

Western Edge Child and Young Person Safety and Wellbeing Policy

This Child and Young Person Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the Committee of Management on 16/02/2022 and endorsed by members at the annual general meeting. It is due to be reviewed on 16/02/2023.

PURPOSE

This policy demonstrates the strong commitment of Western Edge Youth Arts board, staff and volunteers to child safety, and provides an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone safe from any harm, including abuse. This policy was developed in collaboration with all our staff, the children and young people who attend our programs, their parents and the broader Western Edge community.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all board, staff, volunteers, children, young people and individuals involved in our organisation. It applies to Western Edge staff and volunteers, workplace students and contractors who interact with children in person or via digital channels and online platforms, and when representing Western Edge Youth Arts in the community.

DEFINITIONS

Child – a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years

Child abuse – according to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- grooming for sexual conduct with a child under the age of 16 under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

First Peoples – Aboriginal People specifically from Victoria (as per Creative Victoria's *Creative State* definition applicable to arts organisations).

POC – person of colour

Vulnerable People - A child or children; or an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason.

Child Safety Person: a responsibility given to an employee to ensure key areas of the organisation consistently have the protection of children, young people and vulnerable children/young people at the forefront of decisions and are current in legislation and information of best practice.

Participant: A participant is defined as any individual accessing Western Edge programs.

Contractor: a person, or company contracted by Western Edge to undertake a piece of work/ function with contract agreement.

Department Manager: A manager assigned to a department. This includes but not limited to the Marketing Manager, Development Manager.

General Manager: A staff member who reports directly to the Executive Director and Artistic Directors and has the responsibility of management of the Department Managers.

Reasonable Grounds: A reasonable basis to believe that a definable activity has been, or may be committed.

Senior Executive Team: Executive Director and co-Artistic Directors.

Staff Member: People employed under a current Employment Agreement as casual, part time or full-time officers of the organisation.

Stakeholders: Any individual or agency (government and non-government) who have a vested interest in the outcomes achieved by Western Edge.

Volunteers: People who are registered as volunteers with the Western Edge.

BACKGROUND

The Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) has oversight and regulatory responsibility for both the Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

On 19 February 2019, the Council of Australian Governments – including the Victorian Government – endorsed National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. While the requirements of the National Principles are similar to those of the Child Safe Standards, it is compliance with the Child Safe Standards that is required by law in Victoria. <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/news/new-child-safe-standards-start-in-victoria-on-1-july-2022-to-better-protect-children/>

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Our organisation is consistent with the 11 Child Safe Standards as follows:

The Child Safe Standards contained within the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) require organisations that provide services for children to have policies and procedures to protect children from abuse.

To create and maintain a child safe organisation, Western Edge Youth Arts must comply with the 11 new Child Safe Standards effective 1 July 2022.

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
2. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
3. Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
4. Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
5. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice
6. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice
7. Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused
8. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training
9. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
10. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved
11. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

Reportable Conduct Scheme (commenced 1 July 2017)

The Reportable Conduct Scheme is focussed on worker and volunteer conduct and how organisations investigate and respond to suspected child abuse. The Scheme sets out specific obligations for the heads of these organisations. <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme/>

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

1.1 First Peoples First

Western Edge is committed to creating a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal children and young people. The organisation's purpose is the empowerment of young people from diverse communities in Melbourne's west to tell their own stories, in their own way, and with their own voice. By providing safer spaces to explore creativity, learn new artistic practices, and develop leadership skills, Western edge constructs supportive pathways for young people to achieve their own creative agency.

Our core values are inclusivity, access and equity, empathy, respect, transparency and safety. Western Edge priorities the voices of First Peoples throughout all levels of the organisation and values the ongoing legacies of First Peoples leaders who drove social, cultural and political change in Melbourne's western suburbs. We recognise and value the knowledge and wisdom systems that have existed in this country for 80000 years.

Western Edge prioritises Aboriginal children's knowledge, perspectives, protocols and employment across all levels of our artistic, management and governance teams. We recognise the vital role First Peoples play in the creative landscape and are committed to amplifying First Peoples voices, visions and leadership.

Western Edge values diversity and we do not tolerate any discriminatory practices including racism. To ensure this we:

- (a) support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children, young people and their families
- (b) recruit appropriate staff from diverse backgrounds, including First Peoples backgrounds.
- (c) deliver artistic programs and creative spaces that actively celebrate First Peoples cultures and recognises cultural difference.
- (d) all programs and creative spaces that focus on First People's cultures and creative work are created in consultation with First People's communities; Aboriginal children, young people and families; and elders in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne.
- (e) ensure all artistic programs and creative spaces that focus on First Peoples cultures and creative work are creatively led and delivered by First Peoples artists.
- (f) commit to ensuring our facilities promote access and inclusion for Aboriginal children and young people, including cultural access.
- (g) ensure all public facing programs, workshops and performances include a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country by an elder from the First People's language groups specific to the Western Suburbs of Melbourne.
- (h) embed First People's Cultural Awareness in our creative programming and workshops with children and young people.

(i) all staff undertake annual First Peoples Cultural Safety and/or Cultural Competency Training.

(j) drafting of Western Edge's Reconciliation Action Plan in progress as of 2022.

(k) ensuring staff, volunteers and the Board are compliant with Western Edge's First People's Cultural Safety Framework.

2. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

2.1 Commitment to Child and Young Person Safety

All children and young people who come to Western Edge have a right to feel and be safe. The wellbeing of the children and young people in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child and young person abuse. Children, young people and vulnerable people need to know and believe that they always have the right to be safe and feel safe.

Western Edge is committed to the principles of cultural safety and inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and to the safety and inclusion of children with disability, and we recognise that these principles support the safety of all children.

(a) Western Edge shall implement and maintain a formal procedure for disclosures or concerns of harm/risk of harm to children and vulnerable people based on the following principles;

(i) The safety of children, young people and vulnerable people is the paramount consideration.

(ii) Children and young people are among the most vulnerable members of our society.

(iii) Children, young people and vulnerable people need to know and believe that they have the right to be safe at all times.

(iv) Children, young people and vulnerable people are entitled to basic human rights regardless of special needs, cultural, or socioeconomic factors, and to have those rights protected.

(v) Children, young people and vulnerable people deserve respect, care and protection.

(vi) Children, young people and vulnerable people are entitled to the support of a person to act as an advocate on their behalf and to protect them and their voice.

(b) Western Edge will implement and maintain a formal procedure for disclosures of harm or concerns that a participant may be at risk to themselves and or others, to make sure that all staff and volunteers are aware of their responsibility as mandatory reporters as defined by Western Edge policy (See Reporting Harm Policy).

(c) Western Edge will ensure that all staff, students and volunteers who work directly with participants and children, young people or vulnerable people are employed with recognised and appropriate qualifications in accordance with their role in the organisation.

(d) Western Edge will ensure all staff, students, volunteers and Board and Committee members hold a current Working with Children Check (in accordance with state legislation) before commencing

working or volunteering at Western Edge. Western Edge keeps a Working with Children Check Register for all Western Edge Officers and Board and Committee members. A registered teacher with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) is exempt from obtaining a Working with Children Check when employed with Western Edge. VIT registration must be maintained at all times by the employee and a record will be maintained on the employee's file.

(e) The relevant Departmental Manager will ensure that staff, volunteers, contractors and Board and Committee members are aware of the definitions of sexual assault/exploitation, abuse and neglect as contained in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) through the induction process.

(f) The relevant Department Manager shall ensure staff, volunteers and Board and Committee members are aware of the policy and procedures of reporting any suspicion, concerns or disclosure of child, young person and vulnerable people abuse and neglect through the induction process.

(g) The relevant Department Manager shall ensure Western Edge Officers and Board and Committee members are aware of the policy and procedures of reporting any suspicion, concern or disclosure that a participant may be at risk of harm to themselves and or others as required by duty of care through the induction process.

(h) The General Manager will ensure Western Edge Officers and Board and Committee members undertake ongoing training and development for fulfilling reporting obligations.

(i) Western Edge will ensure participants, children, young people and vulnerable people are made aware of this policy and Western Edge's mandatory reporting and incident management procedures. This will be shared through consent forms, program registration, Western Edge website and regularly informed via communication with any Western Edge Officer.

(j) All information relating to a disclosure or concerns of harm to children, young people and/or vulnerable people and participants will be recorded, considered and retained with regards to confidentiality.

(k) All disclosures or concerns of harm to children, young people and/or vulnerable people and participants will be addressed in a confidential manner. Only the people directly involved in reporting, investigating or resolving the issues will have access to information about it.

(l) The relevant Department Manager shall ensure that the investigation process is impartial. No assumptions will be made, nor any action taken until all relevant information has been collected and considered.

(m) The relevant staff member will ensure that any cultural, LGBTIQ+ or disability factors will be considered in the investigating process.

(n) All Western Edge staff, volunteers and Board and Committee members must follow Western Edge Code of Conduct.

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

3.3 Children and young people's rights to safety and participation

Western Edge prioritises safety, respect and equity and has a strong culture of physical, emotional psychological and cultural safety and inclusivity.

Our organisational purpose is;

- To meet young artists on their own terms to tell their stories in their own way and with their own voice.
- To provide a safer space for young people to explore creativity, learn new artistic practices, gain on-the-job employment, and develop leadership skills.
- To deliver long-term investment in young people's trajectories towards sustainable professional careers and claiming their own creative agency.
- To reflect the diversity of contemporary Australia as a visible counterpoint to mainstream representation.
- In doing so, to shift the balance of power and transform the world into one that is truly inclusive.

Western Edge is a child and young person-centred organisation. We actively include the voices of children and young people in our organisational planning, delivery of programs, and evaluation procedures. Western Edge actively seeks to understand what makes children and young people feel safe in our organisation. Western Edge centres the voices of children and young people in the following ways:

(a) regular discussions are held with children and young people that facilitate child and young person-led conversation on what makes them feel safe.

(b) regular opportunities for feedback and evaluation on programs, processes and organisational matters with children and young people that are child and young person-led and centres their needs on what makes them feel safe.

(c) any proposed significant changes to the programs, policies, processes, programs or staffing are discussed with children and young people. Their views are collated by staff and provided to management for assessment and inclusion in the decision-making process.

(d) communication materials on programs, policies, processes and staffing are child and young person-friendly and suitable to the relevant age groups and diversity of the children at Western Edge.

(e) communication materials on programs, policies, processes, including this policy; and staffing are easily accessible on the Western Edge website.

(f) the Western Edge Child Safety Persons are advertised on the website and introduced to children and young people at the commencement of all programs and workshops with children and young people.

4. Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

4.4 Our artistic work is always led by and grown out of community.

Western Edge regularly seeks meaningful engagement with families of children and young people; and communities in the West in the delivery of Western edge programs. We do so recognising that the families and communities that we approach are experts on community's; and children and young people's needs. Western Edge's engagement with families and community is informed by the

organisation reflecting on being a children and young people-led organisation and listening to what children, young people and their families and communities have to say.

The Western Edge co-Artistic Directors build on the capacity of family and community engagement with our programs and child safety and wellbeing through consultation with our Cultural Advisory Council; relevant community elders in the west; families of children and young people; artists; and cultural practitioners. We do this through;

- (a) the employment of a Cultural Advisory Council that includes family of children and young people in Western edge programs; as well as community members from the West; and elders, who provide insight and feedback on the safety and wellbeing needs of children and young people in the community.
- (b) community building practices embedded into programs, including sharing culturally relevant meals at each workshop and event, inviting family members and community into Western Edge spaces and face-to-face engagement with staff.
- (c) Western Edge events and productions are financially accessible for families, community and audiences to attend.
- (d) Western Edge seeks parental/guardian permission for media release and photographic documentation of programs with children and young people.

5. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

5.5 Valuing Diversity

At Western Edge, we recognise that every child and young person in a community holds a unique role. Western Edge's lateral, youth-led approach responds to the specific needs and interests of the individuals in the room. To us, children and young people have unbridled genius and an exciting ability to speak truth to power, shift paradigms, and recentre the conversation around what matters. Our practice is informed by the many different cultural backgrounds and knowledge systems of our community of children and young people.

In a colonial context, children and young people come from a range of historically silenced communities, and often experience the ongoing erasure of cultural identity. We embrace a plurality of voices and encourage children and young people to nurture their personal space as leaders. We provide a safe space where we are all comfortable in our own sense of self, knowing that the power rests in the collective.

Western Edge prioritises Aboriginal children's knowledge, perspectives, protocols and employment across all levels of our artistic, management and governance teams. We recognise the vital role First Peoples play in the creative landscape and are committed to amplifying First Peoples voices, visions and leadership.

Western Edge values diversity and we do not tolerate any discriminatory practices including racism. To ensure this we:

- (a) support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people from POC backgrounds and their families

- (b) welcome children and young people with disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- (c) recruit appropriate staff from diverse backgrounds.
- (d) welcome same-sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse children, young people and families.
- (e) deliver artistic programs and creative spaces that actively celebrate diverse cultures and recognises cultural difference.
- (f) commit to ensuring our facilities promote access and inclusion for all children and young people.
- (g) all staff participate in weekly discussions around cultural safety, trauma informed practice and diversity, equity and inclusion

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

6.1 Training and Recruiting board, staff and volunteers

Western Edge applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of board, staff and volunteers. The Western Edge Recruitment Policy ensures that child and young person safety requirements are addressed in the recruitment process through strategies including:

(a) Deciding to recruit

- (i) Assess the level of contact and responsibility the role will have regarding children.
- (ii) Working with Children Checks are required for all Western Edge board, staff and volunteers.
- (iii) Assess the qualifications and prerequisites required to ensure the staff are appropriately skilled for the role.
- (iv) Assess the training, guidance and supervision required for the position and the current resources available to meet these requirements.

(b) Advertising

- (i) All positions are advertised with the Western Edge Statement of Commitment to Child and Young Person Safety.
- (ii) Positions will clearly state the responsibilities with regard to children and young people.
- (iii) Prerequisite criteria will be listed for positions, for example: Working with Children Check, training and qualifications.
- (iv) Advertised positions will state that referee checks will be performed for shortlisted candidates.

(c) Selection

- (i) Where a position includes responsibility for children or young people or is a position of leadership, interview questions will address experience and previous engagement with children and young people and will gauge the applicant's attitudes and values toward children and young people.
- (ii) Before commencing in their role, successful applicants must sign the Western Edge Child and Young Person Safe Code of Conduct and attend an induction session on the Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm policy and procedures.

6.2 Support and Resources

Along with mandatory training (see Section 8) all staff and volunteers are supported to deliver child safety and wellbeing values in practice. This is done through;

(a) all staff and volunteers receive a formal induction into the organisation's policies, procedures and Codes of Conduct (including this policy and Child Safe and Wellbeing Code of Conduct) (see Western Edge's Induction Policy).

(b) Western Edge fosters a culture of continuous learning amongst staff, where questions are encouraged and staff are supported in seeking information to clarify or deepen their understanding of child safety and wellbeing

(c) Western Edge has a formal procedures for collecting feedback from staff and volunteers, through our rigorous evaluation process that is undertaken at the end of every program. This provides opportunities for staff and volunteers to identify where improvements in child and young person safety and wellbeing can be made

(d) all staff and volunteers have online access to all organisational policies and procedures, including the Child Safe Standards Report Form and incident reports

(e) staff working directly with children and young people have strong working relationships with their manager; at least one member of the Senior Leadership Team; and at least one of the Child Safe Officers; as well as the ability to reach one, if not all, of these people via phone or email at any time

(f) Senior Leadership is supported by a Board with experience in working with children and young people.

(g) Child and Young Person Safety and Wellbeing being a standing item at Board meetings.

(h) the Board is actively engaged in training, resourcing and policy and procedure changes regarding child and young person safety and wellbeing

7. Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused

7.1 Young people feel safe and connected

Western Edge values the voices of children and young people and will act on concerns raised by children, young people or their families in regard to their safety and wellbeing. We regularly communicate with children and young people about what they can do if they feel unsafe. This is done through;

(a) Western Edge has two Child Safety Persons who have specific responsibility for responding to complaints made by board, staff, volunteers, parents or children. Child Safety Persons are introduced to all children and young people to ensure they understand who the appointed officers are, and how and when they may contact them. Photos of the Child Safety Persons are also displayed on the Western Edge website and in organisational updates and e-newsletters.

(b) The Child Safe Standards Reporting Form is also available in an age-appropriate format, to support children and young people's disclosures through their own voice

(c) all staff and volunteers receive training and resources for how to respond during disclosures by children and young people – underpinned by the Western Edge principle of **PLAACE**:

- **Private** – tell them that their information is private
- **Listen** – carefully to what they have to say
- **Affirm** - that it is not their fault and you are proud of them
- **Action** – tell them that you will do everything to ensure something is done safe
- **Care** – do not force them to talk about it and do what you need to make them feel safe
- **Encourage** – use open ended, prompting questions

(d) Follow up processes and procedures ensure that children and young peoples autonomy and consent is considered with regards to how their disclosure or complaint is progressing; their privacy; and further supports they require from the organisation

7.2 Reporting procedures

The Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm Policy includes how to respond to an allegation or incident of child abuse. If a staff member, volunteer or contractor believes a child is at risk of sexual or physical abuse they should take immediate protective action and notify a senior staff member, i.e. a Child Safety Person, Executive Director, Co-Artistic Directors, or Manager who will **phone 000** to report the matter to police and follow relevant procedures set out in the Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm policy.

If in the course of delivering a program or service **online** a staff member or volunteer believes a child is at immediate risk of sexual or physical abuse they should take immediate protective action and notify a senior staff member, i.e. Child Safety Person, Executive Director, Co-Artistic Directors, or Manager by phone (not by email for privacy reasons). The senior staff member will **phone 000** to report the matter to police and follow relevant procedures set out in the Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm policy.

The Executive Director will determine if it is necessary to notify the Department of Health and Human Services if there is a belief that a child is in need of protection. This may involve notifications to the police or Child Protection.

- All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or a child or young person.
- When an allegation of child abuse is received, all mandatory reporting requirements must be met, including reporting to:
 - Victoria Police
 - Department of Health and Human Services
 - the Commission for Children and Young People under the Reportable Conduct Scheme
 - other government departments or regulators as appropriate.

7.3 Record keeping and incident monitoring

In accordance with the Western Edge Records Management Policy and as required in Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm Policy, all reports of child abuse shall be recorded within the Western Edge incident reporting system.

Western Edge, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, will maintain confidentiality and privacy for children, young people and families in accordance with legislation and our Privacy policy.

Records will be retained in line with the Australian Privacy Principles

Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by the Board to ensure that they are appropriately managed. Child safety matters will be a standing agenda item at every board meeting.

Risks to child and young person safety that are identified in complaints and reports of abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan and reported to the Board.

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

8.1 Supporting staff and volunteers

Western Edge is committed to ensuring that all board, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child and young person safety. Western Edge assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decision-making and to promote a culturally safe environment where children and young people are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

8.2 Mandatory training requirements for Western Edge board, staff and volunteers are as follows:

- (a) Training in Aboriginal Cultural Awareness and creating a safe environment for Aboriginal children and young people
- (b) induction: Child and Young Person Code of Conduct; Child and Young Person Safety Policy and Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm Policy.
- (c) Bravehearts Child and Young Person Safety Training e-module or in-person training
- (d) identifying indicators of child and young person abuse
- (e) how to respond to disclosures of child and young person abuse
- (f) complaint, Code of Conduct breach and child and young person safety incident reporting procedures.
- (g) Annual Trauma Informed Practice Training for working in an artistic context with children, young people and adults who have experienced trauma

8.3 Other training provided for Western Edge board, staff and volunteers includes (but is not limited to):

- (a) risk management practices in relation to child and young person safety
- (b) creating cultural safety for POC children and young people
- (c) access and inclusion training for Disabled children and young people
- (d) investigating child abuse concerns and allegations.

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

9.1 Risk Management

We recognise the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policies, procedures and program planning.

The Western Edge Risk Management Plan includes the assessment and mitigation of risks of child abuse at Western Edge both onsite and online. The following elements are included in the Risk Management policy and framework:

- (a) All existing and new activities and facilities are assessed for risks of child abuse including:
 - (i) environmental risks (e.g. areas that might obscure a line of sight)
 - (ii) vulnerability risks (such as activities that may foster personal relationships between staff/volunteers and children or young people who have an increased risk of being exploited, such as children and young people who are highly vulnerable and dependent on the staff/volunteer for their needs).
- (b) All identified risks of child abuse are actively reduced by designing and implementing appropriate preventative measures.
- (c) Risk management plans are documented for all existing and new activities and facilities.
- (d) Staff, volunteers and contractors are made aware of their responsibility for identifying risks of child abuse in both physical and online environments and their obligation to work with management on reducing those risks.
- (e) Risk management plans are living documents that are updated as required, referred to regularly and reviewed periodically.

9.2 Risk and Wellbeing Education

Western Edge ensures the voices of children and young people are engaged in the risk identification process. This is done through;

- (a) during Western Edge programs staff and volunteers explain how to identify a environmental risk and what they can do if they spot one – this includes in online environments
- (b) during Western Edge programs staff and volunteers explain what child abuse is and the process for disclosing (including who to talk to at Western Edge as well as external resources and organisations)
- (c) during Western Edge programs staff and volunteers explain the importance of feeling safe and secure; and caring for wellbeing. Creative exercises, games and check-ins occur throughout programs to act as both a source of wellbeing promotion and provide an educational resource for h children and young people to support their own wellbeing through using these techniques outside of Western edge spaces.

10. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

10.1 Continuous Improvement

Western Edge is committed to the continuous improvement of the policies and procedures outlined in this policy and other organisational policies with regard to young person safety.

The organisation conducts an annual internal audit of compliance with the 11 Child Safe Standards to identify weaknesses and strengths within our systems and processes.

Western Edge is also committed to conducting audits by external provider, Bravehearts, once every two years, to ensure full transparency across all levels of the organisation.

10.2 Reviewing this policy

This policy will be reviewed annually and we undertake to seek the views, comments and suggestions from children, young people, parents, carers, staff and volunteers as a part of this process.

10.2 Non-compliance with this policy and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct

Western Edge will enforce this policy and the Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct. Following any non-compliance we will instigate a review that may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or other corrective action in accordance with the Western Edge Discipline Policy.

11. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

This Child and Young Person Safety and Wellbeing Policy is supported by internal Western Edge policies and procedures.

11.1 Related Documents

- (a) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- (b) Child Safe Standards – effective 1 July 2022
- (c) Western Edge Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct
- (d) Western Edge Recruitment policy
- (e) Western Edge Child and Young Person Protection and Reporting Harm policy
- (f) Western Edge Privacy policy
- (g) Western Edge Discipline policy
- (h) Western Edge Induction Policy and Procedures
- (i) Western Edge Policy Manual

Children and Young Persons Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct

Purpose

Western Edge is a Child and Young Person Safe environment committed to understanding and abiding by the Victorian Government Child Safe Standards. Western Edge's staff, contractors, volunteers and Board members are required to observe child and young person safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children and young people.

Scope

All personnel of Western Edge Youth Arts are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children. This includes:

- Employees
- Volunteers
- Contractors and sub-contractors including workshop facilitators
- Any other individual working in the organisation

Code of Conduct

Western Edge team members are responsible for promoting the safety and wellbeing of children by complying with the following:

- adhering to Western Edge Youth Arts Children and Young Person's Safety and Wellbeing Policy;
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children and young people from abuse;
- treating everyone with respect;
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children and young people, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child or young person has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another;
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and young people (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal child's or young person's self-identification);
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children or young people with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination);
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people with a disability (for example, during personal care activities);
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not left alone with a child or young person;
- reporting any allegations of child or young person abuse to the Executive Director or Board Executive and to the police or child protection;
- reporting any child or young person safety concerns to the Executive Director or Board Executive and ensuring any allegations is reported to police or child protection;

- if an allegation of child or young person abuse are made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child(ren)/young people are safe;
- encouraging children and young people to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them;
- respect the privacy of children and young people and their families, and only disclosing information to people who have a need to know.

Western Edge Personnel must not:

- develop and 'special' relationships with children or young people that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children or young people);
- exhibit behaviours with children and young people that may be construed as an unnecessarily physical activity;
- put child and young people at risk of abuse;
- do things of a personal nature that a child or young person can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes;
- engage in open discussions or activities of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children or young people (for example, personal social activities);
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children and young people;
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children or young people;
- discriminate against any child or young person, including because of cultural identity, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or disability;
- have contact with a child or young person or their family outside of our organisation without Western Edge's knowledge and/or consent. Accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate;
- have any online contact with a child or young person or their family (unless necessary, for example providing families with e-newsletters);
- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspected or disclosed child abuse;
- condone or participate in, behaviour with children and young people which is illegal, unsafe or abusive exhibit unnecessary, culturally insensitive and inappropriate physical contact and activities (such as cuddle);
- Use prejudice, oppressive behaviour or language with children and young persons
 - engage in behaviour to shame, humiliate, belittle, degrade, emotionally abuse a child or young person
 - express or use inappropriate language in the presence of children – whether of an offensive, discriminatory, demeaning, abusive or sexual nature – when speaking with or whilst in the presence of children and young people

By observing these standards, you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to Western Edge Youth Arts Executive Director or Board Executive on 03 8658 4052.

Attachment B – What is Child Abuse?

Physical violence

Physical violence occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from a non-accidental injury or injuries inflicted by another person. Physical violence can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning or use of weapons (such as, belts and paddles).

Sexual offences

Sexual offences occur when a person involves the child in sexual activity, or deliberately puts the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are exploitative or inappropriate to his/her age and development. Child sexual abuse can involve a range of sexual activity including fondling, masturbation, penetration, voyeurism and exhibitionism. It can also include exposure to or exploitation through pornography or prostitution, as well as grooming behaviour. Grooming refers to a person over 18 years communicating (including online or via mobile) with a child or with a person who supervises or has authority for a child with the intention to create a situation that enables them to abuse a child.

Sexual misconduct

‘Sexual misconduct’ captures a broader range of inappropriate behaviours of a sexual nature that are not necessarily criminal. Examples of sexual misconduct include:

- developing an intimate relationship with a child, for example, through regular contact with the child without the knowledge or approval of the organisation’s management;
- inappropriately discussing sex and sexuality with a child; and
- other overtly sexual acts that could lead an organisation to take disciplinary or other action

Serious emotional or psychological abuse

Serious emotional or psychological abuse occurs when harm is inflicted on a child through repeated rejection, isolation, or by threats or violence. It can include derogatory name-calling and put-downs, or persistent and deliberate coldness from a person, to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired. Serious emotional or psychological abuse could also result from conduct that exploits a child without necessarily being criminal, such as encouraging a child to engage in inappropriate or risky behaviours.

Serious neglect

Serious neglect is the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, medical attention or adequate supervision, to the extent that the child’s health, safety and/or development is, or is likely to be, jeopardised. Serious neglect can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child where the child is exposed to extremely dangerous or life threatening situations. There are a number of different types of neglect

including supervisory, physical, educational and emotional neglect. Examples of each type of neglect and guidance to help organisations identify significant neglect are available on the CCYP website.

Grooming

Grooming concerns predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity at a later time. The offence applies where an adult communicates, by words or conduct, with a child under the age of 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with the intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or another adult.

Grooming does not necessarily involve any sexual activity or even discussion of sexual activity – for example, it may only involve establishing a relationship with the child, parent or carer for the purpose of facilitating sexual activity at a later time.

The sexual conduct must constitute an indictable sexual offence. This includes offences such as sexual penetration of a child, indecent assault and indecent act in the presence of a child. It does not include summary offences, such as upskirting and indecent behaviour in public.

The offence can be committed by any person aged 18 years or over. It does not apply to communication between people who are both under 18 years of age. The offence applies to communication with children under 16 years, but not communication with 16 and 17 year old children. This distinction between children aged below 16 and those aged 16 or 17 reflects the general age of consent (16 years) recognised by the criminal law in relation to sexual offences.

Call the police on 000 if you have immediate concerns for a child's safety and report the incident to a Western Edge Child Safety Officer (Executive Director or Board Secretary).

Attachment C – Recognising the Signs of Child Abuse

Type of Abuse	Possible Indicators	
	Physical	Behavioural
Physical violence	Unexplained bruises Burns and/or fractured bones	Showing wariness or distrust of adults Wearing long sleeved clothes on hot days (to hide bruising or other injury) Fear of specific people Unexplained absences Academic problems
Sexual offences	Presence of sexually transmitted diseases Pregnancy Vaginal or anal bleeding or discharge	Displaying sexual behaviour or knowledge that is unusual for the child's age Difficulty sleeping Being withdrawn Complaining of headaches or stomach pains Fear of specific people Showing wariness or distrust of adults Displaying aggressive behaviour
Emotional or psychological abuse	Delays in emotional, mental, or even physical development Physical signs of self-harming	Exhibiting low self-esteem Exhibiting high anxiety Displaying aggressive or demanding behaviour Being withdrawn, passive and/or tearful Self-harming
Serious neglect	Frequent hunger Malnutrition Poor hygiene Inappropriate clothing	Stealing food Staying at school outside of school hours Aggressive behaviour Misusing alcohol or drugs Academic issues