

Policy Owner:	Head of People & Culture	Policy Year & Version:	2025 – Version 4.1
Executive Policy Sponsor:	Chief Operating Officer	Date Approved:	14 March 2025
Approval Authority:	MCRI Board	Next Review Date:	14 March 2028

1. Overview and Purpose

- 1.1. This document sets out the Child Safety Policy developed by Murdoch Children's Research Institute (ABN 21 006 566 972) (referred to as **MCRI**) and Victorian Clinical Genetics Services (ABN 51 007 032 760) (referred to as **VCGS**) collectively referred to as the **Organisation**. Words defined in this Policy have the meaning given in this document including in the Definitions section 10.
- 1.2. Children are at the heart of everything we do. Our purpose is to give all children the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilled life. MCRI and VCGS have **zero-tolerance towards abuse and neglect** of children. This policy outlines our approach to keeping children and young people safe.

2. Scope of Application

- 2.1. This Policy applies to all staff of the Organisation including:
 - both salaried and non-salaried employees of the Organisation
 - all other staff of the Organisation including Board members, volunteers, students, honorary and affiliate appointments.
- 2.2. In some circumstances, this Policy applies to third-party collaborators and Suppliers, including implementing partners and Contractors. Collaborators and Individuals will be notified when the Policy applies to their engagement.

3. Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

- 3.1. We are committed to keeping children and young people safe and ensuring their wellbeing. We have a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of child abuse, exploitation, or harm. Child safety is prioritised in our decision-making, at all levels of the Institute. We help our people understand and meet their responsibilities to keep children safe. Children and young people are actively involved in our research and programs. We ensure their safety, and respect their views, culture and diversity at all times.

4. Policy Principles

- 4.1. **Zero tolerance approach to child abuse and exploitation.** The Institute has zero-tolerance for all forms of child abuse, exploitation and harm. All staff must respond to and report any safety concerns for children.
- 4.2. **Best interests of the child.** The best interest of the child is at the heart of all activities involving children. This is in line with Article 3 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). This Convention forms the basis for children's rights and safety laws worldwide.
- 4.3. **Shared responsibility.** Everyone at the Institute is responsible for safeguarding children and young people. We maintain high standards of behaviour around children. All staff must **respond to** and **report** any safety concerns for children.

Child Safety Policy

- 4.4. **Confidentiality and procedural fairness.** We ensure confidentiality and procedural fairness when investigating and responding to child safety concerns.

5. Policy Commitments

We ensure a safe environment that minimises the risk of child exploitation and abuse.

5.1. Children have child safety information and are empowered to speak up

The involvement of children and young people in our research and activities must:

- bring them no harm;
- be voluntary and informed, considering their age, maturity, and capacities;
- be responsive to their individual needs including traits, experiences, culture, and context. These may affect their understanding of, and response to our child safety practices.
- be meaningful and ethical; and
- recognise and address power imbalances.

Throughout their involvement with us, children and young people are encouraged to:

- express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights;
- feel safe to speak up and trust that they will be heard;
- behave with courtesy and consideration for others; and
- ask questions to clarify their rights, participate in decision making and provide feedback.

5.2. Robust recruitment and screening processes

Robust recruitment and screening processes ensure that we only suitable people engage with the Institute. We screen out people who:

- might seek to use the Institute to harm children and young people; or
- whose past actions indicate an unacceptable risk of harm.

5.3. Thorough child safety risk assessment

We regularly assess and manage child safety risks. This includes those involving our partners and affiliates. We consider child safety risks in all projects and activities involving children. This includes activities where children are indirectly involved. We have documented risk management plans in place and review these in line with our:

- Risk Management Framework; and
- Child Safety Procedure.

We work with collaborators to ensure they comply with these policies.

5.4. Immediate reporting is mandatory

Child safety incidents or policy breaches **must be reported via the [MCRI Reporting Procedure](#) immediately**, including:

- Disclosures or complaints of harm by children, young people, or adults.

Child Safety Policy

- Breaches of the Child Safety Policy, Procedure, or the Institute’s Code of Conduct.
- Concerns or observations of inappropriate behaviour by our employees or collaborators.
- Any new information about an already reported incident.

External reports to Police, Child Protection authorities and donors must be made when required and completed with the support of internal reporting contacts.

5.5. Education, training and support

We train our people to create child-safe environments.

Our commitment to child safety is communicated through recruitment, induction, and training activities. We ensure that everyone has access to this Policy and the Child Safety Procedure. We foster continuous improvement in safeguarding practices.

5.6. Diversity, equity and inclusion is fundamental to creating child safe environments

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is vital for child safety. We respect and recognise the individuality of each child and young person. Our approach acknowledges their strengths and vulnerabilities. We understand that these factors shape the barriers to safety.

6. Key Accountabilities

Position	Responsibility
Board Audit Finance and Risk Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorse this policy • Maintain oversight over the effectiveness of the Child Safety Policy and Procedure
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote commitment to the Child Safety Policy and Procedure • Communicate with teams about the importance and expectations of child safety initiatives • Allocate adequate resources to develop, implement and improve child safety
People Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support team members, contractors and stakeholders to understand and meet their child safety obligations • Ensure teams complete all child safe training including refreshers • Ensure team members maintain current Working with Children Checks and National Police Checks • Ensure appropriate recruitment, screening and employment practices for all new hires and contractors • Communicate with their teams about the importance and expectations of child safety initiatives • Support team members involved in reporting or responding to child safety incidents as required
Child Safety Officer (Head of People and Culture, MCR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable owner of this Policy • Develop, implement, review, maintain and enforce the Child Safety Policy and Procedure • Establish and maintain compliant record-keeping and reporting practices • Act as a key contact for child safety questions, concerns and issues • Lead the investigation/response to reported child safety incidents • Oversee the child safety training program • Immediately report allegations of child exploitation or abuse to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the police ○ child protection authorities ○ donors
People and Culture team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct all relevant pre-employment checks for employees • Ensure the suitability of employees who will be working closely with children is assessed during interviews and in reference checks • Ensure all Working with Children Checks and National Police Checks are up to date as required • Support the investigation of breaches and incidents as required

Child Safety Policy

Position	Responsibility
All People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain current Working with Children Checks and National Police Checks• Comply with the Child Safety Policy and Procedure at all times• Report any child safety concerns, incidents or Policy and Procedure non-compliance• Complete all induction and ongoing child safety training as required• Obtain appropriate informed consent for children and young people's participation, including consent for using their images and videos• Behave in line with the Institute's Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Procedure's Standards of Behaviour• Seek the guidance of their manager or the Child Safety Officer if they are unclear about anything related to this policy

7. Dispute Resolution and Breaches

- 7.1. All instances or complaints of child abuse must be reported. We will respond in line with the Child Safety Procedure. People who breach this policy or pose an unacceptable risk to children will not be allowed to work with children. Disciplinary action, including termination of employment may also apply.
- 7.2. The Institute must comply with the [Child Safe Standards](#). Concerns about the implementation of the Child Safe Standards can be raised with:
- the Child Safety Officer (Head of People & Culture MCRI)
 - the [Commission for Children and Young People](#).

8. Enquiries

- 8.1. This Policy is available on our website and intranet. For further information please contact the:
- People and Culture team peopleandculture@mcri.edu.au; or
 - Institute Child Safety Officer, the Head of People and Culture, MCRI.

9. Compliance with the Policy

- 9.1. If the Organisation has a reason to believe that a person subject to the policy has failed to comply with it, the Organisation will investigate the circumstances. If it is found that this person has failed to follow the policy, the Organisation will consider the circumstances, legal implications, Code of Conduct and may take action against them. This may include seeking to terminate their relationship with the Organisation.

10. Definitions

- 10.1. In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, for the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18.
- 10.2. Child abuse refers to an act and/or omission which endangers a child's health, wellbeing and/or development. For the purposes of this policy, child abuse includes:
- **Emotional abuse:** Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a child does not receive the love, affection, or attention they need for healthy emotional, psychological, and social development.
 - **Exposure to family violence:** Family violence is behaviour by a person towards a family member that may include physical violence or threats, verbal abuse, emotional or psychological

Child Safety Policy

abuse, sexual abuse, financial and social abuse. Exposing a child to family violence which includes seeing, hearing or experiencing that behaviour in any way is harmful to children and constitutes child abuse.

- **Grooming:** Grooming is predatory behaviour designed to prepare a child for sexual abuse. Many perpetrators of sexual offences against children purposefully create relationships with children, their families and carers in order to establish the conditions necessary for them to abuse the child.
- **Neglect:** Neglect is persistent failure or deliberate denial to provide the child with the necessities of life.
- **Physical abuse:** Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a child to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally or inadvertently because of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child.
- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse occurs when an adult or a person of authority (e.g. older) involves a child in any sexual activity.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s) of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.

11. Supporting information, related documents

- [Child Safety Procedure](#) (Internal)
- Further related policies and procedures are listed in the Child Safety Procedure linked above

11.1. **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Australia is a signatory to the [United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). The Convention forms the basis of children's rights, and the foundation of child safety and child protection legislation around the world.

11.2. **Australian Principles for Child Safe Organisations.** In 2019, the leaders of each State and Territory endorsed the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. The Principles were a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017). The principles are designed to work together to form an organisational culture and systems that place the safety of children at their core. The Principles can be found [here](#).

11.3. **State and Territory Child Safety Standards.** Some states and territories have implemented legislated standards in relation to the maintenance of child safe organisations. These Standards reflect the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations which the Institute is committed to.

In 2022, the Victorian Government introduced 11 [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#). The Institute must comply with and is committed to upholding the as a Child Safe Organisation.

11.4. **Screening Legislation.** Each Australian State and Territory have screening requirements for employees and volunteers who work with children and young people, including Working with Children and Working with Vulnerable People Checks. People and Culture ensure all screening requirements are fulfilled including State and Territory requirements found here

[Pre-Employment and Volunteer Screening Checks](#)

Child Safety Policy

11.5. **Child Protection and Reporting Legislation.** Each Australian state and territory has implemented specific legislation, across both mandated and voluntary reporting of child abuse and harm.

[State and Territory Child Protection Legislation](#)

All personnel must report child safety concerns along the Institute's Child Safety Reporting Procedure. The Institute will support personnel to report to law enforcement and/or Child Protection authorities.

Some personnel may be classed as mandatory reporters in their State or Territory and have a legal responsibility to report concerns of child abuse and neglect.

In some Australian states and territories it is a criminal offence for an adult to fail to report certain forms of child abuse. Please review the legislation found at the above link to ensure you understand your ethical and legal reporting obligations.

[State and Territory Reporting Contacts](#)

The above link includes the contact details for each State and Territory's statutory Child Protection authority.

11.6. **Reportable Conduct Scheme.** Reportable Conduct Schemes are oversight systems that monitor how organisations handle allegations of child-related misconduct against personnel. These schemes aim to improve child safety within organisations. In Victoria, [Reportable Conduct](#) is monitored by the [Commission for Children and Young People](#). The Scheme requires the Institute to inform the Commission of the reportable conduct involving staff, volunteers, contractors and other individuals engaged by the Institute. Reportable conduct includes:

- sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child.

11.7. **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Child Protection Policy.** The Institute is an Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) partner and applies the [DFAT Child Protection Policy](#) across all projects that engage with or have contact with children and young people.

11.8. **Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct.** The Institute is a signatory to the [ACFID Code of Conduct](#), including commitments to advance the safeguarding of children and young people.

Version History

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date	Changes (if relevant)
4.1	MCRI Board of Directors	14 March 2025	14 March 2025	Board review and approval of Policy.
4.0	Chief Operating Officer	01 August 2024	01 August 2024	Re-structuring in line with the development of the Child Safety Procedure.
3.0	Director	10 October 2023	10 October 2023	Re-titled Child Safety Standards Policy. Separate Procedure in development. Reporting Flowchart inserted
2.0	Director of People & Culture	20 May 2020	20 May 2020	Re-titled Child Safety Policy & Procedure. Incorporates full reporting procedure.

Child Safety Policy

1.1	Head of Human Resources	25 September 2018	25 September 2018	Updates following the introduction of DFAT's 2017 Child Protection Policy
1.0	Head of Human Resources	2016	2016	
