

LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS FRAMEWORK



LODDON
SHIRE

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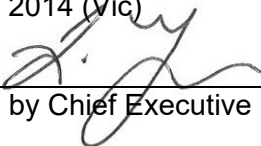
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RELATED STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS, POLICIES OR PROCEDURES: Child Safe Standards and Reporting Policy
Staff Code of Conduct
Councillor Code of Conduct
Loddon Shire Council Child Safe Standards Code of Conduct
Working with Children Check Policy
Discipline Policy

RELATED LEGISLATION: Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)
Children's Services Act 1996
Child Wellbeing and Safe Amendment Act 2015 (Vic)
Child Wellbeing and Safe Amendment Oversight and Enforcement of Child Safe Standards Act 2016 (Vic)
Child Safe Standards 2022 (Vic)
The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012 (Vic)
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
Failure to Protect a Child From Sexual Abuse 2015 (Vic)
Failure to Disclose Child Sexual Abuse 2015 (Vic)
Grooming Offence 2014 (Vic)

EVIDENCE OF APPROVAL:


Signed by Chief Executive Officer

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This document is available in alternative formats (e.g. larger font) if requested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

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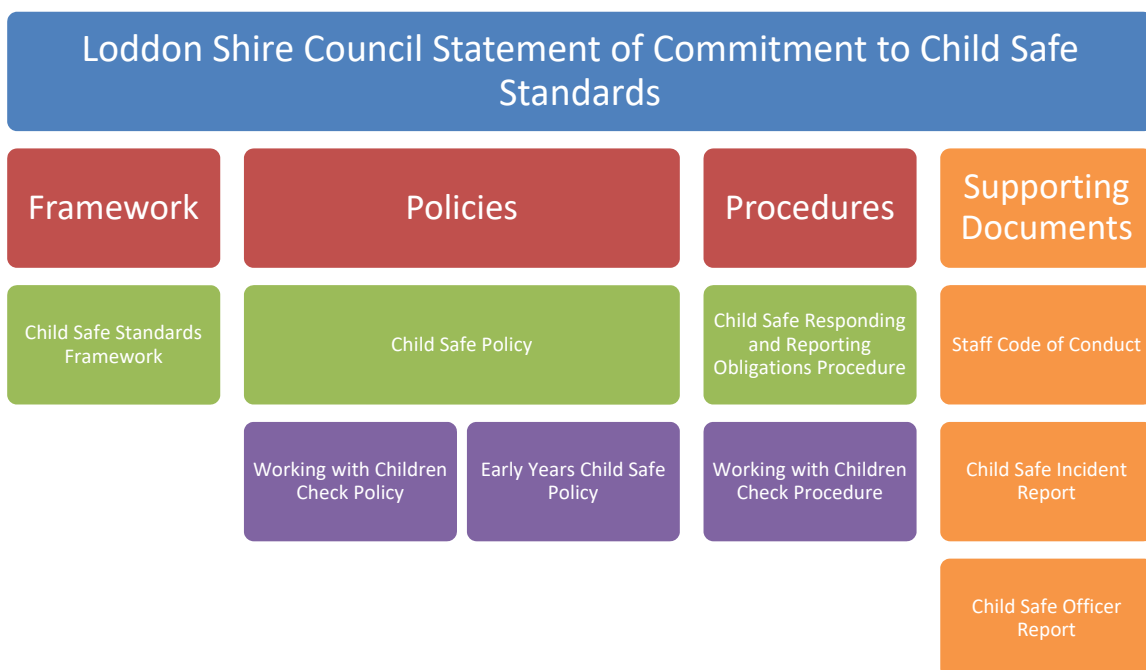
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1 PURPOSE

The purpose of the Child Safe Standards Framework is to:

- underpin a culture of child safety by setting out a framework for effective leadership
- establish clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- reduce the risk of child abuse and or exploitation by new or existing Loddon Shire Council councillors, employees, volunteers and contractors
- outline processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- promote strategies to encourage participation and empowerment of children
- support and promote a culturally safe and inclusive organisation for young people.

For the purpose of this Framework the term “Council Representatives” refers to all councillors, employees, volunteers and contractors. The following diagram illustrates Council’s approach to ensuring a safe environment for all children within the municipality.



2 LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Loddon Shire Council (Council) takes its legal and moral responsibilities seriously.

Council acknowledges it has legal responsibilities it must meet in relation to Child Safe Standards. These include the following:

- responsibility to protect
- responsibility to be inclusive
- responsibility to disclose
- responsibility for mandatory reporting.

The Child Safe Policy outlines these responsibilities. The Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure outlines situations, obligations and actions required in circumstances of known or suspected child abuse and or grooming offences.

3 BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

A budget allocation will be utilised for initial implementation of this Framework and to engage external contractors with specific knowledge to deliver cultural awareness training and develop appropriate resources that Council have committed to as a part of this Framework.

4 RISK ANALYSIS

The implementation of this Framework will reduce legal and compliance risks to Council by providing clear guidelines, and necessary training and awareness for Council Representatives who work both directly and indirectly with a child/children or young people.

Please note that unless otherwise stipulated in this policy, a child or a young person is a person from birth to 18 years. A person at the higher end of this age bracket would be referred to as a young person.

5 ADDRESSING THE CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

5.1 Standard 1: Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued

Council is committed to establishing a culturally safe and inclusive organisation where Aboriginal children and young people, and those with unique identities are accepted, and feel empowered to express their culture and identity with no fear of discrimination.

To support this commitment Council will:

- as an organisation, promote and celebrate cultural diversity days that allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people the opportunity to express and enjoy their culture, and unique identity in a safe environment
- ensure all Council Representatives know and understand the organisation's commitment to creating and maintaining a culturally safe and inclusive environment through education, awareness and training
- equip all Council Representatives with the ability to identify instances of racism, and have the confidence to respond or report these instances by delivering bystander and respect training
- develop a reporting mechanism where allegations of racism can be recorded and responded to in line with Council's Staff Code of Conduct, Managing Misconduct and Discipline Procedures
- report to the Risk Management Committee and appropriate Council Representatives any allegations and substantiated cases of abuse and allocate the resources needed to respond
- embed checklists into the Strategic Document Framework that ensures the development of policy, procedure and strategic documents align with Council's commitment
- develop a Gender Impact Assessment that provides Council Representatives with the ability to apply a cultural lens and allows for the involvement and participation of aboriginal children and young people in the development of Council services and projects.

Additionally to further address this standard within our preschools, Council will:

- deliver the face to face training and awareness that is appropriate for the targeted audience
- ensure key documents are produced in 'Easy English'.

5.2 Standard 2: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Council is committed to ensuring that a child safe culture is modelled at all levels of the organisation and have a robust governance structure in place to achieve this. Through policies and procedures, Council Representatives understand their obligations to identify and report any risk to children or young people.

To support this commitment Council has in place the following documents:

- A Child Safe Policy that outlines:
 - Council's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation where protecting children, and preventing and responding to child abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice.
- A Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure that outlines:
 - when, how and who to report to, if a Council Representative observes or suspects a child is being or has been subject to abuse.
- A public statement of commitment to child safety that:
 - is displayed affirming Council's commitment to child safety.
- A Child Safe statement included in the Staff Code of Conduct, Volunteer Code of Conduct and all position descriptions that:
 - establishes clear expectations of Council Representatives regarding appropriate behaviour with children and young people.

Additionally to further address the standards within our preschools, Council will:

- include wall posters that affirms Council's commitment to the Child Safe Standards in all preschools
- provide this Framework, the Child Safe Policy and Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure to all preschool families
- ensure appropriate annual training on child safety, including recognising the signs and symptoms of child abuse, knowing how to respond, and understanding responsibilities and processes for reporting is provided.

In addition to these documents a periodic risk assessment will be completed to identify, assess and take steps to minimise risk.

All Child Safe documents are developed and regularly reviewed in accordance with Council's Strategic Document Framework which involves consultation with staff, the Leadership Group and requires approval by the Management Executive Group or Council.

5.3 Standard 3: Children and young people are empowered about their rights, and participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

Council supports the participation and empowerment of children and young people and is committed to creating an environment that encourages them to express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

To support this commitment, Council will ensure all Council Representatives will:

- actively encourage children and young people to have their voice heard and express their views
- listen and act on any concern a child or young person or their parents/carers raise
- listen to suggestions that directly affect them

- provide children and young people with age appropriate information about their rights, what to do if they feel unsafe and how to raise concerns or make complaints
- ensure that the physical environment is safe and friendly
- be respectful, inclusive and welcoming of all children and young people and families of all diversities and abilities
- ensure all children and young people know how to raise concerns and where to go if they need help.

Additionally to further address this standard within our preschools, Council will:

- deliver age appropriate education programs to preschool children that promotes inclusiveness and confidence to voice any concerns.

5.4 Standard 4: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

When delivering programs and projects, Council welcomes the involvement of the community, children, young people and their families.

To support this commitment Council will promote involvement and ensure they are informed by:

- including a statement of commitment that is publicly accessible
- providing child safe information to families of children and young people undertaking work experience with Council
- supporting families and the broader community by providing educational tools that help them to understand that some children and young people are more at risk than others
- ensuring the physical environment from which we coordinate children and family services do not pose access issues.

Additionally to further address this standard within our preschools, Council will:

- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the preschool community
- provide a handbook for preschool families that provides them with an understanding of the process for responding and reporting suspected child abuse
- advocate for the inclusion of child safety programs in Council's preschools.

5.5 Standard 5: Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

Council is committed to establishing a safe and welcoming environment for all children and young people regardless of their circumstances, abilities, sex, gender, cultural background or disability and will ensure they are supported, and have accessible information that is easy to understand.

To support this commitment Council will:

- develop information, policy and procedure relating to children and young people that is accessible to all potential users
- ensure that young people and children who are engaged with Council receive induction that includes information and guidance on how to report complaints and seek support should they require it
- deliver the actions in the Gender Equality Action Plan which includes strategies to ensure the organisation is working towards gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness
- provide online learning platforms for all Council Representatives to undertake aboriginal culture awareness gender equality and disability awareness training
- promote the Child Safe Standards Framework, Child Safe Policy and Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure to all Council Representatives
- embed checklists into the Strategic Document Framework that ensures the development of policy, procedure and strategic documents align with Council's commitment

- develop a GIA that provides Council Representatives with the ability to apply a diverse lens and involve the participation of children and young people in the development of Council services and projects
- maintain a Staff Code of Conduct and a Volunteer Code of Conduct that outlines expectations and appropriate behaviours of Council Representatives in relation to children.

5.6 Standard 6: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

Council has strong recruitment and selection processes, contract management processes, policies and procedures, and regular training for all staff that ensures all reasonable steps are taken to provide a safe environment for children and young people.

Some positions at Council have regular direct contact with children and young people while other roles can have intermittent contact, indirect contact or no contact.

When recruiting staff, volunteers and contractors, Council will:

- confirm the candidates' Working with Children Check validity for roles that are likely to have contact with children or young people
- undertake a National Police Check status and/or professional registration for all roles
- inform the applicant of Council's requirement for disclosure of any active investigation, charge, conviction or other relevant finding
- ensure all positions have clauses included in the position description in respect of this Framework
- require all staff to complete Council's induction of the Child Safe Standards ELearning
- ensure they acknowledge that they have read and understand the Child Safe Policy and Framework
- ensure they acknowledge that they have read and understand the Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure
- include clauses specific to the Child Safe Standards in contract specifications to ensure contractors are aware and understand their obligations whilst representing Council.

5.7 Standard 7: Processes for complaints and concerns are child focussed

Through the implementation of this Framework, Council is creating an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to their supervisor/manager, the Child Safety Officer or the relevant authority.

To support this commitment, Council will ensure:

- there is a Child Safety Officer (CSO) who will provide advice and support to Council Representatives about what they are required to do if they need to report suspected abuse
- provide the CSO with required training to fulfil the organisational and legislative requirements of the role
- provide new Council Representatives including and work experience students with information about how to make a complaint and what to expect Council will do when responding to the complaint
- allow work experience students the ability to complete exit documentation that includes questions about their induction and experience with Council
- host the Council Complaints Handling Policy on Council's public facing website
- provide assistance and support services for any child that wishes to raise a complaint

- ensure complaint handling systems and processes are confidential and that only authorised Council Representatives can access these records
- ensure all complaints are taken seriously and the source of the problem is investigated.

Additionally to further address this standard within our preschools, Council will:

- provide information packs to new preschool families that include information on how to report or respond to a suspected case of abuse.

Once a complaint is received Council's Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedure outlines how to record a suspected or confirmed case of child abuse, how the report will be documented and maintained and the process for contacting the appropriate authorities if there is reasonable belief that child abuse has occurred or the child is at risk.

5.8 Standard 8: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

Through the delivery of education and awareness programs and training, Council Representatives will have the relevant knowledge and will be confident in their own ability to abide by, and work within the standards.

To support this commitment Council will ensure all Council Representatives:

- undertake initial online training in Child Safe Standards
- undertake refresher training regularly
- receive training and information on how to recognise indicators of child harm
- are aware of who the CSO is and where to seek further information or guidance within the organisation.

5.9 Standard 9: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

Council is committed to identifying, assessing and taking steps to minimise child abuse and child exploitation in the delivery of Council programs and services.

To support this commitment Council will:

- ensure all children and young people engaged by Council are adequately supervised
- ensure all staff, and any children or young people working or volunteering with Council are informed about appropriate use of Council's information technology
- provide a safe online environment for all users of Council's information technology by installing and maintaining cyber security software
- ensure that all Working with Children checks are current for all workplaces that engage children or young people.

Additionally to further address this standard within our preschools, Council will:

- ensure the learning environment provided considers appropriate child groupings, sufficient space and adequate supervision of children
- Implement risk assessments of the kindergarten environment and equipment to ensure risks to health and safety are minimised
- provide age appropriate cyber safety at Council's preschools
- provide families of preschool children with cyber safety awareness packs.

In addition a periodic risk assessment will be completed to identify, assess and take steps to minimise risk.

5.10 Standard 10: Implementation of the child safe standards is regularly reviewed and improved

Council has a governance structure which includes a register of all policies, procedures and strategic documents and includes the review schedule for each document.

During the implementation process Council will:

- take the documents through a robust governance process for review and approval
- circulate the Framework and Policy to all Council Representatives encouraging any feedback
- host relevant documents on Council’s intranet and public facing website for access by internal and external stakeholders
- review the Framework, Policy and Procedure every four years or as required
- undertake further reviews where it has been identified, or feedback has been provided, or it has become evident that processes could be improved
- monitor and manage any child safety risks through the Risk Management Framework
- investigate and determine the cause of reported incidents and implement actions to mitigate reoccurrence.

5.11 Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

Upon implementation of this Framework, Council will:

- have strategies in place that address all the Child Safe Standards
- have policies and procedures that are accessible to all Council Representatives and the community that are easy to understand
- have undertaken a consultation process with stakeholders to inform the development of the documents
- distribute the documents to all Council Representatives
- provide Child Safe Standards ELearning to all Council Representatives
- empower leaders to champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.

6 RESPONSIBILITIES

When you are working on behalf of Loddon Shire Council, you are required to fulfil your responsibilities to protecting children and young people.

The table below outlines specific responsibilities of all Council Representatives.

Whom	Responsibility
All Loddon Shire Council Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to a child safe organisation.
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate leadership in child safe practices. • Ensure organisational resources and requirements are in place for implementation of the Framework and related policies and procedures. • Ensure Councillors have access to relevant policies and training.

Whom	Responsibility
Management Executive Group (MEG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure implementation of Council's Child Safe Standards Framework within the organisation. • Ensure child protection measures are implemented within their areas of responsibility should they have individuals in positions whose activities interact with children. They may delegate their responsibilities to managers and coordinators.
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure relevant policies are implemented in their work areas and all their employees, volunteers and contractors have access to them. • Ensure all their employees, volunteers and contractors have access to child safe training and induction. • Ensure a workplace culture of transparency and continuous improvement in relation to child safety.
Organisational Development Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain relevant policies and procedures and ensure their implementation. • Ensure that Child Safe Standards training is provided. • Ensure the recruitment process, position descriptions and induction of all Council Representatives support Council's commitment to ensuring a child safe organisation. • Ensure that records are maintained and stored with the appropriate level of security.
Loddon Shire Council appointed Child Safe Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice and support to management, employees and volunteers about what they need to do if they need to report suspected abuse. • Engage the assistance of expert advice as required when the nature of the child safety issues are beyond their experience, knowledge or qualifications. • Ensure relevant authorities are notified. • Retain child safe records for reporting purposes. • Support children and representatives where incidents or suspected cases of abuse have been reported to them. • Ensure that records are maintained and stored with the appropriate level of security.
Early Years Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the event of an incident occurring within the Early Years Team, notify the relevant authority first and then Council's Child Safe Officer of the incident. • Submit an internal report. • Follow up with support where appropriate.
All Loddon Shire Councillors, employees and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the legislation and legal obligations to report. • Participate in training and education programs. • Obtain and maintain a valid Working with Children Check as required for the role. • Work within the provisions of Council's Child Safe Standards Framework and related policies and procedures.
Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the safety and protection of children. • Work within the provisions of Council's Child Safe Standards Framework and related policies and procedures. • Provide evidence of a valid Working with Children Check as required for the task being completed, or if requested by Council.

7 TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Council	The organisation
Child or young Person	Unless it is explicitly specified in any of associated documentation for the Child Safe Standards, a child for the purposes of this Framework is considered any person from 0 to 18 years old.
Child abuse	Any act committed against a child involving: physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect.
Child related work	Work within one or more occupational fields defined in the Children's Services Act 1996 Act where the contact with children is direct, unsupervised, and part of a person's duties, not incidental to their work.
Child protection	Means any responsible measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.
Child safe organisation	In the context of the child safe standards, a child safe organisation is one that meets the standards by proactively taking measures to protect children from abuse.
Council Representatives	Means all Councillors, employees, volunteers and contractors.
Disclosure	<p>Requires any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (aged under 16) to disclose that information to Victoria Police or Child Protection.</p> <p>Applies to everyone in the community, not just mandated professionals.</p> <p>Failure to disclose applies to any person who holds a position of authority within the organisation who knows of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and has the authority to reduce or remove the risk, BUT negligently fails to do so. The maximum penalty is 5 years imprisonment.</p>
Mandatory reporting	<p>Under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Section 182) doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers) principals, police a person in a religious ministry, a person employed by a children's service within the meaning of the Children's Services Act, registered psychologist, youth and child welfare worker, youth justice officer and a youth parole officer are mandatory reporters.</p> <p>These professions are legally required to make a report to Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS Child Protection Unit) if they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from being abused or is at risk of being abused.</p>
Reasonable belief	A reasonable belief or a belief on reasonable grounds is not the same as having proof but it is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

8 ADMINISTRATION

8.1 Review of this Child Safe Standards Framework

Council is committed to the continuous improvement of this Child Safe Standards Framework. This Framework will be reviewed by the Manager Organisation Development for any necessary amendments no later than four years after adoption.