



Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

Child Safe Standards toolkit: Resource 6



The Child Safe Standards require organisations that provide services or facilities for children to have strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse. Your organisation may already have existing strategies. This resource is designed to assist organisations to identify common risks of abuse and potential courses of action to help protect children from abuse.

Taking a risk management approach to child safety

Risk management involves developing policies and procedures to identify and reduce risk as well as ensuring these measures are understood and followed. You can never eliminate all risks, but you can have processes in place to ensure they are reduced and managed appropriately when they arise. Generally, risk management tends to focus on what can go wrong, but it is important to remember that any event, circumstance or situation that occurs can also provide an opportunity for improvement.

The examples provided in this document are not exhaustive and should be considered in the context of your organisation. Your organisation's risk management approach should recognise your duty of care to protect children from abuse based on a range of activities including:

- the types of activities or services for children that your organisation provides and the level of care, supervision or authority over children whether as part of your primary function or otherwise
- opportunities within those activities or services for a person to be on their own with a child or children, or to develop relationships of trust with children and/or their families
- risk of harm to children because of the action or inaction of a person involved (including staff, volunteers, families and other children)
- online and physical environments
- ages, abilities and cultural diversity of children
- specific activities such as excursions and overnight trips.

If you require further generic risk management information, please contact the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority on (03) 9270 6900 or refer to the [Victorian Government Risk Management Framework page](http://www.vmia.vic.gov.au/risk/victorian-government-risk-management-framework) <www.vmia.vic.gov.au/risk/victorian-government-risk-management-framework> on their website.

A framework for mitigating risks to child safety

A successful risk management strategy includes a number of crucial steps that should be taken in regular consultation with staff, volunteers, children and their families. These steps are detailed below and should be well-documented, accessible, and reviewed periodically.

1. **Identify the risks** - The first thing you need to do is recognise the risks to child safety within your organisation. A risk is anything that has the potential to cause harm to children or enables that harm to occur. Risks can include processes associated with ineffective screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices.

2. **Assess and evaluate the risks** - Once you have identified the risks, you need to determine which risks to address as a priority. This decision will be based on the likelihood of each risk occurring and the severity of the consequences for a child or children should that risk occur.
3. **Manage and treat the risks in a timely manner** – Develop an action plan for your organisation to eliminate or reduce the risks to child safety you have identified, and ensure that the actions are completed in a timely manner. Ensure ongoing oversight of the action plan to confirm that the actions are appropriate and successful.
4. **Review and improve your strategy** – Regularly review and reiterate your approach to build and demonstrate an organisational culture of child safety that is influenced and driven by effective leadership.
5. **Designate and manage:** Risk management is part of an ongoing quality improvement process for your organisation. Nominate a person to be responsible for the ongoing management of your strategy and ensure that the strategy is embedded in your organisation’s culture and management.

Your risk management strategy must include a plan for managing any action or inaction by a person in your organisation that fails to comply with any policies and procedures which make up your risk management strategy.

Circumstances and situations are constantly changing. Once you commence the process of risk management, there is no doubt that new or different risks will appear that will trigger a new risk assessment. This includes risks associated with a ‘special event’ or risks associated with a change in service provision. Your organisations need to manage these risks when they arise and adapt your risk management strategy so that it remains contemporary.

Key risks and recommended responses

Please note: The list of risk considerations below is not exhaustive. Organisations must consider their situation specifically to identify and manage their risks of child abuse. The suggested strategies to reduce or remove these risks are suggestions only. An organisation’s response should be appropriate in the particular circumstances.

The following areas may be considered in order to meet Standard 6 (Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse) of the Child Safe Standards.

Risk considerations	Strategies to reduce or remove these risks
<p>Factors related to the children who receive services from your organisation</p> <p>This may include factors that mean children may be at greater risk of harm. Factors which may contribute to risk for children include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disability • mental health issues • age • living arrangements (for example, out-of-home care, in hospital or in a residential facility) • living circumstances that make a child more isolated or vulnerable • identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander • identifying as being from a culturally diverse and/or linguistically diverse background • language barriers • identifying as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender or intersex • exhibiting behaviours of concern (for example, sexualised behaviours). 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policies and procedures to protect the diversity of children, including their cultural safety, are implemented • children with heightened risks of abuse have a detailed plan to manage their circumstances • Aboriginal children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have adequate opportunity to stay connected with their culture, community and their support network/s (for example, family, kin or Elders) • children have adequate support to understand what is happening • children are adequately informed about, supported and involved in decisions that affect them • the number of staff and/or volunteers and their level of experience and qualifications adequately meets the needs of children • staff and/or volunteers are competent in recognising, mitigating and responding to issues (for example, ensuring appropriate supervision)

	when accessing shared toilets or other secluded spaces).
<p>Factors related to your organisation’s board members, staff and volunteers</p> <p>The following considerations may contribute.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are staff and/or volunteers supervised (by senior staff or peers)? • What level of qualification do staff and/or volunteers possess? • What level of experience, knowledge and skill do board members, staff and/or volunteers possess or demonstrate in relation to child wellbeing and safety? • Are staff and/or volunteers competent to manage difficult or unusual situations? • Are all staff and/or volunteers subject to the same safety screening? • Are people who have not been subject to the organisation’s safety screening processes present (including guest speakers, work experience participants, networking opportunities, contractors, and families)? • Have the staff and/or volunteers been the subject of concern or allegations previously? 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include putting in place systems and monitoring to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate staffing and supervision arrangements are in place at all times • staff are aware of the organisation’s code of conduct and expectations for conduct with children • children (where appropriate) understand appropriate and inappropriate conduct toward them and understand the processes in place if they feel unsafe • there are clear policies and procedures in place for children who feel unsafe, and that staff adhere to these processes • staff and/or volunteers undertake necessary training, certification or qualifications • induction and ongoing training is undertaken by board members, staff and volunteers • the organisation’s policies and procedures are clear, concise, publicly displayed and appropriately address foreseeable risks • staff and/or volunteers have necessary supports available to them to manage unusual situations • deployment of staff and/or volunteers is informed by the above concerns.
<p>Your organisation’s physical environment</p> <p>Considerations may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the organisation’s staff maintain a line-of-sight to child-staff and child-child interaction? • Can staff or volunteers isolate children? • How are higher risk locations, such as change rooms, toilets or bedrooms overseen? • Are procedures and policies detailing staff and/or volunteer presence in higher risk locations, such as change rooms, toilets or bedrooms clear, visible and well-understood by everyone? • Are confidential personal details stored securely? 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a detailed and specific plan to manage each identified risk, including issues such as supervision and managing access to secluded areas • ensuring that when physical contact is necessary, staff and children are aware of what constitutes appropriate contact and what is inappropriate • ensuring that children know where they are allowed to go or not go (clear “out of bounds” rules) • having in place rules to manage higher risk locations such as taking children to the toilets in small groups • rostering two or more staff to higher risk situations or locations • ensuring that children know who to approach or talk with if they feel unsafe or are worried about the safety of another child.
<p>The nature of activities undertaken by your organisation</p> <p>Considerations may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations providing services such as accommodation, emergency response or other services, which have a high degree of care or direction over children, may have a higher level of risk. 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a detailed and specific plan to manage each identified risk, including issues such as supervision, managing access to secluded areas and linking the organisation’s code of conduct to these policies

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations providing services which largely involve the oversight or participation of each child's parent or other trusted adult may have a lower level of risk. • Does the organisation deliver activities which involve staff or volunteers working in isolation? • Does the organisation provide services for people who present a higher risk to children? For example, people with sexualised behaviours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing responses commensurate with the level of risk involved in the organisation's activities or services • ensuring that staff and volunteers are appropriately supported with supervision, peer support, debriefing opportunities and contacts to manage critical events • ensuring that staff and volunteers have appropriate induction training and ongoing supervision.
<p>Online communication</p> <p>Your organisation must identify what protections are in place to protect children in the online environment. Considerations may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do staff and/or volunteers communicate with children using online and/or other media channels either as part of their role or away from work? • Do staff and/or volunteers communicate with their peers using online and/or other media channels as part of your organisation's activities? • Does the organisation effectively monitor online and other media communication of staff and volunteers and between children? • Does the organisation have and enforce a policy on online and other media behaviour and communication? • Are confidential personal details stored securely and only shared in accordance with relevant legislation and in line with your organisation's privacy policy? 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that a detailed policy or code of conduct includes guidance about online and other media interaction, including addressing the following concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What online relationships are acceptable? – Can staff or volunteers take photos of children with the consent of parents/guardians? How are the photos used? Can pictures be posted and 'tagged' online or printed and used locally? – Can staff or volunteers contact children or their families outside the services provided by the organisation? If so, under what circumstances?
<p>'Non-core' activities (including fetes, overnight trips, carnivals, excursions, guests at the organisation)</p> <p>Considerations may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are appropriate supervision arrangements (based on age, location or other factors)? • What is an appropriate level of staffing? Should there be a designated ratio of organisational staff compared to volunteers in place? • What are appropriate sleeping arrangements (based on age, gender, supervision and other factors)? • Are processes in place for children to voice concerns at the time? • What orientation/induction is necessary for children, staff, volunteers or visitors (including any support staff contracted by other organisations)? • What support will be available to staff to manage unusual situations? • Do staff and volunteers know what to do if a child is not picked up on time or in the case of an emergency? 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supervision and coordination of activities are well-planned and responsibilities are known in advance • qualified and/or experienced staff or volunteers are present to supervise • adequate child/adult ratios are in place • the organisation has clear policies to guide unexpected situations, such as a child who has not been picked up on time • organisations providing support staff who assist children to access your activities have a strong focus on child safety

<p>Awareness of rights</p> <p>Considerations may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your organisation enable children, their families, carers and community to be aware of their rights? • What information is available and accessible to children so they understand their rights and are encouraged raise concerns? • Are strategies in place to support the participation and empowerment of children? • What support is available to children and their families to understand appropriate and inappropriate conduct? • How are children and their families, carers and communities encouraged to raise concerns or speak out? 	<p>Appropriate responses to these risks may include ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leaders and managers create an organisational culture that protects children from abuse • policies and procedures for raising concerns or making complaints are accessible to children, families and carers • contact points within the organisation are able to sensitively, confidentially and appropriately respond to allegations of abuse, following the organisation's complaints or allegation of abuse policy • the culture of the organisation is one of safety and transparency, not secrecy or defensiveness • the requirements of Child Safe Standard 7 (Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children) is met.
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Further information

Further information about the [Child Safe Standards](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards) <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards> can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) website. This includes additional resources that have been designed for organisations that are funded and/or regulated by the department. In particular, an [overview of the Victoria Child Safe Standards](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/overview-victorian-child-safe-standards-word) <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/overview-victorian-child-safe-standards-word> has information to help organisations to understand the requirements of each of the Child Safe Standards.

All organisations may also refer to the information and resources available on the [Child Safety page](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety/) <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety/> on the Commission for Children and Young People's website.

Disclaimer

This resource provides general guidance only on the Child Safe Standards. The department does not guarantee that the examples provided in this document are sufficient for the purposes of an organisation's compliance with the Child Safe Standards.

To receive this publication in an accessible format, email [Child Safe Orgs](mailto:childsafeargs@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <childsafeargs@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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Available at <<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards>>