

# Child Safe Policy

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

This policy has been developed in line with Victoria's new Child Safe Standards, which came into effect in January 2017.

A child is a person under the age of 18 years old.

Melbourne Writers Festival (MWF) is committed to the safety of children of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Children are vital and active participants in our Festival. MWF acts to specifically empower children and invites them to be involved in our organisation through our Schools' Program and our Children and Families program stream.

The purpose of this policy is to outline the commitment of MWF's Board, management, staff and volunteers to the safety of children attending and participating in the Festival.

It aims to ensure that everyone involved in our organisation is aware of their responsibilities for identifying and reporting child safety concerns, and outlines the procedures we have in place to create a safe, inclusive environment for the children who come into contact with MWF.

## 2. Definition of 'Working with Children'

In line with the Working with Children Act 2005, 'working with children' means where contact with a child is direct, unsupervised, and part of the person's duties.

## 3. MWF's commitment to child safety

As an organisation, MWF:

- wants children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children just as we support our staff and volunteers;
- is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
- is committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children;
- has zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously and consistently;
- recognises its legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety;
- is committed to identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks;
- maintains human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers;
- is committed to educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

## **4. Strategies**

### **Everyone can read this Policy**

This Child Safe Policy is available on MWF's website.

MWF has a Code of Conduct which staff must adhere to.

MWF's Schools' Program (print, online) will include information about, and a link to, this Child Safe Policy, so that parents/teachers can familiarise themselves with MWF's commitment to child safety.

### **Recruitment of staff and volunteers**

All MWF staff and volunteers must sign our Code of Conduct.

All prospective employees undergo an interview process, including positive reference checks, before they are appointed.

Any staff members specifically responsible for working with children must have a Working with Children Check.

As volunteers will be supervised by MWF staff at all times, or the staff of a partner organisation or school, they are not required to have a Working with Children Check. However, volunteers with Working with Children Checks will be prioritised for duties that involve interaction with parents/guardians/teachers and the children in their care.

### **Training and supervision**

Training and education help ensure that everyone in MWF understand their responsibilities.

All staff and volunteers will be provided with information on our Child Safety Policy and reporting procedures as part of their induction, to ensure that everyone is feels confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

The nature of MWF's Program means that it is unlikely that any staff member or volunteer will be alone with a child without the supervision of the child's teacher/educator, parent or guardian. Any staff members specifically involved in working with children will be required to have a Working with Children Check.

Any staff who are responsible for the supervision of volunteers who are working with children will be required to have a Working with Children Check, and volunteers will not be allowed to work unsupervised with children.

### **Booking Procedures and Adult Attendance**

The nature of MWF's activity means that it is unlikely that a child will attend an event without a parent or guardian present. However, MWF is committed to making its artistic program accessible by people of all ages.

Adults are not permitted to attend MWF Schools' Program unless they are accompanying a child.

Children are only able attend Schools' Program events as part of a school group, under the supervision of a teacher or attending adult engaged as part of that excursion.

Melbourne Writers Festival - Child Safe Policy and Code of Conduct  
**If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.**

Children & Families events are not designed for unattended children.

## **Photography, video, and other documentation and publication**

MWF may document Festival activities involving children or young people with photographs, videos or voice recordings of participants.

There will be prominent signs at venues stating that the event is being recorded.

Recorded content may be used by MWF in our publications, reports, funding applications, for promotional materials and marketing, and online.

MWF employs the services of a professional photographer to record events throughout the Festival. The purchase of a ticket grants implied permission for these photos to be used for the intended purposes. If any children do not wish to be photographed, the attending adult (the child's parent or guardian) must inform the photographer, venue or contact a Festival representative on the day of the event.

## **5. Legislative responsibilities**

### **Legal responsibilities**

MWF takes its legal responsibilities to report suspected abuse of children seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.<sup>1</sup>
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.<sup>2</sup>
  - Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.<sup>3</sup>
  - MWF is also committed to supporting any mandatory reporters (e.g. teachers) involved in MWF activities to report suspicions of child abuse, and should any concerns be raised with MWF staff or volunteers, those concerns will be treated with the utmost seriousness.

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<sup>1</sup> A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>.

<sup>2</sup> Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>.

<sup>3</sup> Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

## **Allegations, concerns and complaints**

MWF takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate reports thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are informed how to deal appropriately with allegations.

MWF works to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse, are a victim of abuse, or notice inappropriate behaviour.

MWF believes all individuals have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if they have a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred (see failure to disclose, above). If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves);
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed<sup>4</sup>;
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it;
- observing suspicious behaviour.

## **Reporting and Response**

MWF's General Manager has been appointed as Child Safety Person, with specific responsibility for responding to any complaints or concerns raised by staff, volunteers, or other personnel involved in MWF's activities.

Anyone with concerns about inappropriate behaviour towards children or young people under MWF's care must report it to the General Manager, who will report it to the appropriate authorities as required under:

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (oversight and Enforcement of Child Safe Standards) Act 2016 (Victoria);
- Crimes Act 1958 (Victoria);
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Victoria).

## **Regular review**

This policy will be reviewed regularly, and following significant incidents if they occur.

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<sup>4</sup> For example behaviour, please see [An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards:](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc)  
<www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\_\_data/assets/word\_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards\_overview.doc>