Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - Staff Code of Conduct

What is the Code for?

(1) The Victorian Child Safe Standards, established under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), require organisations that provide services for children to have a Code of Conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with Children and Young People.

(2) The Code:

a. Outlines the University's expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of Children and Young People;
b. Acts to protect Children and Young People, and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur; and,
c. Promotes the participation, wellbeing and empowerment of Children and Young People at Victoria University (VU).

(3) The Code applies to all adults engaged by the University in any capacity to perform work, including employees, consultants, contractors or volunteers and to all University activity situations where interactions with children may occur whether face-to-face, over the phone or online.

Breach of the Code

(4) All Staff must report any breaches of the Child Safe Code of Conduct in line with the Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Procedure. Breaches of the Code may lead to disciplinary action in accordance with the relevant industrial instrument, up to and including termination of employment. Failure to report a breach of the Code may also lead to disciplinary action.

Obligations

(5) Every adult at VU is responsible for the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of Children and Young People who are part of the VU community. Everyone must act in accordance with all relevant legislation, this Code of Conduct, VU's Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy, the Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Policy and Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People Procedure and Safety and Welfare of Children and Young People - International Student Welfare Procedure.

(6) All VU staff members must abide by the four obligations and behavioural boundaries, which also embed obligations under law.

Obligation 1: Promote the safety of children

Explanation	Staff have a duty of care to avoid acts or omissions that could expose a child or young person to reasonably foreseeable risk of injury. This means that staff must prioritise and protect the safety and wellbeing of Children and Young People, understand the nature and risks of child abuse, and take deliberate steps to reduce or eliminate risks.

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As a staff member you must:	- Take all reasonable steps to protect Children and Young People through the early identification, management and mitigation of risk of harm or abuse. – Provide appropriate supervision for Children and Young People based on their age and level of maturity. – Ensure contact, including online, with Children and Young People is consistent with university policies, programs and activities. – Specifically consider risks to the safety and wellbeing of Children and Young People in planning your Activities, and include mitigation strategies (which may be separate to but in addition to broader OHS risk strategies). – Be open and transparent and keeping other adults informed of the Activities you will be undertaking with Children and Young People. – Communicate with families and carers where appropriate about the nature of the Activities. - Use computers, mobile phones, video cameras, cameras and social media appropriately, and never to exploit or harass Children and Young People or access child exploitation material through any medium.
As a staff member you must not:	- Engage in any form of sexual contact with a child. - Engage in inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature with a child, including making sexually suggestive comments or sharing sexually suggestive material, including via online platforms. – Commit or coerce another person to commit an act or acts of abuse against a child or young person. – Possess, control, produce, distribute, obtain or transmit child exploitation material. – Commit or coerce another person to commit an act or acts of grooming or online grooming. – Develop inappropriate or 'special' relationships with children or young people (for example, preferential treatment, the giving of inappropriate gifts, or in-class favouritism). – Inappropriately hire children or young people who are members of the VU community for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage. – Post online any information about a child that may reveal their identity without the child's informed consent and, in the case of a child under 18, their parent or guardian's consent. - Have personal/online contact with a child or young person or their family outside of a valid organisational context unless transparent to the organisation and part of an approved program (for example, newsletters or responding to enquiries).

Obligation 2: Manage and respond to all child safety concerns

Explanation	Child safety requires all staff to report any form of abuse, including suspected cases in accordance with university policies and procedures. A 'reasonable belief' that child abuse has or is occurring is all that is required to report concerns about child safety.
As a staff member you must:	- Take all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse by proactively identifying and managing risks and being vigilant about signs of abuse. – If an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure the child's immediate safety as quickly as possible. - Listen and respond to the concerns of Children and Young People, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or are worried about their safety or the safety of another child or young person. – Report any allegations of child abuse or harm or concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person to Safer Community in accordance with the University's procedure and if appropriate, given the severity and urgency of the matter, reporting directly to Victoria Police on 000 or Child Protection (Department of Health and Human Services - Victoria). – Immediately advise the University if you are investigated for, charged with or convicted of a child sex offence in Australia or any other jurisdiction and/or if you become (or may become) ineligible to work with children because of a criminal conviction or other relevant finding including but not limited to a negative working with children check assessment (e.g. an intervention order in relation to children or young people).
As a staff member you must not:	- Ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of child abuse. – Wait until there is definite proof before you act on an allegation or suspicion of abuse if you form a reasonable belief that the abuse has occurred or is occurring.

Obligation 3: Respect social, emotional and cultural safety and inclusion for all children

Explanation	Respect involves seeking to understand cultural inclusion and valuing the diversity of children. It also includes creating and supporting an environment where it is safe for children to express their cultural, religious and sexual identity. An environment where cultural and ability level differences are respected is empowering for Children and Young People.
As a staff member you must:	- Respect cultural values and norms that may be different from your own; - Where relevant, respect a child's Aboriginality and encouraging their sense of self and identity; - Consider cultural and disability needs when planning and delivering programs, services and events; – Promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children by supporting their connection to culture, kin, community, cultural practices and Aboriginal identity; – maintain open, honest communication and collaboration with families, including seeking their feedback and input into any programs designed specifically for children as the primary cohort; – Ensure that when photographing or filming Children and Young People or when using children's and young people's images, you: – Assess and endeavour to comply with relevant traditions or restrictions on reproducing personal images; – Obtain informed consent from the child, and where appropriate their parent or guardian; – Ensure photographs, films, videos and DVDs present Children and Young People in a dignified and respectful manner. – Where photographs are taken at public events, ensure notice of intent is given via adequate signage (which is accessible to all, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds and those with disabilities). Signage must contain a clear and easily accessible opt-out process for people who do not wish to consent to the use of their image.
As a staff member you must not:	- Discriminate against or denigrate any child because of their age, gender, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or disability. – Question a child's self-identification or self-expression related to their gender, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or disability. - Express inappropriate or disrespectful personal views on cultures, ethnicity, sexuality or disability in the presence of young people.

Obligation 4: Treat all children with respect and hear what they have to say

Explanation	Children and Young People have unique insights into their lives, their needs and the world around them. They have a right to be heard and to have their concerns and ideas taken seriously.
As a staff member you must:	- Treat Children and Young People with respect. – Encourage children to 'have a say' on issues that are important to them. - Respect a child or young person's privacy in sensitive matters, such as health or family problems, and only reveal confidential matters when lawful and appropriate.
As a staff member you must not:	- Shame, humiliate, oppress, belittle or degrade students, including Children and Young People. - Use inappropriate or discriminatory language when speaking with, or in the presence of a child or young person.

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Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	10th January 2023
Review Date	10th January 2026
Approval Authority	Deputy Vice-Chancellor People & Organisation
Approval Date	20th December 2022
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
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