

Child safe policy and statement of commitment

The Child Safe Standards require organisations that provide services or facilities for children to have a child safe policy or a statement of commitment to child safety.

This policy has been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and expanded to suit our services. This policy demonstrates our commitment to protecting children from abuse of any kind. The policy forms the foundation of the STEM Zone's procedures, practices, decision-making processes and ultimately our culture with respect to child safety.

Our commitment to child safety

STEM Zone is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

STEM Zone is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.

STEM Zone has robust human resources and recruitment practices to reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing staff, contactors, and volunteers.

STEM Zone is committed to regularly training and educating our staff, contactors, and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for gender diverse children and children with a disability.

We have specific policies and procedures in place that support our staff, contactors, and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children, who are vital and active participants at STEM Zone. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We promote diversity and acceptance at STEM Zone, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome.

In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally
- promote the personal safety, participation, and empowerment of gender diverse children
- provide an environment and activities that encourage all children to participate and celebrate their identity.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff, contractors, and volunteers on how to behave with children at STEM Zone.

All of our staff, contractors, and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children.

All staff, contractors, and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at STEM Zone understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Our organisational culture aims for all staff, volunteers, families and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. We also support our staff, contractors, and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of gender diverse children and children with a disability.

New staff, contractors, and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand STEM Zone's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to STEM Zone's code of conduct for information about appropriate behaviour).

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with the Co-founders of STEM Zone.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legal responsibilities.

STEM Zone understands that when recruiting staff, contactors, and volunteers, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations. We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal people, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

All people who are engaged in child-related work and who are not exempt, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check (WWC) and to provide evidence of this check. Teachers registered in Victoria with the VIT are exempt because the WWC is mandated for their registration.

Fair procedures for staff and volunteers

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff, contactors, and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, families or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of STEM Zone are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

Legislative responsibilities

STEM Zone takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to Victoria Police
- Mandatory reporting: Any staff, contractors, or volunteers who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- Reportable conduct: The head of our organisation must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee, contractor, or volunteer towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation
- Duty of care: If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

STEM Zone takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal with allegations appropriately. We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour or physical condition consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Date of last review: 06/11/2022

Date of next review: 06/11/2024