

# Policy

# Child Safety & Wellbeing

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## Policy Statement

Beyond Housing is committed to ensuring that children are safe, respected, and that their voice is heard. Beyond Housing has zero tolerance for child abuse and recognises the importance of developing and implementing systems which protect children and young people. Each workplace participant has an obligation under this policy to ensure that children are kept safe.

## Policy Application

This policy applies to all Beyond Housing employees and includes all permanent and casual staff, volunteers, work experience students, management, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). For the purposes of this document, all parties will be referred to throughout this policy as workplace participants.

## Responsibility & Authority

- The Board of Beyond Housing has responsibility for ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements at a Governance level.
- This policy is operational and therefore the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for ensuring:
  - Appropriate and effective policies and systems are in place to operationalise legal and regulatory requirements and therefore implement this policy in accordance with that responsibility.
  - All managers and workplace participants are aware of this policy.
  - Support for workplace participants to undertake their responsibilities under this policy is provided.
- The CEO may delegate specific responsibility to managers or workplace participants to ensure that the objectives relating to this policy are met.
- Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for informing workplace participants about their responsibilities under this policy.
- All workplace participants are responsible to familiarise themselves with this policy and comply with its requirements.

## Policy Detail

The purpose of this policy is to communicate Beyond Housing's commitment to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Beyond Housing aims to create a child safe environment that aligns to National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and Victorian Child Safe Standards. This will be addressed by:

- The establishment of a culturally safe environment in which the diversity, identity and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is respected and valued
- Ensuring child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
- Ensuring children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
- The promotion of child safety and wellbeing via families and communities Beyond Housing engage with
- The promotion of equity and diversity in policy and procedure
- Ensuring workplace participants are suitable and supported to understand child safety and wellbeing values in practice
- Suitable ongoing education and training is made available to workplace participants.

- Ensuring children and young people who engage with Beyond Housing have a feedback mechanism to raise issues
- Ensuring that physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- Ensuring that key policy and procedure is regularly reviewed and improved

## **A culturally safe environment**

Beyond Housing has a public facing “Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples” which recognises the long-lasting, and intergenerational consequences of colonisation and dispossession and strives to provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is further demonstrated by:

- office areas display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- workplace participants undertaking cultural competency training via three modules from Centre for Cultural Competence Australia as part of their induction

## **A public commitment to child safety**

Beyond Housing promotes the safety and wellbeing of children via customised “Child Safe” posters and the following customised logo on the door at each office



## **Empowerment and Participation**

Children and young people accessing our services individually or as part of a family, have the right to:

- Be involved in decision making that affects them.
- Be respected and listened to.
- Have their confidentiality and privacy respected in line with relevant legislation.
- Be informed about the service they are receiving and what other options are available.
- Be offered referral to a specialist support provider.
- Have their safety considered and acted upon.

## **Families & Communities**

- Beyond Housing ensures the needs and views of the child are taken into consideration when providing services and making decisions.
- Children are involved, where relevant and with the parent/carer’s consent, such as explaining to the child the workers role and plans that impact on them, including letting them ask questions about housing etc.
- Work to ensure that our work environment is child friendly, including our offices and interview rooms.

- Provide referrals and information about specialist children's services to clients when appropriate.
- Ensure that we have up to date information and networks to support our client group.

## **Responding to Diversity**

Beyond Housing will consider the diversity of all children as children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family or social background. All children and young people have a right to feel safe.

## **Workplace Participant Suitability and Training**

Beyond Housing will take all reasonable steps to engage skilled and suitable people, who share our commitment to protect children.

Beyond Housing undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workplace participants that aims to prevent a person from working at Beyond Housing if they pose a risk to a child. This is achieved via the following practices:

- In person interviews where possible. If this is not possible then via videoconference
- Thorough reference checks (including asking about any concerns about a person's suitability to work with children)
- Current Working with Children Check (employee)
- Police Check
- Board members are also required to have a current Working With Children Check (either as volunteer or employee), which are recorded and regularly reviewed by the Chief People Officer/Executive Assistant.

Upon successful appointment workplace participants must read and sign the Code of Conduct which sets out stringent standards of behaviour. Breaches of this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment. Child Safety and Wellbeing induction is provided by dedicated Child Safety Officers. This covers the Child Safety Standards, their importance and an overview of Beyond Housing's Child Safety Documentation. Further training and guidance is provided by Team Leaders as part of induction, and this is also supported by a Human Resources Training Framework.

## **Complaints and Reporting**

Beyond Housing has an easy to navigate website that has easy read, accessible and translation embedded tools where feedback and complaints can be readily made. This can be accessed via the following link:

[Contact Beyond Housing - feedback and complaints](#)

Office areas have child friendly spaces that include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and "Are you OK" poster.

Beyond Housing will provide guidance to workplace participants to take appropriate action where they suspect any abuse within or outside of our organisation.

All workplace participants must comply with Child Safety reporting obligations.

The table below provides an overview of the reporting obligations in Victoria, and the individuals to whom they apply.

When to report	Who it applies to	Who to report to	Requirement
When a child needs protection	Everybody	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Voluntary (discretionary) reporting
Sexual offence against a child under 16 by an adult	All adults	Police	Failure to disclose (Crimes Act)
Substantial risk that an adult associated with the organisation will commit a sexual offence against a child	Individuals in a position of power	Police	Failure to protect (Crimes Act)
Within 3 days of a person forming a reasonable belief that an employee has committed reportable conduct	Head of Entity	Commission for Children & Young People	Reportable Conduct

If a workplace participant is of a reasonable understanding that a child is at immediate risk (immediate risk is defined as the workplace participant has no time to complete a risk assessment without placing the child in further danger), we encourage you to call 000 immediately and ask to speak to the Police.

Beyond Housing supports and encourages workplace participants to make a report to the Police and/or the relevant regulator/government agency if they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection, or they are concerned about the safety, health or wellbeing of a child.

If a workplace participant would like internal guidance or support with addressing their concerns, they are encouraged to speak to the Child Safety Officer.

Beyond Housing will:

- Immediately report child sexual abuse to the Police in accordance with the obligations above and report all other forms of child abuse to the relevant regulator in consultation with the relevant Team Leader or Program Manager, and Beyond Housing’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedure.
- Report unaccompanied young people, under the age of 16 who present for services, to Child Protection, consistent with Beyond Housing’s Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedure.

### Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS)

Beyond Housing has strict obligations to report and investigate child abuse under the Reportable Conduct Scheme. This is set out in the Reportable Conduct Scheme procedure.

The RCS:

1. Seeks to improve organisation’s responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect by workers and volunteers. The scheme is established by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.
2. Requires Beyond Housing to respond to allegations of child abuse and other child-related misconduct, made against workplace participants, and to notify the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)
3. Enables the CCYP to oversee the responses to the allegation
4. The CCYP is able to share information, where appropriate, including with the Working with Children Check Unit, relevant regulators and Victoria Police, to better prevent and protect children from abuse.

The RCS does not replace the need to report allegations of child abuse, including criminal conduct and family violence to Victoria Police.

## Protection of reporters

Australian states and territories have legislation that protects individuals who make reports about suspected child abuse in good faith. A report is made in 'good faith' where the person has a valid and reasonable concern and is acting without malice or retaliation towards the alleged offender.

The protections mean that a report made in good faith:

- Does not constitute unprofessional conduct or a breach of professional ethics by the person by whom it is made; and
- Does not make the reporter liable for any disciplinary or legal action (including in cases that are not proven).

Reports need to be made in line with Beyond Housing's policies and procedures and relevant legal obligations.

## Investigating

Whether or not the authorities decide to conduct an investigation, the CEO will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the CEO may decide to conduct such an investigation. All workplace participants must co-operate fully with any investigation.

In conducting any investigation, Beyond Housing will be guided by principles of procedural fairness and natural justice.

The CEO will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time-to-time other workplace participants may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.

## Responding

Beyond Housing may (at its discretion) stand down a workforce participant while an investigation is conducted into any child safety concern.

If Beyond Housing is satisfied that the workplace participant has committed an offence against, or breached Beyond Housing's policies, procedures or Code of Conduct in relation to children, they may be the subject of disciplinary action up to and including the termination of their employment or engagement.

Beyond Housing will report the findings of any investigation to relevant regulators (e.g., the Commission for Children and Young People) as required.

## Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS)

Beyond Housing is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) under the CISS. From time to time, Beyond Housing may need to request or share confidential information about the safety and wellbeing of a child in accordance with CISS. In doing so, Beyond Housing must comply with the guidelines when requesting or sharing confidential information about child wellbeing and safety. The guidelines are available at [www.infosharing.vic.gov.au](http://www.infosharing.vic.gov.au) and are set out in Beyond Housing's Child Information Sharing Scheme Procedure.

## Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)

Beyond Housing is also a prescribed ISE under the FVISS. From time to time, Beyond Housing may need to request or share confidential information to respond to wellbeing and safety needs and risks for children, including family violence.

The CISS and the FVISS have complementary purposes. It is intended that the two schemes will be applied in an integrated way to respond to a range of wellbeing and safety needs and risks for children, including family violence.

## Physical and online environments

Beyond Housing maintains safe spaces at each office location and all contractors are required to have a current Working with Children Check and Police check before commencing work for Beyond Housing. Our maintenance team ensure currency is maintained. In addition to this if a renter is under 18 years of age a Property Manager is required to be in attendance when works are carried out.

Our IT environment has in place several protection measures to ensure a safe online environment for all children and young people. This extends from the office to the working from home or remote worker.

## Reviews and compliance

Child Safety and Wellbeing guide the development and regular review of our work policy, procedures and work systems. This is highlighted by Child Safety featuring as a standing agenda item for both operational and governance meetings.

## Definitions


<b>A child</b>	Is anyone aged under 18 years of age or as otherwise specified in applicable legislation
<b>Child abuse</b>	includes any act committed against a child involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a sexual offence; or</li> <li>○ grooming; and</li> <li>● the infliction, on a child of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ physical violence; or</li> <li>○ serious emotional or psychological harm; and</li> <li>○ serious neglect of a child.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Physical violence or abuse</b>	occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a child's parent or caregiver. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures
<b>Emotional or psychological harm</b>	may arise when a child's parent or caregiver repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child. This may involve name calling, put downs or continual coldness from the parent or caregiver to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development.
<b>Neglect</b>	is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.
<b>Child sexual offence</b>	is any act which exposes a child to, or involves, a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. Sexually abusive behaviours can include fondling of the child's genitals fondling of breasts, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object, or exposure of the child to pornography.
<b>Grooming</b>	is where an adult communicates by words or conduct with a child under 16, or a parent or carer of a child under 16, for the purpose of engaging the child in a sexual offence with any adult. It includes action deliberately undertaken to befriend and influence a child (and in some circumstances members of the child's family) with the intention of achieving a criminal objective of sexual activity with children. Grooming can occur online (e.g. via

	Facebook) and is designed to help the perpetrator establish an emotional connection in order to lower the child's inhibitions.
<b>Reasonable grounds for belief</b>	<p>is a belief based on reasonable grounds (see below) that child abuse has occurred when all known considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are taken into account and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances of consideration may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated; the nature of and details of the allegation; and whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator.</p> <p>A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child is in need of protection.</li> <li>• The child has suffered or is likely to suffer "significant harm as a result of physical injury" or</li> <li>• The parents or care giver are unable or unwilling to protect the child.</li> </ul>
<b>Child Safety Officer</b>	has specified "child safe" duties in their job description, including being the designated person to hear or be informed about all allegations or concerns, and providing support to other workplace participants. The role ensures that any allegation of abuse or safety concerns are recorded and responded to consistently and line with Beyond Housing's legal requirements and policies and procedures. A designated Child Safety Officer also provides a single contact for children, parents and workplace participants to seek advice and support regarding the safety and wellbeing of children associated with our organisation.

## Related

Document Reference	Document Type
<a href="#">Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)</a>	Legislation
<a href="#">Case Management Policy</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Code of Conduct</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Code of Ethics</a>	Policy
<a href="#">DFFH Client Incident Management</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Family Violence</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Privacy and Confidentiality</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Rights and Responsibilities</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Risk Management</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Compliments and Complaints</a>	Policy
<a href="#">Feedback and Complaints</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Documents Required for Employment</a>	Procedure

<a href="#">Employment and Induction</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Child Information Sharing Scheme</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Reportable Conduct Scheme</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Child Safety</a>	Procedure
<a href="#">Opening Doors Manual</a>	Other
<a href="#">Beyond Housing HR Induction Manual</a>	Other
<a href="#">Betrayal of trust fact sheet: The new organisational duty of care to prevent child abuse</a>	Other
<a href="#">Failure to Disclose and Failure to Protect Fact Sheet</a>	Other
<a href="#">Commission for Children and Young People</a>	Other
<a href="#">The Victorian Child Safety Standards</a>	Other
<a href="#">National Principles for Child Safe Organisations</a>	Other
<a href="#">The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</a>	Other
<a href="#">DFFH Unaccompanied homeless children</a>	Other
<a href="#">Working with Children Regulations 2016 (Vic)</a>	Other

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