

Summary

This guideline details Life Without Barriers' approach to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people we support. Our approach is aligned with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, endorsed in 2019 by the Council of Australian Governments.

Who should read this document?

This policy guideline is applicable to all employees and volunteers at Life Without Barriers.

What is our aim?

To protect and promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people we support.

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Guideline

Life Without Barriers recognises that all children and young people have important rights, including to:

- be treated fairly
- have a say about decisions affecting their lives
- live and grow up healthy
- be safe
- an education
- play and have fun.

At Life Without Barriers, there are a range of ways in which we ensure that children's rights are enacted and protected.

Our commitment to child safety and wellbeing

At Life Without Barriers we all share the responsibility for child safety.

Every day, Life Without Barriers offers support and care to children. We want each and every one of those children to feel as safe and respected as they should.

We recognise that physical, emotional and psychological safety is the basis for healthy development and wellbeing, and we're committed to the protection and safety of the children and young people we support. This includes protection from all forms of harm, both intentional and unintentional, caused by individuals and from our processes and systems.

We Put Children First is Life Without Barriers' position on child safety, and communicates:

- our shared responsibility for child safety
- expectations for staff and carer behaviour in relation to children
- the importance of speaking up in relation to suspected child abuse

Our commitment is reflected in a range of systems and practices that support the safety of children:

- The CARE model of practice. CARE is an evidence based, trauma-informed model that aims to create the conditions for positive change in children's lives. CARE guides all interactions with children and young people, focuses on relationships to help children and young people to build new competencies.
- The Therapeutic Crisis Intervention program (TCI). The ability of the entire organisation to respond effectively to staff and children and young people in crisis situations is critical in establishing not only a safe environment but one that also fosters positive relationships and promotes growth and development.
- We use evidence-informed approaches to ensure that children are supported in the ways that research tells us work best.
- As part of our accountability to children, we strive to keep accurate records, and respect children's privacy and confidentiality. We don't share information about children unless it is required under legislation or with good reason and appropriate consent.
- We recognise that reporting of child protection matters to relevant authorities, including the police and statutory child protection agencies, is part of how we keep children safe.
- Our risk assessment and management systems protect the safety and wellbeing of individual children and identify systemic issues that may impact children we support.
- We ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, and contractual requirements.
- We report, track and manage incidents. Incident data is analysed to identify trends and inform practice improvement.
- We provide positive behaviour support. We ensure the appropriate use of restricted practices, and we don't use prohibited practices.
- Our grievance process provides a transparent and credible process to all parties and identifies issues and trends that may impact on children and young people.

Taking child participation seriously

Children's participation is a key part of being a child safe organisation. Children who access our services have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and to have their voices heard. This right is executed at an individual level, via relationships with carers and case workers. Processes are in place to enable children to participate in case planning in ways that are suitable and meaningful.

In addition, we are committed to creating opportunities for children to influence service level decision-making.

Involving families and communities

Children's relationships with their families and communities are essential to their safety and wellbeing. Children do better when they know that their families are valued, respected, and involved. Children in out-of-home care whose families are involved in their lives are safer.

At Life Without Barriers, we support children to spend quality time with their families in ways that suit their needs. We support children having contact with families in a range of safe and

supported ways including visits, activities, phone calls and online platforms. We involve families in our casework and in decisions about children's care as much as we can. LWB supports carers and families to work together to support and care for children. We have formed partnerships with other organisations, such as Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH) and other family inclusion organisations around Australia to better understand what families experience and need, build strong relationships and improve communication around the best interests of children.

Respecting equity and diversity

Life Without Barriers strives to make our services supportive and appropriate for children from a range of diverse backgrounds, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Children with a disability
- Children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to maintain connection with their family, community, language, and culture, and we know that this is essential for safety and wellbeing. To support this goal, we:

- include family, kin, and community in decision-making
- work to restore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to their family wherever possible.
- employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and carers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have access to culturally appropriate services.
- ensure our non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and carers are informed about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, participate in ongoing Cultural Awareness Training and understand cultural rights and the impact of inter-generational trauma affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- provide services that are culturally appropriate and promote the self determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.
- acknowledges the importance of cultural connectedness to the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Ensuring that staff are suitable and supported

Selection processes for staff and carers include measures to ensure their suitability to work with children, where relevant. These measures include merit-based selection, employment screening checks, reference checks, and interviews.

For carers, this also includes a comprehensive industry standard assessment process, and assessment of home safety. Decisions regarding carer authorisation are made by an identified senior manager following consideration by a Carer Assessment Panel. Carers are

subject to regular review to assess their ongoing capacity to provide safe and competent care.

All employees and carers are given a copy of our code of conduct. It sets out the standards of expected behaviour for management, employees and carers. Employees and carers must sign to confirm they agree to abide by the code of conduct.

All new employees and carers are inducted into our organisation, including a requirement to acknowledge their understanding of We Put Children First: Our Stance on Child Safety and Wellbeing.

All staff and carers receive regular supervision that includes a focus on developing their awareness of and responses to child safety matters. In residential care a reflective practice model is used where staff are supported to reflect on how they interact with young people in their care.

Child-focussed complaint systems

We recognise the important role that formal complaints processes play in creating a safe environment. The key to this process is to make children and young people aware of and have access to internal and external complaints mechanisms that are age and developmentally appropriate, and managed effectively.

We are committed to protecting those who speak up about harm to children, and other matters, including whistle-blowers, and encouraging a culture where employees, volunteers and clients feel safe to report improper conduct.

Staff knowledge, skills and awareness

All employees receive training relevant to their role in the organisation. Employees who work directly with children and young people receive training in child protection, reporting harm, responding to disclosures and complaints awareness.

Carers have access to a comprehensive carer learning pathway. This includes core and specialist training covering topics such as Preventing, Identifying, Responding to and Reporting Harm, Responding to Disclosures and Child Protection Legislation.

We implement performance development practices including performance planning, regular formal and informal feedback, supervision, professional development support, and at least one performance appraisal each year. These practices provide mechanisms to reinforce employees' responsibilities in relation to the protection and care of children and young people in their day-to-day activities and to immediately identify and address any concerns.

Safe physical and online environments

We strive to provide physically, emotionally, and culturally safe environments for children we support, so that they feel safe and are safe. We do this by:

- ensuring that staff and carers understand child safety, wellbeing and protection issues
- requiring staff to visit children in their homes, and see them alone, frequently.
- employing practice frameworks that prioritise and promote safety and wellbeing, including CARE and TCI

- We have a suite of resources to inform children, young people and carers about protecting themselves and their personal information when using the internet and social media.
- Our ICT Acceptable Use policy outlines appropriate and inappropriate use of our communication systems, in order to minimise the possibility that they are used in ways that can harm children.

Our service provision is subject to review via processes including reviews of any client deaths, reviews of complex cases, and incident and practice reviews. These processes help to identify any risks in our service provision, current risks to children, promote a continuous quality improvement approach to our practice.

Review of child safe policies and practices

Child safety and wellbeing policies and related documents are reviewed regularly. In addition, changes may be triggered by:

- Internal reviews of incidents or other matter that indicate a change is required
- Complaints
- Changes to legislation, public policy, best practice and research.

Documenting policies and procedures

Organisational policies and procedures relating to working with children are made available to staff and carers, to ensure they have the tools and guidance to perform their roles effectively and safely. These documents help to embed our child safety and wellbeing focus into everyday practices, actions and decision making.

1. Communication

This policy guideline is provided to all employees, volunteers and carers during induction processes. Our Code of Conduct outlines our values and expectations, reinforces compliance and monitoring occurs through a range of mechanisms including supervision.

2. Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required and in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

3. Audit / Evaluation

1. All policies, policy guidelines and documents position child safety and protection as our first priority.
2. Successful accreditation achieved in relation to services for children.