



**MIDCOAST**  
council



**DRAFT**

# **CHILD SAFE ACTION PLAN**

**SEPTEMBER 2021**

# CHILD PROTECTION STATEMENT

MidCoast Council is committed to fulfilling its duty of care to ensure that children and young people who access our services are safeguarded from harm, recognising that feeling safe can be as important to children and young people as being safe.

Child protection is everyone's responsibility, including Council officers and families and carers of children and young people.

Council is a registered agency under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act and is committed to fulfilling its legislative and regulatory obligations regarding child protection.





# BACKGROUND

In December 2017 the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the need for action to make organisations across Australia safe for children. Among the recommendations from the Royal Commission is the development of the standards to ensure a nationally consistent approach to embedding child safe cultures within organisations that engage with children, and act as a vehicle to give effect to all Royal Commission recommendations.

In December 1990 Australia was one of 194 countries that committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that organisations and people working with children in NSW share responsibility for keeping children safe.

Ten standards were developed (see below) and are in the process of being legislated (2021) to ensure that organisations are child safe and underline the premise that child safety is everyone's responsibility.



# DEFINITION OF A CHILD-SAFE ORGANISATION

The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) was appointed to provide oversight of the provision of safety, welfare and wellbeing of children through the Children's Guardian Act, in 2019.

The OCG defines a child-safe organisation as follows:

*Child-safe organisations create cultures, adopt strategies and act to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse. The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians define a child-safe organisation as one that systematically:*

- *Creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed*
- *Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm*
- *Responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm*



# CHILD SAFE STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES

The Child-Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission provide a framework for ensuring organisations are safe for children. Based on extensive research and consultation, the Standards guide organisations to create cultures, adopt strategies and act to put the interests of children first, to keep them safe from harm and are specifically related to child sexual abuse.

The National Office for Child Safety developed National Principles for Child Safe Organisations which are derived from the Child Safe Standards, and addresses other forms of abuse (psychological, emotional and physical) and neglect.

Both the NSW Child Safe Standards and the National Principles provide guidance for child-safe practices. The OCG considers organisations in NSW that are implementing the National Principles will be simultaneously implementing the Child Safe Standards. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

1. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse (or other concerns) are child focussed
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through ongoing education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur
9. Implementation of the child-safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe





# STANDARD 1

## Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Leaders and staff champion a set of core values that inform the organisation's approach to child safety	Provide professional development for Councillors	Child safety is embedded in day-to-day practices
Leaders demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that prioritise the safety of children through the behaviours and practices they reward and challenge	Identify people across the organisation who can champion Child Safety and assist staff and volunteers when further information is required	Staff follow the Code of Conduct and child-safe procedures
Leaders incorporate risk management of child abuse into decision making and actively monitor risks to child safety	Build awareness of child protection statement through internal and external communications channels	Decision-making prioritises children
Leaders encourage day-to-day practices that prioritise child safety	Posters around staff-facing areas of the workplace	Organisational culture creates an environment where it is difficult for abuse to occur
Leaders set clear expectations around child safety and ensure they are followed by staff	Staff working directly with children carry out online child protection course	Staff appropriately respond to and report child abuse
Leaders promote a culture of reporting	Review contracts to include clauses around Child Safety and distance ourselves from organisations who have not put measures in place to work towards being Child Safe	Children feel safer knowing they have input into the organisation
	The Child Protection Statement sent out to all staff to read via e-learning and available on Intranet	



I feel respected  
and trust the adults  
looking after me

I feel  
safe here

Adults in this organisation ask  
my opinion and listen  
to what I say

## STANDARD 2

### Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Children's participation is embedded in organisational practice through feedback mechanisms	Consult with children when Council is developing plans, strategies and events, in every business unit	Children know how adults should behave
Opportunities are created for children to be included in organisational decision-making	Develop child-friendly posters for display in key Council sites where children visit, eg libraries, so that children know who to talk to if they feel uncomfortable	Children understand that they are listened to and respected
Children are given information on internal and external support services		Children speak up about their safety and the safety of their friends
Staff are provided with knowledge and skills to support children's participation		Children are aware they can access support services when needed
Staff encourage peer support for children		
Adults understand what safety means to children		
Age-appropriate information that describes how adults should behave is provided to children and consistently reinforced		



Adults in this organisation listen to me and ask my opinion about things that affect me

I can talk to adults if I feel unsafe, even if it is a difficult conversation

I know that staff sometimes need to tell someone else if I need extra support

# STANDARD 3

## Families and communities are informed and involved

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Leaders and staff encourage families to take an active role in keeping children safe	Arrange information sessions for staff, families (parents of children) and children on child protection	Families feel welcome
Policies and procedures (including Codes of Conduct) are clearly communicated to parents and carers	Host information sessions for community groups to support them to become child-safe organisations	Families and the community support the organisation to be safer for children
Families and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on how the organisation keeps children safe, and this information is acted upon where necessary	Place child-friendly information signage at children's height at key sites in the LGA	Families and the community are comfortable asking questions on how the organisation prioritises child safety
	Work with Communications Team to distribute child safety information through relevant communication channels	
	Develop Child Protection Information Packs for community groups, local businesses and street safety, including checklists to enable them to facilitate child-safe events, sessions, workshops, programs, meetings, games, etc	



The people here  
talk to my family  
about me

The special days  
of my community  
are celebrated

My family  
is welcome here



# STANDARD 4

## Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Leaders and staff understand the barriers that prevent children from disclosing abuse or adults from recognising children's disclosure	Review current Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and ensure children are included. If not, make recommendations for next DIAP	Children with diverse needs speak up about concerns around their safety and the safety of their friends, and adults take them seriously
Leaders and staff identify and respect the diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds of children, and understand the value of treating them fairly	All sections of Council to actively engage Council's Aboriginal Community Development Officers when planning projects for advice and to ensure the Aboriginal Community is included and engaged	Children are not disadvantaged by programs and activities.  Organisational culture allows children with diverse needs to feel valued
All staff are given information about the factors that increase a child's vulnerability to harm		Adults recognise the value of diversity and inclusivity
Leaders ensure that the workforce reflects the diversity of the children it provides services to, where possible		Staff feel confident in working with diverse groups
Leaders and staff adapt activities and services to ensure all children feel included		Increased participation of children with disabilities in the mainstream community



# STANDARD 5

## People working with children are suitable and supported

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
<p>Leaders expect that recruitment does not rely only on the WWCC, and support ongoing training opportunities for all staff</p> <p>Hiring managers are trained in child-safe recruitment practices</p> <p>Staff recruitment includes job ads that identify your organisation as valuing child safety</p> <p>Recruitment processes involve a range of interview questions to establish staff suitability</p> <p>Background and reference checks are carried out and recorded</p> <p>Supervision includes regular reviews to check whether staff are following codes of Conduct and other child safe policies</p> <p>Staff, families and the community are aware of recruitment and other child safe human resource practices</p>	<p>Child Safety Statement included in all job advertisements for Council</p> <p>Include Council's Child Protection Statement in all staff Position Descriptions</p> <p>Adding Child Safety into the recruitment process, especially for identified child-related roles</p> <p>Include children and young people in part of the interview process for child related work</p> <p>E-learning and scenario-based videos included in on-boarding component for new starters and Child Safety component included in Induction Day</p> <p>Ensure all staff in child related work have annual refresher training for Child Protection</p> <p>Staff survey before and after training to ascertain level of awareness within the organisation</p> <p>Survey community groups to ascertain level of awareness within the LGA</p> <p>Work with local businesses and community groups to enhance their child safety measures</p>	<p>Staff recruitment and supervision practices prioritise child safety</p> <p>Children are safe around staff</p> <p>Staff have, or are working towards having, suitable skills and experience to work with children</p> <p>Staff attitudes and behaviours create and maintain a child safe culture</p> <p>Staff values align with the organisation's commitment to child safety</p>



I trust adults here and can talk to them about things that upset me

I'm asked about what kind of staff the organisation should have in it

I feel safe with the adults here

# STANDARD 6

## Process to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Leaders create a culture where complaints are taken seriously and all adults take responsibility for the safety of children	Review procedures relating to child safety to ensure the processes are child-centred	Organisational culture where complaints are taken seriously and acted on
Leaders clearly explain that breaches of Codes of Conduct will result in disciplinary action	Review Complaint Handling Policy to ensure child-centred (clearly outline roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with child-related complaints)	Staff feel supported to raise concerns about child safety
Staff are given support and information on what and how to report, including to external bodies	Ensure there is a child-champion at events where children will be present, who is identified as part of 'housekeeping' process, so that children know who they can talk to	Children feel safe to raise concerns about themselves or their friends
Accessible processes are provided to enable children, staff and others to make complaints	Staff are trained in Council's child-safe Policy and Procedures, and know how to report if necessary	
Procedures describe likely timeframes, review processes and potential outcomes of complaints	Develop scenario-based Q&A for all business units	
Complaints are handled confidentially	Review current access to record management and security	
Processes are reviewed at regular intervals and after complaints are made	Review publicity permission processes	
Complaint handling procedures are publicly available		
Staff are offered a variety of learning strategies		
Documents are confidential where required		



I will be believed if I speak up about something that is concerning me, and action will be taken because of it

I know who to talk to if I feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unhappy

I will not get into trouble if I speak up



## STANDARD 7

### Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Leaders provide ongoing education and training opportunities for all staff	Ensure that staff are aware and appropriately trained in reportable conduct. Including how to manage a complaint either made by a child or about a child protection incident	Staff feel confident to identify, respond to and report child abuse
Training provides staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent and identify abuse, and to respond to complaints	Design flow charts of the process to follow and provide to all staff	The organisation has a culture of continual learning
Staff who are involved in roles and situations with higher risk are provided more advanced training opportunities	Implement e-learning modules for all staff	The organisation can demonstrate it stays up to date with emerging best practices
Where possible, the organisation employs a child safety officer responsible for training	Develop a page on the Intranet with information about what to report and avenues on how and who to report to	
Specialised training is provided to staff working in high-risk situations or with vulnerable children	Source scenarios for Child Protection agenda items at staff meetings to be included as examples on the Intranet for Coordinators and Line Managers to use	
Training is regularly reviewed in response to emerging best practices		
Attendance at conferences and other forums to learn about improvements in child safe practices		



Adults understand how to keep me safe; they notice when I feel sad

I understand that adults are taught how to behave around me

Sometimes the staff here tell me about what they've been learning and how that keeps me safe

# STANDARD 8

## Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
<p>Leaders set expectations about behavioural standards for staff interacting with children in physical and online environments</p> <p>Risk assessments identify areas where adults have opportunities to interact with children unsupervised, including for one-off events and overnight camps</p> <p>Physical environments are altered to increase natural lines of sight while respecting a child's right to privacy</p> <p>Higher-risk areas such as change rooms, cars, boarding facilities and offsite locations are managed using specific safety measures, such as spot checks and log books</p> <p>Children are provided information about online safety and regularly encouraged to tell staff about negative experiences</p> <p>Staff and parents are provided information about risks in the online environment, such as online grooming, cyber bullying and sexting</p>	<p>Develop collateral for Council buildings to raise awareness that MCC is a Child Safe organisation</p> <p>Add Child Protection to all Business Unit's Risk Register</p> <p>Review security settings on all public access computers</p> <p>Include signage on all Council digital screens</p> <p>Incorporate Child Safe design into public spaces</p>	<p>Opportunities to harm children are reduced or removed</p> <p>Children engage in creative and safe activities</p> <p>Children speak up about risks in the online environment</p> <p>Children's privacy is balanced with the need to keep them safe</p>



I can talk to someone I trust about anything I have seen or done online

I know there are some spaces in organisation I'm not allowed into

I know what to do if I feel unsafe online

## STANDARD 9

### Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
<p>Leaders maintain a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented and routinely reviewed even though staffing may change</p> <p>Leaders know the value of continuous monitoring, open conversations and exploring new ways to keep children safe</p> <p>Child safe policies and practices are regularly reviewed</p> <p>Staff refer to the Standards when creating, reviewing or evaluating child safe policies and procedures</p> <p>Leaders and staff review critical incidents to identify the root cause of the problem, identify risks to the safety of children and make improvements</p> <p>Children are supported to provide feedback and this information is acted on</p>	<p>Conduct an audit of the organisation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>confirm child-related role identification</li> <li>identify how each section can comply with the Standards</li> <li>assess levels of professional development required</li> </ul> <p>Review agreements and inclusion of MCC Child Safety approach for events and within our facilities / venue hire</p> <p>Child Protection Officer is involved in the development of all Policies to help identify how they promote child safety</p> <p>Child protection added to internal risk audit</p>	<p>Leaders and staff are open to change</p> <p>Leaders and staff reflect on critical incidents</p> <p>The organisational culture creates an environment of ongoing learning and improvement</p>





# STANDARD 10

## Policies and procedures document how the organisation is Child Safe

APPLYING THE STANDARD	ACTIONS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
<p>Child safe policies are specific to the organisation and its environment, and they address local risks to the safety of children</p> <p>Child safe policies, Codes of Conduct and complaint handling procedures are publicly accessible</p> <p>Policies and procedures are available in child friendly and accessible formats that pay attention to children's diverse characteristics, cultural background and abilities</p> <p>Staff follow child safe policies and procedures</p> <p>Documents are saved in accordance to NSW record keeping requirements</p>	<p>Review procedures, agreements and internal policies and requirements related to working with children, eg Youth Taskforce, Libraries, Customer Service</p> <p>Provide information on the Website</p>	<p>Staff and the community understand the organisation's approach to child safety</p> <p>Staff and the community know that the organisation takes child safety seriously</p> <p>Staff, parents and carers know where to find the organisation's child safe policies and procedures</p> <p>Staff, parents, carers and the community can use policies and procedures to hold the organisation to account</p>



My parents and I know where to find the rules that keep me safe

I can understand what the rules mean

Adults have rules to keep me safe

# DEFINITIONS

Children	All children and young people under the age of 18.
Complaint	Any suggestion of abuse or harm that is disclosed, witnessed or demonstrated by a child. Typically, three categories of behaviour are the subject of a complaint: (a) Concerning conduct - behaviours or patterns of behaviour that are a risk to the safety of children. This also refers to ambiguous behaviours that are potentially inappropriate for children to be exposed to but may not necessarily be indicators of abuse occurring. The sharing of inappropriate jokes may be an example of this. (b) Misconduct - behaviours that constitute a breach of the institution's Code of Conduct. (c) Criminal conduct - conduct that, if proven, would constitute a criminal offence.
'Equity' and 'equality'	Equity encourages people to live to their full potential. Equality is treating everyone the same. If someone is disadvantaged they may not achieve the same outcome as a non-disadvantaged person if they are treated 'equally' because they may need more support.
Grooming	Occurs when an adult person engages in conduct that exposes a child to indecent material or provides a child with an intoxicating substance or with any financial or other material benefit with the intention of making it easier to procure the child for unlawful sexual activity. It means gaining or increasing access to a child, parents or co-workers in order to facilitate abuse. The process involves building trust, obtaining compliance and maintaining secrecy to protect the abuser from being caught. Grooming is commonly an incremental process and can involve stages of increasing intensity. It may consist of many separate actions that, in isolation, are not necessarily criminal or abusive. Grooming behaviour may not be obvious to the victim or to a bystander and can co-exist with behaviour that occurs in normal relationships between adults and children. Children do not need to be alone to be groomed. They are usually sexually abused by someone they know. Online communication and pornography can be used as tools for grooming.
Leader	Anyone in a position of authority in a child-related organisation, including board members, managers and supervisors. One of the findings of the Royal Commission, however, was that all adults have a responsibility for child safety, so leadership is a shared responsibility in this context.
Organisational culture	The organisation's values as demonstrated on a day-to-day basis by its leaders and staff, and as experienced by the children they care for. It is founded on the organisation's values and supported by leadership and governance.
Staff	All employees, volunteers and contractors.



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