



Circle of Friends Australia Inc

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CIRCLE OF FRIENDS AUSTRALIA INC (COFA) CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENTS POLICY 2024

(Note: Policy must comply with requirements in the following:

- Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017
- Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016 and
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.)

COFA is committed to the safety of children and young people. We value and respect children and young people and welcome them regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, or social, economic or cultural background. Bullying and harassment won't be tolerated.

Scope of policy

This policy applies to all volunteers, work placement students and members of COFA, referred to throughout the policy collectively as volunteers. All volunteers are required to agree in writing to accept and act in accordance with the policy.

Communication

This child safe policy and related documents are available on our website. It is also provided as part of a welcome pack when volunteers first join COFA Inc. as part of their induction.

We encourage and respect the views of children and young people and involve them in decision-making as appropriate. We provide clear age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate explanations to children and young people including their right to safety, their right to be listened to and that they can provide feedback or make a complaint if they have a concern, to any volunteer or ask their parent/guardian to do this on their behalf. We will listen to and act upon any complaints or concerns that a child or young person raises with us.

Circle of Friends Australia Inc is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission as a Deductible Gift Recipient. Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible.

Bank Acct Details: BSB, 633-000; Acct #, 150 721 298;

Reference, Surname & Circle Number.

Code of Conduct

COFA is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers who have contact with children and young people are aware of and comply with their additional responsibilities. COFA has an obligation to ensure that all volunteers:

- comply with the organisation's child safe policy at all times and take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and protection of children and young people
- treat everyone including those of different race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes and religious beliefs with respect and honesty and that they ensure that equity is upheld
 - be a positive role model to children and young people in all conduct with them
 - set clear boundaries and maintain appropriate behaviours with children and young people – boundaries help everyone to understand their roles
 - listen and respond appropriately to the views and concerns of children and young people
 - be alert to bullying behaviours and respond promptly and appropriately
 - ensure another adult is always present or in sight when conducting one to one consulting, coaching, instruction or other activity
 - be alert to children and young people who have been harmed, or may be at risk of harm and report this quickly to the Child Abuse Report Line (13 14 78)

RECRUITMENT

To ensure we engage the most suitable people to work with children and young people, we have the following recruitment practices in place:

- clear position descriptions that include our commitment to child safety and wellbeing are provided to all new volunteers
- face-to-face interviews by Circle convenors of all new volunteers to determine the applicant's knowledge of child safeguarding
- at least 2 referee checks.

In accordance with the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016, COFA is registered with the DHS Screening Unit and we link all Working with Children Checks (WWCC).

All volunteers over the age of 14 years who will be volunteering in a role with children and young people must hold a current, not prohibited WWCC issued by the Screening Unit of the Department of Human Services. Evidence of this must be provided prior to commencing as a volunteer with COFA and it must be renewed every 5 years. We will verify the accuracy of all WWCCs in the DHS Screening Unit portal as required by law.

We will immediately contact the Department of Human Services Screening Unit when we become aware of assessable information regarding any person involved with our organisation, including any serious criminal offence, child protection information, or disciplinary or misconduct information.

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TRAINING, SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT FOR WORKERS

COFA has strategies in place to supervise, train and support volunteers to understand our organisation's child safe policy, their mandatory reporting obligations, how to build culturally safe environments and their responsibilities to create a child safe and friendly environment.

Our strategies include:

- the appointment by the COFA management committee of a Child Safety Support Person who has a monitoring and educative role within our organisation.

- Training:
 - as part of their induction, all volunteers are required to read and understand the Mandatory Reporting Information Booklet available at: https://dhs.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/103179/CSE-Mandator
 - all volunteers must complete 'Responding to Risk of Harm, Abuse and Neglect' training every 3 years or whatever current training is required by law/regulations.
 - All members must agree to comply with and sign the COFA Code of Conduct

- Supervision:
 - regular sessions that include a focus on child safety and wellbeing, of all volunteers who have contact with children and young people.
 - The agenda of every Circle meeting is to include child safety as a standing item.

- Support:
 - an induction process for all new volunteers including a copy of this policy document
 - regular performance appraisals, to be conducted at Circle meetings, that discuss child safeguarding with all volunteers who have contact with children and young people
 - Regular contact and support from COFA's Child Safety Support Person both with convenors of Circles and, if required, with individual volunteers.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO HARM OR RISK OF HARM

We aim to ensure that children and young people are safe from harm and risk of harm. (physical or psychological harm whether caused by an act or omission, including harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect.)

Mandated reporters in our organisation are volunteers who:

- provide services to children and young people
- hold a position in COFA, the duties of which include direct responsibility for, or direct supervision of, the provision of those services to children and young people.

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Mandated reporters have a legal obligation to notify the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 13 14 78 as soon as practicable if they have a suspicion that a child or young person has been harmed or may be at risk of harm. If the child or young person is at immediate risk, report to South Australia Police (SAPOL) on 000.

Even if not a mandated reporter, any person can report harm or risk of harm to a child or young person.

The volunteers who identify the harm or risk of harm must notify the convenor of their Circle prior to reporting to CARL or SAPOL. They must also prepare a written report for the convenor and the COFA Child Safety Support Person.

Information about making appropriate reports of harm or risk of harm is available from the South Australian Department for Child Protection website:
<https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse>.

All adult volunteers (even if not a mandated reporter) have a legal obligation to report child sexual abuse to the police and to protect a child from sexual abuse. Failure to meet these obligations may be considered a criminal offence.

Following a report being made to CARL or SAPOL volunteers must make an internal report to the management committee of COFA. COFA will be guided by the Department for Child Protection and/or SAPOL after a report has been made as to whether we can conduct an internal investigation.

If a volunteer is reported to CARL or SAPOL for causing harm or risk of harm to a child or young person, they will be removed from any role that involves working with any child or young person until authorities have concluded their investigation.

Following a report to CARL or SAPOL we will support the child or young person by:

- referring the child, young person or their family to other appropriate services
- continuing to provide a service to the child, young person and their family and monitoring their circumstances.

COFA will also support the volunteer/person who made the complaint on behalf of the child/young person.

COFA will document all information received regarding the report and store this securely in a separate file.

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REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO GENERAL COMPLAINTS OR FEEDBACK

COFA provides opportunities for complaints and feedback to ensure that children, young people and their families feel valued and respected. This also enables us to improve the quality of our service.

Children, young people and their families are informed that they can provide feedback or make a complaint at their first contact with a volunteer from COFA.

Compliments, complaints or feedback can be provided verbally to any volunteer or direct to the COFA Child Safety Support Person or member of the management committee either by telephone (mobile details of relevant Circle to be provided), via email at cofa.admin@bigpond.com or info@cofa.org.au or by the COFA complaint form. COFA will arrange for interpreters to be available if necessary.

COFA will deal with all complaints and feedback promptly, sensitively and fairly. We will:

- listen to the complaint/feedback
- ensure that the person receiving the complaint makes a record of it if received verbally
- advise the time expected for an outcome
- ensure that a volunteer understands that if they receive a complaint, they must forward it to management as soon as possible
- that the management committee will respond to the complainant with an outcome in a timely manner
- clearly document and securely store decisions and actions taken in response to complaints and feedback
- make sure that procedural fairness is followed at all times

If the child, young person or their family is not happy with the outcome from the complaints process they can contact:

- Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner 8226 866 - Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency 1300 419 495 - Australian Human Rights Commission Online: www.humanrights.gov.au Tel: 1300 656 419
- South Australian Equal Opportunities Commission (for complaints relating to discrimination) Online: www.eoc.sa.gov.au Tel: 08 8207 1977.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Physical contact

- any physical contact must be appropriate to the delivery of services being provided
- where physical contact is required, this is undertaken in a safe way by explaining why contact is required and what will happen, and asking the child/young person for their permission (or their

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family if this is more appropriate) before proceeding

- unnecessary physical contact is not allowed

Online communications

- appropriate supervision is provided for all online activities
- volunteers must not communicate with children or young people online or via social media for anything other than official COFA business and all such communication must be copied (CC'd) to the convenor of the Circle

Transport of children and young people

- volunteers must not transport a child or young person unless specifically approved
- parents/guardians must provide consent before transporting a child or young person
- volunteers must have a valid, unrestricted driver's licence
- vehicles must be registered, insured and in roadworthy condition

Supervision

- children and young people are to be supervised by parents/guardians at all times
- if the child/young person is not collected by parent/guardian at end of activity for which the volunteer has provided assistance, two adults are to stay with child/young person until they are collected
- if providing one to one consultation with a child or young person, it will be in line of sight of another adult

Taking images of children and young people

- written consent of child young person and their parent/guardian required
- disclosure will be made as to how the image is to be used and consent must be provided by the child, young person and parent/guardian
- images must be presented in a way that de-identifies the child or young person

Physical environment

- conduct risk assessments for all activities
- ensure all equipment is in good working order

Privacy and confidentiality

- all documents containing confidential information will be stored privately in a locked filing cabinet (or similar place with restricted access)

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- digital files containing confidential information shall be protected electronically by restricting the access to only those requiring it to perform their duties. Adequate malware to be installed on mobile devices and laptops
- volunteers must not disclose information regarding any child or young person without written consent of the child, young person and their parent/guardian

Overnight and/or off-site activities

- consent of parent or guardian must be given
- children and young people must be supervised by a minimum of 2 adults
- privacy when children or young people are bathing, toileting and dressing must be provided
- children and young people will not be left under the supervision of unauthorised persons
- sleeping arrangements will not compromise the safety of children or young people such as unsupervised sleeping arrangements, or children or young people sharing a bed or an adult sleeping in the same bed as a child or young person
- in the event of billeting arrangements, host adults should have a child or young person attending the same event from the same household, and the host adults must have a 'not prohibited' WWCC. (For example, during a visit from an interstate soccer team, child members of the team must be billeted with families whose adult members have a 'not prohibited' WWCC and who have a child of their own who is playing soccer against the visiting team.)
- children and young people have the right to contact their parents, or another adult, if they feel unsafe, uncomfortable, or distressed during the stay

POLICY REVIEW

COFA will, at a minimum, review this policy and the related procedures once every 5 years as required by the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. We will also review this policy when:

- new or added risks are identified for children or young people, which may require a change in the policy or procedures
- a critical incident where a child or young person has experienced harm through involvement in COFA
- concerns are raised by anyone involved in COFA about child safety or welfare in the organisation
- awareness or compliance to the child safe policy and/or procedures is low
- legislative changes/requirements.

COFA will lodge a new child safe environments compliance statement with the Department of Human Services each time we review and update this policy.

POLICY DATE: May 2024

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REVIEW DATE:

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