Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Acknowledgement of Country

CFA acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. We pay our respects to their Elders, children and young people of past, present and future generations.

Statement of Commitment

CFA is committed to creating safe and supportive environments for children and young people and has a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child abuse. All CFA employees, volunteers, secondees and any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA have a legal and moral obligation to keep children and young people safe.

As an organisation, we value the contribution of children and young people and create opportunities for them to build their skills and confidence and participate in decision making. We are committed to the cultural safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.

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1. Purpose and Objectives

- This policy outlines what CFA is doing to prioritise child safety and wellbeing and sets out CFA's expectations about child safe practices for all who fall under the scope of this policy. It outlines the support in place to achieve these commitments and describes the approach CFA is taking to ensure all Victorian Child Safe Standards are met.
- This policy confirms the commitment of CFA's Board, Executive and senior leaders to child safety and wellbeing. It outlines how CFA leadership will continue to champion a positive and proactive child safe culture that values the engagement and contributions of young people, while recognising the unique safety risks across the broader organisation.

2. Scope

- This policy applies to all CFA employees, volunteers, secondees, labour hire contractors and any cohort engaged by and/or representing CFA.
- CFA recognises that children's rights to safety and participation are embedded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights for the Child and protected in Victorian legislation through the Child Safe Standards. CFA will align and act in compliance with the established Child Safe Standards governed by the Commission for Children and Young People and with legislation that directly or indirectly impacts the safety of children.
- CFA embraces its obligations and responsibilities to act with integrity and transparency in continuously improving the organisation's child safety and wellbeing approach. Their approach will provide opportunities for children and young people to participate and contribute and CFA will have mechanisms in place to ensure it is responsive to the input of children and young people.
- All child safety concerns or allegations of child abuse, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, exposure to family violence and neglect, will be reported and investigated by CFA or their contracted agencies. A child focused, immediate, and effective response that supports safety and wellbeing, and protects privacy and confidentiality of all parties will be prioritised.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Approach

- CFA's approach to child safety and wellbeing is informed by the Victorian Child Safe Standards. The legislation that creates the Standards is the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005)* Vic. and CFA is one of the organisations required to comply with these Standards.
- The Standards support organisations to promote the safety of children and young people by requiring them to implement policies and procedures to prevent, report and respond to allegations of child abuse and harm.
- The Child Safe Standards help inform our approach, however child safety and wellbeing is at the core of our values as a trusted community organisation.

3.2 A commitment to child safety and wellbeing

- CFA's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and behaviour statements are available to all employees, volunteers, children, young people, and the community.
- Leaders, employees, and volunteers in CFA champion and model a child safe culture, express support for keeping children safe, and act when they have concerns about children's safety.
- Child safety champions are deployed across the state to ensure a child safe culture is modelled at all levels of CFA.
- CFA's risk management approach is focused on identifying, preventing, and reducing risk of child abuse and harm.

3.3 Cultural safety for Aboriginal children and young people

- CFA will provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for Aboriginal children, young people and their families, recognising each person is unique with their own characteristics, strengths, and challenges. CFA employees and volunteers will be supported to understand the importance of cultural safety and what they need to do to contribute to it.
- CFA will actively support and facilitate the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people and their families within the organisation encouraging expression of their culture and supporting them to enjoy their cultural rights. We acknowledge that celebrating the strengths of Aboriginal culture includes recognising and actively addressing the ongoing impact of colonisation and dispossession on Aboriginal communities and children today.
- CFA has a zero tolerance to racism and promptly addresses all concerns and complaints related to racism, cultural abuse, discrimination, and cultural safety.

3.4 Taking child participation and empowerment seriously

- CFA values the contribution of children and young people and creates opportunities for them to build their skills and confidence and participate in decision making.
- CFA recognises that empowering children and young people increases their confidence so they will feel comfortable raising concerns and making complaints or allegations of abuse.
- A protective behaviours training program is available to all CFA young members. This program was co-designed and developed with young people.
- CFA will provide the opportunity for children and young people to help organise events, join advisory committees, help produce information guides and resources and be involved in the development of programs.
- Employees and volunteers have access to training in best practice for youth engagement.

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3.5 Involving families and communities

- CFA recognises families are diverse and all are welcome at CFA brigades. We encourage parents and carers to ask questions about how CFA prioritises child safety.
- Information about CFA's approach to child safety is provided on the CFA website. Families have access to policies, procedures, codes of conduct, behavioural standards, and the child safety behaviour statement.
- Families have an opportunity to participate in decisions made by CFA that impact the safety and wellbeing of their child.
- Families and carers are provided with information about CFA when a child or young person in their care joins CFA.

3.6 Respecting equity, diversity and inclusion

- CFA welcomes and supports the participation of all children and young people including children and young people with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ+, and Aboriginal children, young people, and their families. Reasonable adjustments will be made where appropriate to support the participation of children and young people who have different needs.
- A range of training on inclusion is available for all employees and volunteers including toolkits for Junior Leaders on how to include members with diverse needs.
- Intersectionality will be considered when developing programs for children and young people.
- CFA has diversity and inclusion support groups that provide a place for likeminded members to connect and work towards creating an inclusive organisation where members can bring their whole self to CFA.

3.7 Ensuring that our employees and volunteers are suitable and supported

- All applicants to be an employee or volunteer are aware of CFA's stance on child safety and the screening processes in place before they apply.
- Employee and volunteer induction includes information about the child safety and wellbeing policy, behaviour statement and procedure for reporting child safety concerns.
- During their induction, employees and volunteers are provided with knowledge of how to identify child abuse and how to respond if they receive a disclosure of child abuse.
- CFA has processes in place to continually monitor the suitability of employees and volunteers and act when required.
- All CFA employees, volunteers and FRV secondees are aware of their responsibility to keep children and young people safe.

3.8 Child-focused complaint processes

- CFA encourages and welcomes the reporting of concerns and responds to complaints promptly, thoroughly, and fairly, and takes immediate action to protect children and young people at risk.
- CFA will provide children and young people access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand. Processes for handling child safety complaints and concerns prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- A child friendly complaint form is available and young people are informed of the process to report incidents or concerns.
- Employees and volunteers who are morel likely to receive disclosures of abuse receive training in how to respond in a child focused and culturally safe way.

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- Breaches of the CFA Child Safety Behaviour Statement are taken seriously and addressed.

3.9 Employee and volunteer knowledge, skill and awareness

- CFA has a Child Safety Learning and Development Plan that is tailored to meet the needs of all our members.
- The CFA child safety training module, '*Playing Your Part, Keeping Children and Young People Safe'*, provides knowledge to employees and volunteers so they can recognise indicators of child harm and know how to respond to and report child safety issues.
- A range of other role-based training and resources are available to support our capacity to build culturally safe environments for children and young people in all their diversity.
- The child safety pages on Members Online provide information on CFA's child safe practices.

3.10 Safe physical and online environments

- CFA's risk management system is used to record and monitor actions that will prevent or reduce identified risks of child abuse and harm.
- Risk assessments must be completed for events where children and young people will be present.
- Risk assessments must be completed and deemed acceptable for all new programs and systems that involve or impact children before they are implemented. Intersectionality must be considered when thinking about risks.
- CFA online systems have safeguards in place to ensure data is protected and content is appropriate for the audience.
- The organisation has oversight of employees who have access to data that could be misused.
- Contractors must comply with CFA's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Behaviour Statement. Contactors who regularly attend CFA premises or have access to CFA IT systems including email, must hold a valid WWCC.

3.11 Review implementation of child safe standards

- CFA's Child Safe Organisation Action Plan is regularly reviewed and updated when new opportunities for improvement are identified.
- CFA aims to continuously improve child safe practices through analysis of reported complaints, concerns, and incidents.
- CFA seeks advice from peak bodies and collaborates with similar organisations while looking for improvement opportunities.

3.12 Documenting policies and procedures

- The Child Safety Behaviour Statement (code of conduct) outlines the expectations for behaviour and responsibilities of employees and volunteers.
- CFA's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures have been informed by thorough consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including engagement with employees, volunteers, children and young people and their families as well as subject matter experts from within and outside the organisation.
- CFA's recruitment and human resources procedures have a clear child safety focus.
- Employees and volunteers are supported to follow the child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures through training, supervision, and ongoing review.

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4. Definitions

Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal in this policy is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Child abuse	**Child abuse** is defined by ill treatment or neglect including emotional, physical or sexual abuse or injury, or any physical or psychological damage that is detrimental to a child's well-being or is capable of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's physical or mental health, survival, development or dignity. There are different types of child abuse, and many children experience more than one type. There are **five broad categories of abuse** – physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse including grooming, neglect and exposure to family violence.
	Physical abuse - the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in, or is likely to result in, harm to the child's health, survival, or development. This includes behaviours such as hitting, beating, punching, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning or assault with a weapon. In an organisational setting, it is characterised by physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child.
	Emotional abuse - characterised by behaviour and language which undermines the child's self-esteem, confidence and sense of worth. It may include repeatedly rejecting the child, isolating the child, persistent coldness and cutting them off from normal social experiences and relationships with others, terrorising through verbal assaults, insults, threatening or frightening the child or young person.
	Sexual abuse - occurs when a person involves children or young people in sexual activity. Sexual activity involves a wide range of behaviours such as fondling genitals, masturbation, penetration, exposing oneself, watching children in states of undress, exposure to pornography, taking and sharing inappropriate images or videos.
	Grooming - is predatory conduct undertaken with the intention of involving the child in sexual activity. Grooming can be directed at the child, their family and carers to create relationships and situations where sexual abuse can occur. The definition of grooming includes online grooming. Grooming is a criminal offence.
	Neglect - includes both incidents or a pattern of failing to care for the child, to the extent that their needs are not met e.g. health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and living conditions. In an organisational setting, neglect occurs when staff or volunteers do not meet their obligations and responsibilities to keep a child safe and well.
	Exposure to family violence - involves a child living in an environment where a member of the family experiences any type of abuse including physical violence, threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control or any behaviour that causes a person to live in fear.
Child / Young person	a person under 18 years of age
Child safe culture	A child safe culture means an organisation has shared attitudes, values, policies and practices that prioritise the safety of children.[1]

[1] Adapted from Commission for Children and Young People, Empowerment and participation: a guide for organisations working with children and young people, 2021.

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CFA employee	a person is who is directly employed by CFA, including those employees on a fixed term or casual employment contract, consultancy or contractor and includes members of the Authority (the Board).
CFA volunteer	an officer or member who receives no remuneration for their services in relation to a brigade, but does not include an officer or member of an industry brigade
Cultural Safety	Cultural safety is the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity'. It empowers people and allows them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.[2]
Equity	Equity is a state of fairness in which all children are equal and can participate fully and safely in an organisation, regardless of their background, characteristics or beliefs. This requires that organisations understand that some children have different needs and may require different supports or assistance to feel safe, well and to participate fully.[3]
Intersectionality	Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. This may include gender, Aboriginality, sexual orientation, gender identity, among other aspects of a person's identity.[4]
FRV Secondee (secondee)	an officer or employee of Fire Rescue Victoria made available to CFA pursuant to section 25B of the FRV Act
Inclusive environment	Organisations with an inclusive environment: ▪ value all children ▪ respect their rights ▪ challenge all forms of discrimination ▪ understand and respond to the needs and capabilities of all children and their families, including Aboriginal children and their families ▪ adjust their approaches to ensure all children feel safe, welcome and can participate.[5]
Wellbeing	a positive state of physical, mental and emotional health. It generally means feeling safe, happy and healthy more than momentarily.[6]

Status and Details

Effective Date	TBA
Review Date	TBA
Approval Authority	Chief Executive Officer

[2] The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), with the help of Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), in partnership with the National Office for Child Safety created: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Keeping our kids safe: cultural safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, 2021, p 7.

[3] Based on concepts from the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic).

[4] https://www.vic.gov.au/understanding-intersectionality

[5] Adapted from Commission for Children and Young People, Empowerment and participation: a guide for organisations working with children and young people, 2021

[6] Definition from CCYP's '*A guide for creating a Child Safe Organisation'*.

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