Victorian Churches Football Association

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Date created	August 2024
Audience	VCFA Board, Contractors, Volunteers
Version	2025 v4
Purpose of the document	The purposes of this Policy are to: a) work towards a Victorian Churches Football Association (VCFA) culture of child safety. b) ensure that all paid and unpaid VCFA staff and contractors are aware of their responsibilities for minimising the risk of harm (mental, physical and emotional) for children and identifying possible occasions for child abuse and for establishing procedures for preventing such harm or abuse and/or detecting such harm or abuse when it occurs. c) provide guidance on responding where a person suspects any child abuse within all VCFA environments in alignment with polices and processes, considering the state and federal regulations regarding child safe practices. d) provide a clear statement to players, committee members, volunteers, employees, coaches, officials and other contractors forbidding any such abuse; and e) provide assurance that any and all suspected abuse will be investigated.
Actions	• Ensure VCFA Board, Contractors and Volunteers acknowledge they have read and understand this guide. • Encourage club committees, volunteers and parents to read and understand this guide. • Encourage relevant internal and external stakeholders to read and understand.
Review	Annually
VCFA contact(s)	President: president@vcfa.org.au General Manager: gm@vcfa.org.au
Relevant resources	• Guide to 11 Child Safe Standards (CCYP) • Being a Child Safe Organisation (CCYP) • Child Safe Organisations (AHRC) • eSafety guide (eSafety Commissioner) • *See end of document for more resources*

Introduction

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the VCFA Board in August 2024 and updated in February 2025. It demonstrates the strong commitment of the Board, contractors and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Commitment to child safety

The Victorian Churches Football Association (VCFA) is committed to promoting and protecting the best interests and safety of children. The VCFA:

- Has a zero tolerance for child abuse.
- Actively works to listen to and empower children.
- Aims to create a child safe environment where children can feel safe while participating in football activities.
- Will take all allegations and concerns very seriously and responds to them consistently, in line with the organisation's policies and procedures, and will impress upon member Clubs to do likewise.
- Will impress upon everyone working, contracting or volunteering at the VCFA as responsible for the care and protection of children and reporting information about child abuse.
- Expects every VCFA member Club to be committed to comply and implement all Child Safety legislated policies and practices, including the development of their own Child Safety Policy, Code of Conduct, and other relevant documents, as required by law.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how the Victorian Churches Football Association prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and the steps in place to ensure this occurs.

Scope

The policy applies to all volunteers, staff, contractors, committee members, children and other individuals who may be involved in the Association. The policy applies to all activities – training, matches, events – conducted by the VCFA.

Definitions

Child/children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Child protection means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect or negligent treatment of a child.

Child sexual assault is any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. Sexually abusive behaviours can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography. It includes child grooming, which refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child.

Reasonable belief is a belief based on reasonable grounds that child abuse has occurred when considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are considered and these are objectively assessed.

A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- The child is in need of protection,
- The child has suffered or is likely to suffer "significant harm as a result of physical injury",
- The parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not:

- the same as having proof
- 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. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed if:

- A child states that they have been physically or sexually abused;
- A child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
- Someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused;
- Professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused; and/or
- Signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused

Responsibilities

The Victorian Churches Football Association (VCFA) **Board** has a shared responsibility with its member Clubs, as autonomous entities, in promoting children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

The Board will model a child safe culture and will encourage anyone involved with the Association to report a child safe concern. The Board will ensure that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place and will empower and support member Clubs in sharing this responsibility.

The Board is responsible for ensuring that appropriate VCFA Association policies and procedures, Child Safe Code of Conduct and role specific Code(s) of Conduct are in place, for two conditions:

1. The VCFA programs and events that it itself manages and conducts.
2. The use and support of member Clubs, who also bear their own responsibilities in these matters as autonomous entities, who may elect to utilise amended or alter Association policies, where it better suits their unique operations to do so, subject to supporting child safety.

All VCFA volunteers and contractors share in the responsibility of managing the risks of child abuse and harm, and must:

- Familiarise themselves and comply with the relevant laws and the VCFA's policy and procedures in relation to child safety.
- Report any *reasonable belief* that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and / or the state-based child protection service) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters where applicable.
- Report any suspicion that a child's safety may be at risk to the Child Support Officer(s), or other available VCFA official officer, (or, if the Child Support Officer is involved in the suspicion, to the VCFA President or Vice President); and
- Support an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.

The VCFA expects all member Clubs to have their own Child Safety Policy in place, and to review their individual policies every two years and ensure this is shared to the volunteers within each Club. The VCFA also expects every Club, to complete an annual Child Safety training, either through VCFA hosted sessions, or at individually arranged training.

The VCFA Board will conduct an annual review of how effectively the Association is, and its member Clubs are, delivering child safety and wellbeing.

Children's empowerment and participation

The VCFA provides a platform and competition for children to participate in the Association. Children should expect to be safe and to be informed when participating and at events delivered by the Association.

The VCFA respects the rights of children and provides them with information about their rights through this policy, at events, and encourages member Clubs to empower children to include children consultation around participation and safety.

Child safety is a shared responsibility between the VCFA, all volunteers, workers, contractors, referees, and members Clubs of the VCFA, working for the broad and individual best interests of children.

Families and community

The VCFA, as a community sport Association, recognises the important roles that parents and carers play when making decisions about their child. The VCFA, through the club Member channels, will consider the opinions of children and their families, using opinions and feedback to inform child related policies.

Parents, carers and families are welcome to provide feedback through their associated Club President to our contact email address and are encouraged to raise concerns with us.

The VCFA provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and our Code of Conducts on our website.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

The VCFA is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, Torres Strait Islander children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability.

The VCFA will implement strategies, where possible, to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children.

Valuing diversity

As an Association that provides access to the ‘The World Game’, the VCFA values diversity and equity for all children.

The VCFA puts Inclusivity at its core, and it forms one of the Values of the Association.

All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, ability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, are included and welcomed to participate fully in the Association.

The VCFA has a zero tolerance to racism and other forms of discrimination and will take disciplinary action according to the Association match rules when any discrimination is identified.

All children have equal rights to protection from harm and abuse and should be respected accordingly.

Code of conduct(s)

The VCFA have a Child Safe Code of Conduct, as well as more role specific Codes of Conduct developed for Players, Spectators, Coaches, and Officials. Every person who performs a role within the Association, including the Board, Contractors, Players, Officials, and Coaches (of Representative Teams) agrees to the different Codes of Conducts when registering to be a part of the Association.

Breaches of the Codes of Conducts may result in disciplinary action including deregistration of a person's involvement within the Association.

Recruiting staff, contractors and volunteers

The VCFA undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all Association workers and volunteers which aims to:

- Promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the Association;
- Identify the most suitable people available, who share the VCFA's values and commitment to protect children; and
- Prohibit a person from working or volunteering at the VCFA if they pose an identified risk to children.

The VCFA requires all workers and volunteers to pass through the organisation's recruitment and screening processes prior to commencing their engagement with the VCFA.

The VCFA will require all volunteers, referees and contractors to have a valid Working With Children Check (or other check, such as police check), or be in the process of receiving a valid Working With Children Check before they commence engagement with the VCFA.

The Child Safe Officer(s) will maintain a record of all volunteers and contractors Working With Children Check information and report to the VCFA Executive any volunteers or contractors who do not have, or have an expired Working With Children Check.

On engagement, VCFA workers and volunteers must review, agree to, and sign-off on this Policy and the VCFA Code of Conduct, and fulfil all other relevant screening details (as outlined above).

The VCFA expects all Clubs to appoint a Child Safe Officer who, as part of their role, will ensure all Club based volunteers and contractors have valid Working With Children Checks, complete Child Safety training at regular intervals, and understand and agree to Club policies and procedures.

Training for staff, contractors and volunteers

The VCFA is committed to ensuring that all leaders, contractors and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children.

All Board members, contractors and staff, and immediate volunteers are required to complete child safety training on a cyclical basis (every 2 years).

Complaints, reporting and investigating

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Any VCFA volunteer or contractor who has grounds to suspect abusive activity, must immediately notify the appropriate Child Protection Service or the Police. They should also advise the VCFA Child Safe Officer (CSO) about their concern, or in the absence of, or a suspicion of CSO involvement in the abuse claim, contact a VCFA Executive Board member.

If the person having the suspicion does not believe that the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with by the Child Safety Officer, the matter should be reported to the VCFA General Manager or a member of the VCFA Executive.

If the appropriate Child Protection Service or the Police decide to investigate an Association report of child abuse, all volunteers, contractors and members must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Whether or not the authorities decide to investigate, the VCFA Executive will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, the VCFA Executive may decide to conduct such an investigation. All volunteers, contractors and members must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any such investigation will be conducted according to the rules of natural justice.

The VCFA Executive will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential; however, from time-to-time other VCFA Board Members or the VCFA General Manager may need to be consulted in conjunction with the investigation.

After a determination that the suspected abuse warrants investigation, the VCFA Executive shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and / or law enforcement officials.

If it is alleged that a volunteer or contractor may have committed a child abuse offence or has breached the Association's child safety policy, the person concerned may be stood down while an investigation is conducted by the VCFA Board, or the VCFA Executive in the board's absence), being mindful to avoid any conflict of interest.

If the investigation concludes that on the balance of probabilities an offence (or a breach of the Association's child safety policy) has occurred, then disciplinary action may follow, up to and including dismissal or cessation of involvement with the organisation. The findings of the investigation will also be reported to an external body as required.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Child Safety person

The Board will appoint at least one **Child Safe Officer** who is responsible for:

- Responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns within the Association and investigating these where it is appropriate to do so, without any conflict of interest. Where a conflict arises, independent investigation may be sought, or be directed to the member Club concerned, where it is their primary duty to investigate.
- Deal with the relevant legal and police bodies as applicable in any alleged cases of child abuse.
- Ensuring that all volunteers and contractors of the VCFA are aware of and abide by relevant laws and this VCFA Child Safety and Wellbeing policy (and other relevant VCFA policies, such as the Code of Conduct).
- Ensuring that all adults (those 18 years old and over) within the responsible governance of member Clubs are aware of their obligation to report suspected sexual abuse of a child, consistent with these policies and procedures.
- Ensuring that VCFA Member Clubs likewise communicate similar responsibilities to all adults within their Club community.
- Providing support for VCFA volunteers and contractors in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.
- Providing broad support for VCFA member Club management, to support their undertaking of their child safety responsibilities.

If the Child Safe Officer is unavailable or conflicted in any complaint or concern, the VCFA President, or another member of the VCFA Executive will take responsibility for the related complaint or concern.

Record Keeping

The VCFA is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded. These will be stored securely with access limited to the VCFA President and VCFA General Manager.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

The VCFA will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Risk management

The VCFA recognises the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse and will ensure that child safety is a part of its overall risk management approach.

The VCFA will actively assess identified and perceived child safety risks consistent with a duty of care to avoid harm and abuse to children.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

The VCFA will enforce this policy and the Code(s) of Conduct. Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in the restriction of duties, suspension, or deregistration or banning from the Association.

Reviewing

The VCFA Board will review this policy and all child safe practices at least every two years. The Board will also review relevant policies and practices in response to a child safety incident, or reportable incident. Each review shall be assessed whether the Association's child safety policy and/or procedures require modification to better protect the children under the organisation's care.

The VCFA Board will look to engage a specialist Child Safety organisation to support policy review, deliver training (when required), and provide support in developing clear guidelines to ensure members wellbeing and safety is prioritised.

References

- **VCFA Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy**: this policy
- **VCFA Child Safe Code of Conduct:** https://vcfa.org.au/documents
- **VCFA Volunteer Agreement form:** provided as required
- **VCFA Codes of Conduct:** https://vcfa.org.au/documents
- **VCFA Child Safety Reporting Process:** https://vcfa.org.au/documents
- **VCFA Child Safety Complaint Form:** https://vcfa.org.au/documents
- **VCFA Risk Management Plan:** ***in development***

- **Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP):** Child Safe Standards: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards
    - **The 11 Child Safe Standards:** https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards
- **National Office for Child Safety**: https://www.childsafety.gov.au
- **Justice and Community Service:** https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families
- **Working With Children Check:** https://www.vic.gov.au/working-with-children-check
- **Football Victoria:** Child Safety in Football: https://www.footballvictoria.com.au/resources/clubs/child-safety
- **The Child Safe Standards:** Information for children: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/CSS-RCS-Info-Sheets/The-Child-Safe-Standards-Information-for-children-14.06.23.pdf
- **The Child Safe Standards:** Information for young people: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/CSS-RCS-Info-Sheets/The-Child-Safe-Standards-Information-for-young-people-14.06.23.pdf
- **Speak up – it's your right:** Youth poster: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/Speak-up-its-your-right-youth-poster-20.03.23.pdf
- **Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)**: Useful Links: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/resources/useful-links/
- **Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP)**: Video – The 11 Child Safe Standards in Victoria: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUK8Nrhc8Wo

Services

If there is an emergency, or you or someone else is in danger, then call police on Triple Zero (000) immediately

- **Victoria Police**: 000
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 | https://kidshelpline.com.au/
- **Headspace:** 1800 650 890 | https://headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/
- **Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH):**
    - North Division: 1300 598 521
    - South Division: 1300 555 526
    - East Division: 1300 360 452
    - West Division: 1300 360 462
    - After Hours Emergency Service: 13 12 78
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636 | https://www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/youth
- **Lifeline Australia:** 13 11 14 | https://www.lifeline.org.au/
- **The Orange Door:** https://www.vic.gov.au/orange-door-locations
- **1800 RESPECT:** 1800 737 732