

## Early Learning Child Safe Policy

### Overarching Statement

The *Keeping Children Safe Policy* of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (refer to *Sources*) is the overarching whole of church policy to be implemented by individuals and entities involved with or connected to the Uniting Church. All children who are involved in any of the Church's activities, events or programs have a right to feel and be safe. The Church is committed to provide safe environments where children are cared for, respected, nurtured and sustained.

### Policy Statement

Uniting Early Learning has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all children are safe in their care, and will provide training, resources, information and guidance to support this.

Services are committed to:

- taking all reasonable steps to provide a safe environment for all children which promotes their health, safety and wellbeing;
- fulfilling its legal and duty of care obligations under the law by protecting children from any reasonable, foreseeable risk of injury or harm;
- ensuring that people caring for children at the service act in the best interests of the child, and take all reasonable steps to ensure the child's safety and well-being at all times;
- supporting the rights of all children to feel safe, and be safe, at all times, including a zero tolerance of child abuse;
- identifying the indicators of a child who may need protection and timely and effective intervention for children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect;
- service staff understanding and complying with their obligations under the law including mandatory obligations.
- promoting a service culture of child safety in which children feel valued, respected and cared for;
- encouraging active participation from parents and families at the service, and ensuring that best practice is based on a partnership approach and shared responsibility for children's health, safety, well-being and development.

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## Executive Summary

The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount. Duty of care obligations (refer to *Glossary*) relate to the high level of responsibility to protect children in the care of a service. Adult supervision is a key factor in creating and maintaining child safe environments.

Risks in the child's physical environment can be minimised by ensuring the safety of buildings, grounds, equipment, materials and furniture used at the service, and the safe storage and use of dangerous substances such as cleaning products and chemicals.

Any concerning information which indicates significant risk of or actual harm to a child's safety, development and wellbeing must be acted upon. A child-safe culture encourages staff to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns and make it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden. Early childhood teachers have a legal obligation and are mandated to report any concerns of child abuse and neglect to the relevant authority.

Building the capacity for children to understand their rights and responsibilities will assist to empower children to raise safety concerns, and be provided appropriate protection when required.

## Current Environmental Context

**Attachment 5a:** Responsibilities relating to the Child Safe Policy

**Attachment 5b:** Child protection risk assessment

**Attachment 5c:** Child safe organisations

**Attachment 5d:** Reporting responsibilities and guidelines

**Attachment 5e:** Child safety review checklist

**Attachment 5f:** Guidelines for the recruitment of staff and volunteers

**Attachment 5g:** Flowchart: Processes for responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse

**Attachment 5h:** Child Safe Standards link

Victorian organisations that provide services to children are required under the *Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005* to ensure that they implement compulsorily minimum Child Safe Standards to protect children from harm. The standards aim to drive continuous improvement in the way services prevent and report child abuse and respond to allegations of child abuse. Standard 2 requires services to have a child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.

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**The *Keeping Children Safe Policy* of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, (June 2015) outlines the organisations commitment to upholding the safety and best interests of children including:**

The Church will provide a safe environment for children by ensuring:

Uniting Early Learning, National and Victorian law and regulations require, that approved services protect children from any harm and hazards, and adequately supervise children at all times. Active supervision together with risk minimisation strategies can prevent or reduce the risk of injury to children (refer to *Supervision of Children Policy*).

Policies and procedures must be developed to include: emergency and evacuation, water safety, sun protection,

- An open environment;
- Clear codes of conduct;
- Adoption of clear procedures;
- Recruiting well;
- Orientation and training;
- Planning, supervision and record keeping;
- Support;
- Reporting procedures;
- Review
- Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- Promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Promoting the safety of children with a disability

delivery and collection of children, incident, injury, trauma and illness, medical emergency and behaviour management.

The SafeCare Resources (refer to *Sources*) contain information, forms and checklists to provide regular checks on the safety of the indoor and outdoor environments.

## Reference/Sources

**This policy should be read in conjunction with:**

*Keeping Children Safe Policy* of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Approved June 2015:

<https://www.victas.uca.org.au/UCA%20Resources/Documents/Keeping%20Children%20Safe%20Policy.pdf>

Acceptance and Refusal of Authorisations Policy	Administration of Medication Policy
Administration of First Aid Policy	Asthma Policy
Anaphylaxis Policy	Code of Conduct Policy
Supervision of Children Policy	Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy
Complaints and Grievances Policy	Delivery and Collection of Children Policy
Dealing with Medical Conditions Policy	Emergency and Evacuation Policy
Diabetes Policy	Epilepsy Policy
Enrolment and Orientation Policy	Hygiene Policy
Excursions Regular outings and Service events Policy	Inclusion and Equity Policy
Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy	Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play Policy
Interactions with Children Policy	Participation of Volunteers and Students Policy

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Occupational Health and Safety Policy	Safe Travel Policy
Privacy and Confidentiality Policy	Sun Protection Policy
Staffing Policy	Water Safety Policy.

- Child Safe Standards: <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation>
- Childsafety Australia: [www.childsafetyaustralia.com.au/](http://www.childsafetyaustralia.com.au/)
- Children’s Services Act 1996: Section 26
- Children’s Services Regulations 2009: Regulation 36, 37, 41 (c,e,f,g,h,i), 43, 44, 71-77, 83-89 Choose With Care: Building child safe organisations – an information and training program: [www.childwise.net](http://www.childwise.net)
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010: Section 165, 166, 167
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: Regulation 84, 85, 86, 99, 100, 101, 102, 168
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 2: Children’s Health and Safety
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 3: Physical Environment
- National Quality Standard, Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management
- Office of the Child Safety Commissioner: [www.kids.vic.gov.au](http://www.kids.vic.gov.au)
- Palfrey, N & Harris, A. Information for professionals on supporting children and families after a child has been abused. Tipsheet produced by the Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network. Viewed at: <http://earlytraumagriev.anu.edu.au/files/profrespondchildabusetip.pdf>
- Protecting the safety and well-being of children and young people – A joint protocol of the Department of Human Services Child Protection, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Licensed Children’s Services and Victorian Schools: [www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/well-being/protecting\\_children\\_protocol27\\_5\\_10.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/well-being/protecting_children_protocol27_5_10.pdf)
- SafeCare Resources: <https://www.victas.uca.org.au/communityservices/Uniting/Pages/SafeCare.aspx>
- Safeguarding Children accreditation program, Australian Childhood Foundation: [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)
- Victorian Institute of Teaching : [www.vit.vic.edu.au](http://www.vit.vic.edu.au)
- What is Child Abuse? [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection/what-is-child-abuse](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/child-protection/what-is-child-abuse)
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- Working with Children (WWC) Check: [www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren)
- Working with Children Regulations 2006 (Vic)

## Authorisation

This policy was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on: 8 May, 2017

## Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 08 November, 2017

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## Attachment 5a - Responsibilities relating to the Child Safe Policy

### National Regulations & Act

AP= Approved Provider

NS=Nominated Supervisor

CS=Certified Supervisor

### Victorian Regulations & Act

L=Licensee

PN=Primary Nominee

N=Nominee

### Action

	Approved Provider /Licensee	NS & PN	CS, N and Educators	Parents
Offer support to the child and their family, and to other educators and staff in response to concerns or reports relating to the health, safety and well-being of that child	x	x	x	
Maintain confidentiality at all times (refer to <i>Privacy and Confidentiality Policy</i> )	x	x	x	
Implement reporting procedures and notifications when there are significant concerns for the health, safety or wellbeing of a child at the service (refer to Attachment Reporting responsibilities and guidelines)	x	x	x	
<b>Note:</b> Early childhood teachers must mandatorily report concerns of child abuse, however every person has a duty of care to report if they have reasonable grounds for doing so.				
Implement and review this policy in consultation with all at the service	x	x	x	x
Implement and practise emergency and evacuation procedures	x	x	x	
Identify the potential for and signs of child abuse at the service and develop and implement effective prevention strategies refer attachment – Child protection risk assessment and Attachment – Child safety review checklist)	x	x	x	
Identify and implement appropriate programs and practices to support the principles of a child safe organisation.	x	x	x	
Ensure volunteers/students, parents and other visitors are not left with sole supervision of individual children or groups of children	x	x	x	
Ensure the service is up to date with current legislation on child restraints in vehicles if transporting children	x	x	x	
Ensure the physical environment at the service is safe, secure and free from hazards for children	x	x	x	
Ensure that where the service has been notified of a court order prohibiting an adult from contacting an enrolled child, such contact does not occur while the child is on the service premises	x	x	x	
Ensure that children at the service are not subjected to any form of corporal punishment, or any discipline that is unreasonable or excessive in the circumstances	x	x	x	
Ensure appropriate procedures are in place for the safe delivery and collection of children	x	x	x	
Ensure all equipment and materials used at the service meet relevant safety standards	x	x	x	
Develop co-operative relationships with appropriate services and/or professionals (including Child FIRST) in the best interests of children and their families	x	x	x	
Identify and provide appropriate resources and training to assist educators, staff, contractors, visitors, volunteers and students to implement this policy.	x	x		

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## Action

	Approved Provider /Licensee	NS & PN	CS, N and Educators	Parents
Ensure risk assessments are undertaken for excursions, regular outings and consider children's safety when leaving the service premises	x	x		
Ensure educators, staff, contractors, volunteers and students undertake appropriate training and education on child protection, including recognising the signs or indicators of child abuse, knowing how to respond, and understanding responsibilities and processes for reporting and managing concerns/incidents	x	x		
Screen all educators, staff, contractors, volunteers and students, including undertaking criminal history checks (if required), Working with Children Checks (except for individuals under the age of 18, registered teachers or police officers), reference checks and interviews	x			
Notify the Department of Education and Training if the service premises is in a state of disrepair or is damaged due to a natural disaster (such as fire or flood) and is a risk to children	x			
Notify DET, in writing, within 24 hours of becoming aware of a serious incident (refer to <i>Glossary</i> ) or notifiable complaint/incident (refer to <i>Glossary</i> ) or allegation regarding the health, safety and/or welfare of a child at the service.	x			
Ensure the Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee, educators, staff, contractors, volunteers and students are kept informed of any relevant changes in legislation and practices in relation to this policy	x			
Ensure the Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee, early childhood teachers and educators are advised of current child protection legislation, its application, any obligations they may have under that law and any changes to the law	x			
Ensure recruitment and induction processes for educators, staff and contractors are in line with this policy (refer to Attachment – Guidelines for the recruitment of staff and volunteers)	x			
Ensure clear procedures are in place for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect (refer to Attachment - Reporting responsibilities and guidelines)	x			
Keep up to date and comply with child protection legislation, its application and any obligations under that law, including any changes to the law and practice in relation to this policy		x	x	
Inform the Approved Provider/Licensee or Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee immediately on becoming aware of a serious incident, notifiable complaint or of a concern, complaint or allegation regarding the health, safety and welfare of a child. (refer to <i>Glossary</i> and to the Incident Reporting and Escalation Process in the <i>Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy</i> ).		x	x	
Ensure that no child is left alone (or is out of sight) with a contractor, visitor, volunteer, student or parent at the service		x	x	
Ensure that families are made aware of support services available to them (such as Child FIRST), and of the assistance these services can provide		x	x	
Ensure learning environments provide sufficient space, and include carefully chosen and well-maintained resources and equipment that will help enhance the quality of children's learning and experiences		x	x	
Organise/facilitate regular safety audits of the following:		x		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emergency equipment</li> <li>• playgrounds and fixed equipment in outdoor environments</li> <li>• cleaning services</li> </ul>				

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## Action

	Approved Provider /Licensee	NS & PN	CS, N and Educators	Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>horticultural maintenance</li> <li>pest control</li> </ul>				
Ensure all educators, staff and others who work with children are aware of this policy, and are supported to implement it in the service		x		
Ensure all cupboards/rooms are labelled accordingly, including those that contain chemicals and first aid kits, and that child-proof locks are installed on doors and cupboards where contents may be harmful		x		
Ensure all contractors/visitors sign in to the visitor's log book		x		
Use appropriate resources and undertake training and education on child protection, including recognising the indicators of child abuse, knowing how to respond, and understanding processes for reporting managing and escalating concerns/ incidents (refer to Attachment )			x	
Undertake appropriate training and use relevant resources to implement this policy at the service			x	
Notify the Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee or the Approved Provider/Licensee immediately of any serious incident, notifiable complaint/incident or of any concerns, complaints or allegations regarding the health, safety and welfare of a child. Refer to the Incident Reporting and Escalation Process in the <i>Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy.</i> )			x	
Maintain a regular cleaning schedule for all equipment to avoid cross-infection			x	
Maintain a clean environment daily and remove tripping/slipping hazards as soon as these become apparent			x	
Educate and empower children to talk about events and situations that make them feel uncomfortable			x	
Conduct risk assessments for excursions and consider children's safety when leaving the service premises			x	
Conduct a daily check of the building, ensuring all children are signed out of the service, doors and windows are closed and locked, and appliances are switched off etc. A written record of the daily check should be kept, signed by an educator and filed			x	
Actively supervise children and maintain educator-to-child ratios at all times			x	
Report any concerns, including the potential for child abuse, to the Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee				x
Report any concerns regarding child safety or wellbeing to the Nominated Supervisor/Primary Nominee, including in relation to child abuse.				x
Read and comply with this policy				x

**Note:** Volunteers and students, while at the service, are responsible for following this policy and its procedures.

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## Attachment 5b - Child protection risk assessment

A child protection risk assessment process helps in the identification of the potential for child abuse in the service, and enables appropriate strategies to be developed to minimise risk.

It is important to create awareness among employees, contractors, visitors and volunteers of possible risks to children from abuse, and to implement a range of strategies to protect children from these risks.

Risk factors	Level of risk to children	Strategies to reduce risk	Evaluation
e.g. Appointment of a sex offender	High	Recruitment processes	Recruitment processes have been developed that include running all relevant criminal history and working with children related checks.
Opportunities for a child to be isolated within the program/premises			
Opportunities for a child to be taken away from the program/premises			
Close physical contact with an adult other than an educator			
Physical environment			
High staff turnover			
Limited staff turnover (with little outside scrutiny of the program)			
Unauthorised access by other people to the service (such as strangers or non-custodial parents)			
Staff not recognising signs of abusive behaviour			
Staff not raising concerns/suspicions of abuse			
Low levels of awareness of child protection issues			
Low levels of commitment to preventing abuse by management/staff			
Lack of appropriate incident management procedures			
Access to multimedia and information technology			

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## Attachment 5c - Child safe organisations<sup>1</sup>

This table provides some examples of practices that may be implemented to support the principles of a child safe organisation.

Child safe principle	Practices
The organisation welcomes children, their parents and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators, staff, volunteers and students readily interact with children in an age-appropriate and respectful way</li> <li>Children are treated as individuals: educators and volunteers strive to understand each child's particular interests and needs</li> <li>Educators, staff, students and volunteers listen to children and encourage their participation</li> </ul>
The organisation recognises that children are vulnerable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators, staff, students and volunteers accept it is their role to protect children involved with their organisation</li> <li>Educators, staff, students and volunteers accept there is a difference in power between a child and an adult</li> <li>The service maintains appropriate educator-to-child ratios</li> <li>Policies are in place to minimise risk involved in one-to-one situations between a child and an adult</li> <li>Equipment and activities are appropriate for the ability and age of the children</li> <li>Children are supported and comforted in an appropriate way, consistent with the child's wishes</li> <li>Information about children is treated confidentially</li> </ul>
The organisation recognises and responds to children with additional needs, including disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service is accessible to all children</li> <li>Educators, staff, students and volunteers relate to all children in a respectful and developmentally-appropriate manner</li> <li>Policies are in place to guide the physical and psychological care requirements of all children</li> </ul>
The organisation actively encourages the participation of Aboriginal children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators, staff, students, volunteers and other children acknowledge and show respect for Aboriginal culture</li> <li>Policies acknowledge that an Aboriginal child's cultural identity is fundamental to their overall well-being</li> </ul>
The organisation recognises, and responds to, the particular needs of children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural diversity is welcomed and celebrated</li> <li>Activities offered are representative of the cultural and religious mix of the local community</li> <li>Educators, staff, students, volunteers and other children acknowledge and show respect for diversity</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Attachment 3 is based on principles for creating child safe organisations, as developed by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, Victoria.

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Child safe principle	Practices
The organisation encourages children to participate in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are asked their views, and these views are respected and taken into consideration in decision-making</li> <li>• Children are involved in discussing appropriate behaviour</li> </ul>
The organisation carefully recruits and manages its employees, contractors and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service has policies on staff and volunteer recruitment and management, covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– recruitment processes, including skills and qualifications required</li> <li>– background-checking and screening processes for all employees, contractors and volunteers</li> <li>– Working with Children Checks and police checks</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The service has a <i>Code of Conduct</i> that outlines acceptable behaviour by educators, staff, students, volunteers and contractors</li> <li>• There is a clear and accessible complaints procedure for use by children, parents and employees</li> <li>• Parents can access the service policies on request</li> </ul>
The organisation ensures that its commitment to child safety is clear and shared by all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A child protection policy (such as this one) is in place and accessible</li> <li>• Educators, staff, students, volunteers, contractors and parents are aware of the service's child protection policy</li> </ul>
The organisation ensures employees, contractors and volunteers are informed about child safety and receive training, where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service has a clear staff development policy that includes areas of child development, child protection, risk management and safety</li> </ul>

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## Attachment 5d - Reporting responsibilities and guidelines

This attachment is based on information from: *Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people* (refer to Reference/Sources above).

Individuals working with children or young people have a duty of care to support and protect them. Where there is a belief, on reasonable grounds (refer to *Glossary*), that a child/young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm, adults in contact with, or working with, that child/young person are ethically bound to act to maintain their safety and wellbeing. For some professionals, there is also a legal obligation to report the concern to the appropriate authorities.

### Mandatory reporting

Under section 182 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, a person registered under the *Education Training and Reform Act 2006*, or who has been granted permission to teach under that Act, is designated as a mandatory reporter. From 30 September 2015 early childhood teachers are required to be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and will be obligated to undertake mandatory reporting (refer to *Glossary*) of any concerns of child abuse and neglect.

### Non-mandated staff members

Section 183 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, states that **any person** who believes on reasonable grounds (refer to *Glossary*) that a child is in need of protection may have a duty of care to report their concerns to Child Protection. This includes non-mandated licensed children's services staff.

Acting on a belief that child abuse has occurred, or is occurring, can be the first important step in stopping the abuse and protecting the child from further harm.

The Department of Health and Human Services has a statutory responsibility to provide Child Protection services for all children and young people in Victoria. It is a Child Protection worker's role to investigate and prove significant harm, so other professionals need only provide reasonable grounds (refer to *Glossary*) for their belief.

### New Criminal Offences

- In response to the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry the Victorian Government introduced three new criminal offences in 2014 to improve responses to child sexual abuse:
- *Failure to disclose* offence: Any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child in Victoria must report that belief to police, unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so.
- *Failure to protect* offence: applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.
- *Grooming* offence: targets individuals who communicate with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse.
- For more information refer to the Department of Health and Human Services website:  
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/new-criminal-offences-to-improve-responses-to-child-sexual-abuse>

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## General guidelines

- The best interests of the child should always be the primary consideration, with due regard to confidentiality and fairness to the person against who the allegation is made.
- Children should be encouraged to approach any person in the service to express concerns about their treatment, and should be made to feel confident that they will be taken seriously.
- Employees and volunteers must express any concerns to the responsible person of the service.
- Any investigation undertaken by the service must ensure procedural fairness and natural justice for a person suspected of abusing a child.
- Records must be kept about any child safety concern or complaint, and stored in accordance with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*. These records must contain information about the action taken, including any internal investigation and any reports made to statutory authorities or professional bodies.
- Everyone at the service must be made aware of the need to report serious matters involving child protection to external authorities.
- Privacy must be maintained, and information must only be disclosed on a need-to-know basis.
- Instances of physical and sexual abuse of children are crimes and must be reported to the police. If a child discloses any such abuse, the service must listen, respond and report to both the police and child protection authorities.
- A report to the appropriate authorities can be made even if educators/staff and others working with children at the service do not have all the necessary information.
- Permission is not required from parents of a child where abuse is suspected, and parents do not need to be notified that a report has been made.
- 

## Forming a professional judgement

Forming an objective and professional judgement can be based on:

- warning signs (or indicators) of harm or potential harm, that have been observed or inferred
- knowledge of child development
- knowledge of cultural backgrounds
- knowledge of any difficulties experienced or support currently being received by a family
- consultation with colleagues and other professionals
- professional obligations and duty of care responsibilities
- established service protocols
- individual service procedures
- legal requirements, such as mandatory reporting.

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## Gathering information

Action	Details
Make notes	Record your observations, and date and sign the entries
Continue to observe	Record your observations, and date and sign the entries
Consult colleagues	Access support and advice from your colleagues, compare notes and brainstorm possible strategies to address areas of concern
Develop action plans based on service procedures	Understand and consult the policies and procedures of the service when determining what action to take
Talk to other agencies about helping the family	Collaborate with or engage community health services, local government services, Child FIRST, regional Department of Health and Human Services/Child Protection officers and disability services. You may wish to instigate a case meeting
Talk to the child	Do this with respect for the child or young person's need for privacy and confidentiality
Talk to the parents	Only do this when it will not jeopardise the safety of the child or young person

**Note:** The responsibility for investigating an allegation of child abuse rests solely with Child Protection and/or Victoria Police. Staff members or family day carers must not investigate an allegation or a concern. They should only enquire sufficiently to form a belief that may then require further action.

## Signs or indicators of harm

- Physical signs of abuse or neglect may include, but are not limited to, bruises, burns, sprains, bites, cuts, fractures, frequent hunger, malnutrition, poor hygiene and inappropriate clothing.
- Behavioural signs of abuse (physical, sexual and emotional) or neglect may include, but are not limited to, wariness or distrust of adults, fear of parents and of going home, fear when other children cry/shout, excessive friendliness to strangers, being very passive and/or compliant, having/claiming to have headaches and/or stomach pains, displaying sexual behaviour that is unusual for the child's age, frequent rocking, sucking and biting, having difficulty sleeping, being withdrawn, aggressive and/or demanding, being highly anxious, having delayed speech, acting like a much younger child, and often being tired and falling asleep.
- Disclosures by the child concerned, or by other parties.

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## Reporting

- There are two types of notifications to be made in relation to significant concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child: a referral to Child FIRST (Family Services) or a report to Child Protection (see below).
- To report concerns that are life threatening, ring Victoria Police on 000.
- If there is an allegation of abuse by a proprietor, staff member or visitor at a licensed children’s service, the matter must be immediately reported directly to Victoria Police for investigation by telephoning the emergency number 000.
- To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child within their family unit, call the nearest DHHS office in your region during business hours. To report concerns after hours or on weekends, call the Child Protection Crisis Line on 13 12 78 (24 hours, 7 days a week and toll free within Victoria). Note: this is an emergency service for weekends and after hours only, and cases reported to the Child Protection Crisis Line will be referred to the relevant DHHS office on the following working day.
- Provide the following information:
  - the child’s name, age and address
  - the reason for believing that the injury or behaviour is the result of abuse or neglect
  - the reason why the call is being made at this point in time
  - an assessment of immediate danger to the child/ren (the person making the report may be questioned regarding knowledge of the current location of the alleged abuser/s)
  - a description of the injury or behaviour observed
  - the current location of the child
  - knowledge of other services that support or are involved with the family
  - any other information about the family
  - any specific details that will help the child, such as cultural background, need for an interpreter or disability support requirements.
- A notification should still be made, even if the notifier does not have all the necessary information.
- The responsibility for investigating an allegation of child abuse rests solely with Child Protection
- and/or Victoria Police. Staff members or family day carers must not investigate an allegation or a concern. They should only enquire sufficiently to form a belief that may then require further action

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## Making a referral to Child FIRST

A referral to **Child FIRST** should be considered if, after taking into account the available information, the staff member forms a view that raising their concerns will have a low-to-moderate impact on the child, and that the immediate safety of the child will not be compromised. This may include circumstances when there are:

- significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
- family conflict, including family breakdown
- families under pressure, due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance misuse, disability or bereavement
- young, isolated and/or unsupported families
- families experiencing significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development.

Child FIRST provides a consolidated intake service to Family Services within sub-regional catchments. Child FIRST ensures that vulnerable children, young people and their families are linked effectively into relevant services, and this may be the best way to connect children, young people and their families with the services they need.

## Making a report to Child Protection

A report to **Child Protection** should be considered if, after taking into account all of the available information, the staff member forms a view that the child is in need of protection because:

- the harm or risk of harm has a serious impact on the child's immediate safety, stability and/or development
- the harm or risk of harm is persistent and entrenched, and is likely to have a serious impact on the child's safety, stability and/or development
- the child's parents are unwilling or unable to protect the child or young person from harm.

Upon receipt of a credible report, Child Protection will seek further information, often from professionals who may already be involved with the child or family, to determine whether further action is required. In determining what steps to take, Child Protection will also consider any concerns previously reported with regard to the child or young person. In most circumstances, Child Protection will inform the notifier of the outcome of investigations.

When reporting concerns of child abuse and/or neglect, it is important to remember that:

- a failure to notify the Department of Health and Human Services is an offence under section 182 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*
- the Department must be notified as soon as practicable
- it is not necessary to prove that abuse has taken place, only to provide reasonable grounds (refer to *Glossary*) for the belief
- permission from parents or caregivers is not required to make a notification, nor do they need to be informed that a notification is being or has been made
- if a notification is made in good faith, the notifier cannot be held legally liable for any consequences, regardless of the outcome of the notification
- the identity of the notifier will remain confidential unless the notifier chooses to inform the child and/or family, or if the notifier consents in writing to the disclosure of their identity, or if the court decides that this information must be disclosed

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- the notifier may have an ongoing role, including:
  - acting as a support person in interviews with the child or young person
  - attending a case conference
  - participating in case-planning meetings
  - continuing to monitor the child’s behaviour and their interactions with others
  - observing/monitoring the conditions of a protective court order that may relate to access or contact with a parent
  - liaising with other professionals and child protection officers in relation to a child or young person’s wellbeing
  - providing written reports for case-planning meetings or court proceedings in relation to the child’s wellbeing or progress.

## Notifying the Department of Education

An Approved Provider/Licensee should notify the Regulatory Authority of any circumstance arising at the service that poses a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or children attending the service including:

- where children are being or may be at risk of being subjected to child abuse (refer to *Glossary*) including instances where children are observed displaying concerning behaviour that may indicate they are being subject to abuse.
- occurrences of sexualised play between children

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## Attachment 5e - Child safety review checklist<sup>2</sup>

This checklist will assist organisations to identify risks and issues in relation to the protection of children, and the requirements for appropriate amendments to be made to a service's policy and practices, or training and support for staff.

	Child safe standard question	Yes, describe how	No or only partly, describe what needs to be done	Person responsible for any action required	Timeline and review date
Clear and public commitment to child safety	Is there a child protection policy (such as this <i>Child Safe Environment Policy</i> ) for the service?				
	Have employees, contractors and volunteers read and understood the policy?				
	Are parents made aware of this policy on enrolment of their child at the service?				
Children's rights to safety and participation	Are children welcomed, consulted and respected at the service?				
	Are the indoor and outdoor environments physically safe?				
	Is a safety assessment conducted for all activities?				
	Do service programs stimulate children and meet their physical, emotional, intellectual, social and recreational needs?				
	Are children with additional needs and from different backgrounds encouraged to participate? If so, do they actually participate?				
Employment of staff and volunteers	Are there adequate screening procedures for staff, volunteers and students on placement?				
Support for staff and volunteers	Is there a code of conduct policy that explains the acceptable and unacceptable				

<sup>2</sup> Attachment 4 is based on a checklist created by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (OCSC). The OCSC checklist can be downloaded at [www.kids.vic.gov.au/downloads/childsafes\\_organisation.pdf](http://www.kids.vic.gov.au/downloads/childsafes_organisation.pdf)

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	Child safe standard question	Yes, describe how	No or only partly, describe what needs to be done	Person responsible for any action required	Timeline and review date
	behaviours of parents, volunteers and students at the service?				
	Are employees aware of the risk of harm to children and the different types of harm (refer to <i>Glossary</i> )?				
Reporting a child safety concern	Do staff understand and feel confident about the process for reporting and acting on concerns about child safety?				
	Have staff identified any other support, assistance and resources they feel they need to assist in providing a child safe environment?				

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## Attachment 5f - Guidelines for the recruitment of staff and volunteers

The processes for the recruitment and selection of employees, contractors and volunteers demonstrate our commitment to maximising the safety of children and deterring unsuitable and inappropriate persons from attempting to work at Uniting Early Childhood Services.

Uniting Early Childhood Services is committed to the following processes.

### Preparation for recruitment

- An explicit statement of our commitment to child safety is included in all advertising promotion for the organisation.
- Job advertisements clearly state our commitment to child safety.
- Job descriptions include a statement about our commitment to maintaining a child safe environment and clearly outline responsibilities and accountability.
- The selection process includes:
  - consideration of a Working with Children Check (and a criminal history record check, where appropriate)
  - confirmation of identity, which involves sighting an original birth certificate or extract, a driver's licence or a passport
  - verification of qualifications
  - thorough reference checks: at least two referees are contacted (including the current or most recent employer) in person or via telephone and all referees must have observed the applicant working with children first-hand.

### Interview process

- At least three people are on the interview panel including, where possible, a gender mix and a person external to the service or someone with HR/interviewing experience.
- Questions are behavioural-based and ask the interviewee to provide examples of their past behaviour in specific situations relevant to the job being applied for.
- Questions regarding relationships with children, professional boundaries, resilience and motivation, teamwork, accountability and ethics are values-based.
- Questions are based on key selection criteria.
- Candidates are asked about their attitudes, aspirations and motivations.
- More detail is asked for when answers seem incomplete.

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## Ongoing management

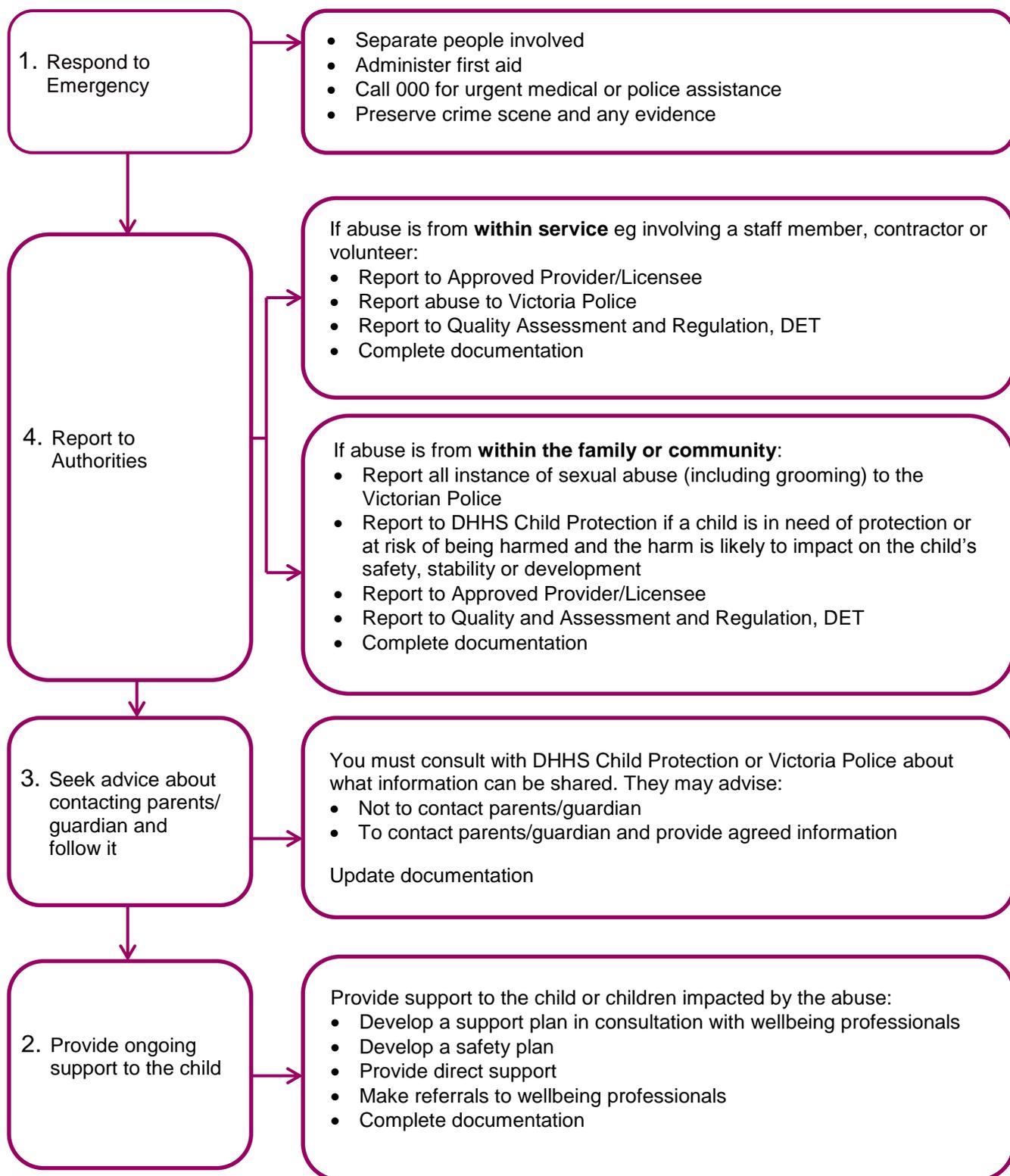
- Information provided to the employee on commencing work at the service includes the Child Safe Environment Policy, Code of Conduct Policy, Complaints and Grievances Policy and Staffing Policy.
- The letter of offer includes a statement about what is expected of the staff member in terms of commitment and responsibilities for child safety.
- Orientation and induction covers information about values, attitudes, expectations and workplace practices in relation to maintaining a child safe environment.
- Regular meetings are held between employees, volunteers and the Approved Provider/Licensee.
- A mentoring or buddy system between employees is in place.
- Training and education with regard to child safety is provided for all employees, contractors and volunteers.
- Resources and support are provided for all employees, contractors and volunteers to ensure a child safe environment.
- Employees, contractors, volunteers and visitors are treated with respect.
- 

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## Attachment 5g – Flowchart: Processes for responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions



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## Circumstances that pose a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child

An Approved Provider/Licensee must notify the Regulatory Authority of information in respect of any other prescribed matters. One of which includes, circumstances arising at the service that pose a risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or children attending the service..

- The types of circumstances that the Approved Provider/Licensee should notify the Regulatory Authority (in addition to reporting to any relevant external agency) include:
- occurrences of inappropriate sexualised activity between children
- where children are being or may be at risk of being subjected to physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including instances where children are observed displaying concerning behaviour that may indicate they are being subjected to abuse.
- Occurrence of inappropriate discipline
- where the education and care service premises is in a state of disrepair or has experienced a natural disaster, such as flooding which has damaged the premises in such a way that it poses a risk to children.

*In some instances Victoria Police and/or DHHS Child Protection may need to be notified. The following table provides an outline of these notification requirements.*

Alleged Incident	Person allegation against (person committing act)	Notify	
		DHHS Child Protection	Victoria Police
Inappropriate sexualised behaviour between children, where all children are under 10 years of age	N/A	✓	
Inappropriate sexualised behaviour between or involving children when one or more are 10 years of age or older	N/A	✓	✓
Allegations of physical or sexual assault/abuse of child	Parent of the child	✓	✓
Allegations of physical or sexual assault/abuse of child	Staff member or adults (including other parents)		✓
Allegations of physical or sexual assault/abuse of child	Person under 18 years of age	✓	(if allegation against child 10 years or over) ✓

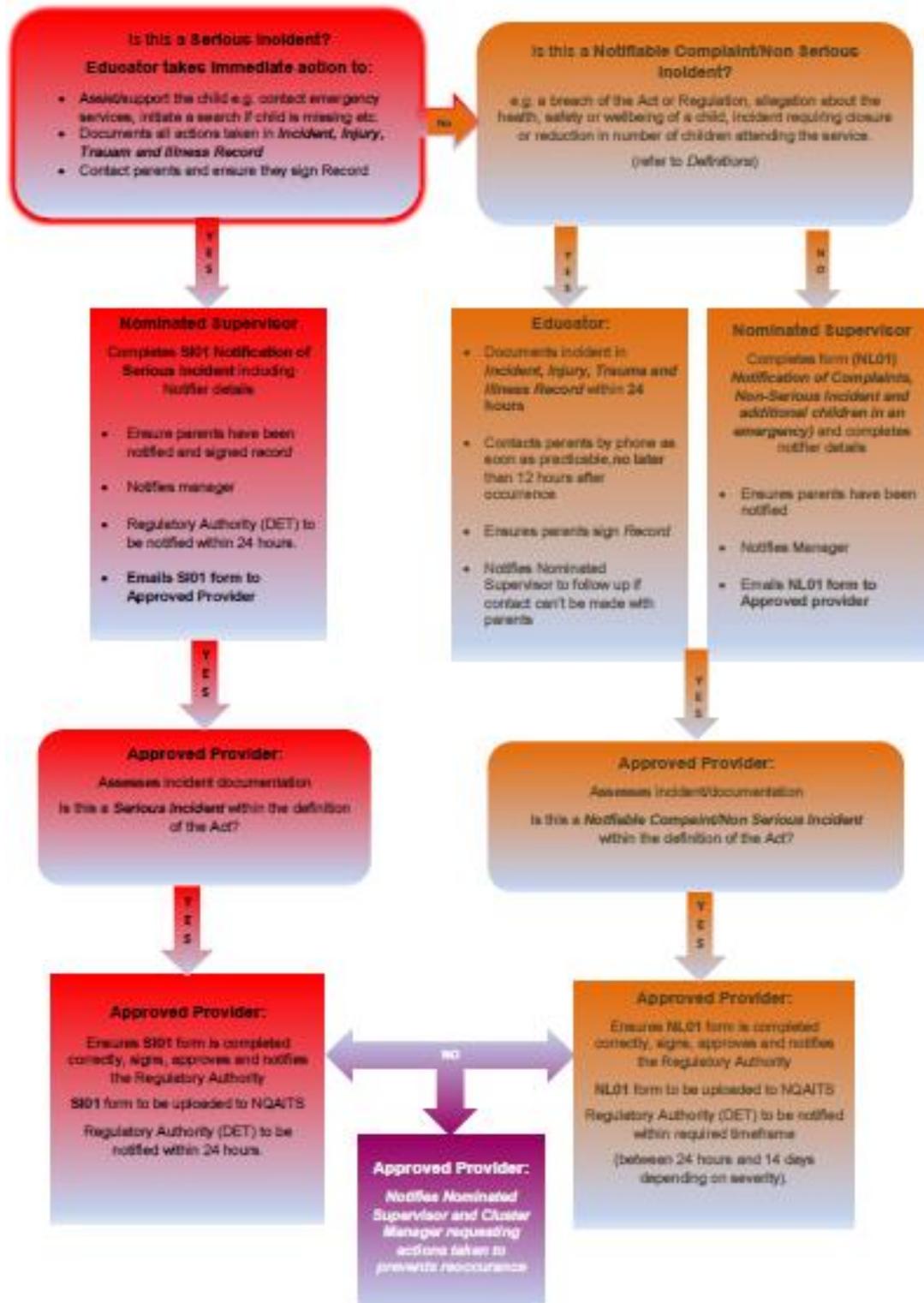
**Definition:** - Allegation: a claim or assertion that someone has done something illegal or wrong, typically one made without proof. An **allegation** is an **accusation**, which is sometimes true and sometimes not.

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## Internal processes



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## Attachment 5h – Child Safe Standards

Victorian State Government

<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafe/Pages/standards.aspx>

UCVT "Keeping children Policy

[safe https://www.victas.uca.org.au/UCA%20Resources/Pages/Keeping-Children-Safe-Policy.aspx](https://www.victas.uca.org.au/UCA%20Resources/Pages/Keeping-Children-Safe-Policy.aspx)

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