



CHILD SAFETY & PROTECTION POLICY

Policy number	GEN123	Version	1.0
Drafted by	Lockie	Approved by Committee on	09/02/2022
Responsible person	Chairperson	Scheduled review date	Feb-2023

INTRODUCTION

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children. We have zero-tolerance for any form of child abuse.

Everyone working at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is responsible for the care, safety and protection of children and reporting information about child abuse.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is

1. To facilitate the prevention & identification of child abuse at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.
2. To continuously improve Goonawarra Neighbourhood Houses Inc. culture of child safety.
3. To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying and reporting possible occasions of child abuse.
4. To guide staff/volunteers/contractors as to the action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse.
5. To assure that all suspected abuse will be reported under Mandatory Reporting Laws.

POLICY

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is committed to promoting and protecting the best interests of children involved in its programs and services.

All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from all forms of abuse.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. has zero-tolerance for child abuse. Everyone working or volunteering at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is responsible for the care and protection of the children within our care and reporting information about suspected child abuse.

Child protection is a shared responsibility between the Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc., all employees, workers, contractors, associates, volunteers, and members of the Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. community.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. supports and respects all children, staff, and volunteers. Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability.

If any person believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse, telephone 000.

Department of Family, Fairness and Housing – Child Protection Service 131 278

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

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RESPONSIBILITIES

The Committee of Management for Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. has ultimate responsibility for the detection, prevention and reporting of child abuse and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place. The Committee of Management is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures to protect children are in place.

The Chairperson of Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is responsible for:

- Reports of child abuse follow the Victorian Government PROTECT Framework.
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and the organisation's Code of Conduct.
- Ensuring that all adults within the Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. are aware of their obligation to report a suspected abuse of a child under Mandatory Reporting Laws.
- Providing support for staff, contractors, and volunteers in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

The House Manager must ensure that they:

- Always promote child safety.
- Assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and eradicate or minimise any risk to the extent possible.
- Educate employees about the prevention and detection of child abuse; and
- Facilitate the Mandatory Reporting of any suspected abusive activities.

Management should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur and be alert for any indications of such conduct as outlined in the PROTECT Framework.

All staff/volunteers/contractors share the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child abuse, and must:

- Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the Code of Conduct, and Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.'s policy and procedures concerning child protection and comply with all requirements.
- Report any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and/or the state-based child protection service) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.
- Report any suspicion that a child's safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a responsible person in the organisation); and
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

DEFINITIONS

Child means a person below the age of 18 years

Child protection means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.

Child abuse means all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect, or negligent treatment, commercial (e.g., for financial gain) or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that result in actual or potential harm to a child.

Reasonable grounds for belief are 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 considered and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations 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.

A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- (a) the child requires protection,
- (b) the child has suffered or is likely to suffer “significant harm as a result of physical injury,” or
- (c) the parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

A ‘reasonable belief’ is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. For example, a ‘reasonable belief’ might be formed if: a child states that they have been physically or sexually abused.

- a) a child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves).
- b) someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused.
- c) observations of the child’s behaviour or development led to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused; and/or
- d) signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused.



EMPLOYMENT OF NEW PERSONNEL

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all employees and volunteers that aims to:

- promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation.
- identify the safest and most suitable people who share Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. values and commitment to protecting children, and
- prevent a person from working at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. if they pose a risk to children.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. requires all staff, volunteers & committee members to pass through the organisation's recruitment and screening processes before commencing their engagement with Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. requires applicants to provide a National Criminal History Check and have or obtain a Working with Children Check before they commence working at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. and during their time with Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. at regular intervals as defined in relevant legislation.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. will undertake thorough reference checks as per the approved internal procedure.

Once engaged, staff & volunteers must review and acknowledge their understanding of this Policy.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. will ensure that child safety is a part of its overall risk management approach.

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. will regularly review its risk and compliance obligations in identifying and managing risks at Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. Staff and Committee members will receive regular training concerning child safety as required by relevant legislation.

IDENTIFICATION OF ABUSE

It is critical to be able to recognise the physical or behavioural signs of child abuse. In many circumstances, they may be the only indication that a child is subject to abuse. You may be the best-placed or only adult in a position to identify and respond to suspected abuse.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

PHYSICAL ABUSE TYPES

- Bruises or welts on facial areas and other areas of the body
- Bruises or welts in unusual configurations indicate the use of an object
- Burns in the shape of an object (iron, cigarette, etc)
- Fractures when inconsistent with the explanations offered or possible at the child's age
- Cuts or grazes to the mouth, lips, gum, eye area or external genitalia
- Bald patches, indicating hair has been pulled out
- Multiple injuries, old and new over some time

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

- Disclosure of an injury inflicted by someone else, or an inconsistent, unlikely or inability to remember the cause of the injury
- Unusual fear of physical contact
- Aggressive behaviour
- Disproportionate reaction to events
- Wearing clothes inconsistent for the weather (hiding injuries)
- Reluctance to go home
- No reaction or limited emotion when being hurt or threatened
- Overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, uncommunicative
- Suicidal or self-harm thoughts

SEXUAL ABUSE

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TYPES

- Using power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity
- Includes a wide range of sexual activities including fondling, oral, vaginal, anal penetration by a penis or object
- Talking to a child in a sexually explicit way
- Sending sexual messages to a child
- Forcing a child to watch a sexual act including pornography
- Having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner
- Exploitation, offering a child something of value in return for sexual activities

PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Injury to the genital or rectal area, e.g., Bruising, bleeding, discharge, discomfort, inflammation, or infection
- Injury to breasts, buttocks, upper thighs
- Sexually transmitted infection, inconsistent with the child's age
- Presence of foreign bodies in the vagina or rectum
- Pregnancy
- Anxiety-related illness, e.g., Bulimia or Anorexia

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- Disclosure of sexual abuse, either directly or indirectly (by a third person or allusion)
- Persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity, e.g., public masturbation, exposing genitals, rubbing genitals against adults or objects
- Drawings or descriptions that are sexually explicit and age inconstant
- Fear of home, specific places, or particular adults
- Poor relationships with adults
- Complaining of headaches, stomach pains without physiological basis
- Regressive behaviour, e.g., speech loss or slow development
- Low mood, depression, self-harm

GROOMING

Grooming is a criminal offence and occurs when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer.

TYPES OF GROOMING

- Giving gifts or special attention to a child or their parent or carer (this can make a child feel special or indebted to an adult)
- Controlling a child through threats, force or use of authority
- Making close physical contact sexual, e.g., tickling or wrestling
- Openly or pretending to expose the child to nudity or pornography

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF GROOMING

- Developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- Mood changes
- Using different language, copying the way a new 'friend' talk
- Possessing items of value, e.g., jewellery, clothes, electronics without being able to account for these items or disclosing there were given by a 'friend'
- Being secretive about the use of communication technologies
- Staying away from home is inconsistent with the family unit
- Drug use or possession of drug paraphernalia e.g., spoons, tabs, lighters
- Being collected by a 'friend' inconsistent with the family unit

FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008 defines family violence as behaviour towards a family member where that behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening or coercive OR
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.

A child or young person might be a victim of family violence in the following ways:

- being hit, yelled at, or otherwise directly abused
- being injured
- being sexually abused
- experiencing fear for self
- experiencing fear for another person, a pet, or belongings
- seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing violence directed against another person
- seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing the aftermath of violence (such as broken furniture, smashed crockery, an atmosphere of tension)
- knowing or sensing that a family member is in fear
- being told to do something (such as to be quiet or to 'behave') to prevent violence
- being blamed for not preventing violence
- attempting to prevent or minimise violence
- attempting to mediate between the perpetrator and another family member
- being threatened or coerced by the perpetrator into using violent behaviour against another family member
- being coerced into supporting the perpetrator or taking their side
- being isolated or socially marginalised in ways that are directly attributable to the perpetrator's controlling behaviours.

PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- speech disorders
- delays in physical development
- failure to thrive (without an organic cause)
- bruises, cuts or welts on facial areas, and other parts of the body including back, bottom, legs, arms, and inner thighs
- any bruises or welts (old or new) in unusual configurations, or those that look like the object used to make the injury (such as fingerprints, handprints, buckles, iron, or teeth)
- fractured bones, especially in an infant where a fracture is unlikely to have occurred accidentally
- poisoning
- internal injuries

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- violent/aggressive behaviour and language
- depression and anxiety and suicidal thoughts
- appearing nervous and withdrawn, including wariness or distrust of adults
- difficulty adjusting to change
- psychosomatic illness
- acting out, such as cruelty to animals
- extremely demanding, attention-seeking behaviour
- participating in dangerous risk-taking behaviours to impress peers
- overly compliant, shy, withdrawn, passive and uncommunicative behaviour
- taking on a caretaker role prematurely, trying to protect other family members
- embarrassment about family
- demonstrated fear of parents, carers, or guardians, and of going home
- parent-child conflict
- wearing long-sleeved clothes on hot days to hide bruising or other injuries
- becoming fearful when other children cry or shout
- being excessively friendly to strangers.

EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

Emotional child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats, or by witnessing family violence.

It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health. Emotional abuse may occur with or without other forms of abuse.

PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

- speech disorders such as language delay, stuttering or selectively being mute (only speaking with certain people or in certain situations)
- delays in emotional, mental, or physical development

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

- overly compliant, passive, and undemanding behaviour
- extremely demanding, aggressive, and attention-seeking behaviour or anti-social and destructive behaviour
- low tolerance or frustration
- poor self-image and low self-esteem
- unexplained mood swings, depression, self-harm, or suicidal thoughts
- behaviours that are not age-appropriate, e.g., overly adult, or overly infantile
- fear of failure, overly high standards, and excessive neatness
- poor social and interpersonal skills
- lack of positive social contact with other children

NEGLECT

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter, or supervision to the extent that the health or physical development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk.

In some circumstances the neglect of a child:

- can place the child's immediate safety and development at serious risk
- may not immediately compromise the safety of the child but is likely to result in longer-term cumulative harm.

PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

- appearing consistently dirty and unwashed
- being consistently inappropriately dressed for weather conditions
- being at risk of injury or harm due to consistent lack of adequate supervision from parents
- being consistently hungry, tired, and listless
- having unattended health problems and lack of routine medical care
- having inadequate shelter and unsafe or unsanitary conditions.

BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS OF NEGLECT

- gorging when food is available or inability to eat when extremely hungry
- begging for or stealing food
- appearing withdrawn, listless, pale, and weak
- aggressive behaviour, irritability
- involvement in criminal activity
- little positive interaction with parent, carer, or guardian
- poor socialising habits
- excessive friendliness towards strangers
- indiscriminate acts of affection
- poor, irregular or non-attendance at school
- staying at school for long hours and refusing or being reluctant to go home
- self-destructive behaviour
- taking on an adult role of caring for a parent.



REPORTING

Any staff member, volunteer, contractor, or committee member who has grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify the **Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Child Protection Service on 131 278 (24/7)**

The person reporting should also contact the House Manager, who will notify the Chairperson of Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. that an incidence of abuse has been identified and is being reported.

Reporting any form of child abuse where a person has 'reasonable belief' is mandatory by law under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. Failure to report suspected child abuse is a criminal offence. **Failure to report also constitutes serious misconduct and will result in immediate dismissal from Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.**

The person reporting in conjunction with the House Manager must complete the 'Responding to suspected Child Abuse Report.' The report is to be tabled at an urgent Committee of Management meeting and where appropriate used to review this policy. Once tabled the report shall be marked as '**Restricted Material**' under the Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. Confidentiality Policy.

INVESTIGATION

If Child Protection or Victoria Police decide to investigate a report, all employees, contractors, volunteers, or committee members must cooperate fully with the investigation. **Failure to cooperate with Child Protection or Victoria Police constitutes serious misconduct and will result in immediate dismissal from Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.**

SUPPORT

Having a child or young person disclose any form of abuse can be extremely difficult and confronting for an adult. Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all our staff, volunteers, and committee members. Any person involved in disclosure or report of abuse shall have access to the organisation's Employee Assistance Program and where required, leave to attend any counselling sessions as directed by the persons General Practitioner or Health Professional.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. will have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected.

Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.

Any sensitive documents including but not limited to the Responding to suspected Child Abuse Report shall be marked as **Restricted Materials** in line with Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc.'s Confidentiality Policy.

REVIEWING

Every two years, and following every reportable incident, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the organisation's child protection policies or procedures require modification to better protect the children under the organisation's care.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- GEN104 Confidentiality Policy
- GEN124 Staff Recruitment Policy
- GEN125 Staff Induction Policy
- GEN119 Whistle-blower Policy
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Victoria)
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Victoria)
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth)
- Crimes Act 1958 – Section 49 'Failure to Protect' (Victoria)
- Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Inc. Constitution
- GNH Responding to Suspected Child Abuse Report

AUTHORISATION



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