

CHILD SAFE POLICY

OCTOBER 2023

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline Big Kids' Table's (BKT) commitment to the safety of children and vulnerable people from all forms of abuse.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all BKT employees, volunteers and contractors who work with us.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

This Policy was made by the Co-Directors of The Big Kids' Table (BKT), Lauren Foster and Georgia Nicholas, in compliance with the requirement of Victorian legislation to meet prescribed child safe standards.

BKT is committed to child safe practice. The care, the safety and the welfare of children and youth are embedded in policies and practices which are intended to reflect a commitment to zero tolerance of child abuse.

"When Jesus spoke the words, 'let the children come to me and do not hinder them' (Matt 19:14) he set the benchmark for us. We want to be a community where children and families are welcome and participate fully. We want to be an open space where young people are fully engaged and have every opportunity to grow and flourish. We want to be a space place and to put no barriers in place that will harm or hinder children and young people.

In all actions and programs, we seek to maintain high ethical standards and work in accordance with child safe practices and child protection reporting guidelines. We consider the participation and empowerment of children in all of our decision-making.

BKT has zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are concerned about a child's safety, which we will follow through fully. We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

DEFINITIONS

Child: In Australia, a child is considered anyone under 18 years of age.

Staff, Employee and/or Volunteer: a single person or group of people performing regular directed work/tasks on behalf of BKT.

Child Safety: any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm and includes:

- + The measures we take to keep children safe from child abuse while they are in our care.
- + Providing support to a child who discloses
- + Responding to suspicions, disclosures, or incidents of child abuse.

What constitutes abuse and neglect according to the Victorian Department of Education and Training includes but is not limited to:

- + **Physical:** Physical child abuse can consist of any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person. Examples of physical abuse may include beating, shaking, or burning, assault with implements and female genital mutilation.

- + **Sexual:** a child is sexually abused when any person uses their authority over the child to involve the child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse involves a wide range of sexual activity including masturbation, fondling genitals, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis or any other object, or exposure of the child to pornography.
- + **Grooming:** grooming is a criminal offence and occurs when an adult engages in predatory conduct to prepare a child for sexual abuse later. Grooming can include communicating and/or attempting to befriend or establish a relationship or other emotional connection with the child or their parent/carer. It is a criminal offence. Grooming includes online grooming. It occurs when an adult uses electronic communication (including social media) in a predatory fashion to try to lower a child's inhibitions, or heighten their curiosity regarding sex, with the aim of eventually meeting them in person for the purposes of sexual activity.
- + **Emotional, Psychological and Spiritual:** this type of abuse occurs when a person engages in inappropriate behaviour, such as rejecting, ignoring, humiliating, isolating, threatening, or verbally abusing a child, or allowing others to do so.
- + **Neglect:** the failure of a parent or guardian to provide a child with the necessities of life where the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm to his or her wellbeing or development.
- + **Racial, Cultural, Religious:** conduct that demonstrates contempt, ridicule, hatred or negativity towards a child because of their race, culture or religion. This may be overt like racial discrimination, or covert, such as demonstrating a lack of cultural respect and awareness.

Reasonable grounds for belief: a belief based on reasonable grounds that child abuse has occurred when all known consideration or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are taken into account and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated, the nature of and details of the allegation, and whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator. A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

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

POLICY

- + Big Kids' Table Ltd (BKT) is committed to promoting and protecting the best interests of children involved in all BKT activities, at all times.
- + All children regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse.
- + BKT has zero tolerance for child abuse. Every person working at BKT is responsible for the care and protection of the children BKT works with and reporting information about alleged abuse.
- + Child safety is a shared responsibility between all employees, volunteers and contractors of the BKT community.
- + BKT will consider the opinions of children and use their opinions to develop child safety policies and procedures.
- + BKT supports and respects all children, employees, and volunteers. BKT is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from cultural and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability.
- + BKT will appoint a Child Safety Officer. The Child Safety Officer is available for anyone to gain advice and support from in relation to child safety.
- + BKT's policies and procedures are compliant with the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, the Victorian Child Safe Standards and Commission for Children and Young People Mandatory Reporting Scheme.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

At BKT, we are committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child safety issues. They must all agree to abide by our Code of Conduct for Child Safety, which specifies the standards of conduct and guidelines required when working with children.

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at BKT understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. We aim for all staff, volunteer, children, and families to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

RECRUITMENT

All staff and volunteers at BKT must have a current Working with Children's Check and are thoroughly reference checked. New employees and volunteers will be supervised to ensure they understand BKT's commitment to child safety, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channelings, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the urgency and severity of the matter.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history, then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

We support and respect all children and adults. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of children with a disability.

FAIR PROCEDURES FOR PERSONNEL

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern as well as being fair and just to our staff and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking professional standards action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

PRIVACY

We uphold the privacy of individuals when storing personal information, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

We affirm that we must comply with applicable mandatory reporting obligations in state legislation.

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.

Through the Code of Conduct for Child Safety and the recruitment and training process, we aim to ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of their statutory and ethical obligations in this area.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. As well as general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to the children we work with.

BKT has risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments, and online environments.

BKT is committed to systemic risk identification and management and acting to introduce measures that reduce or remove the identified risk.

REGULAR REVIEW

BKT will review this policy and statement of commitment every two years and following significant incidents if they occur.

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS, AND COMPLAINTS

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

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place.

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- + A child states they or someone they know has been abused.
- + Behavior consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed.
- + Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- + Observing suspicious behavior

CHILD SAFE OFFICER

At BKT, Lauren Foster is the Child Safe Officer who is the point of contact for those who have questions or concerns. The Child Safety Officer has the following responsibilities:

- + Promoting child safety at all times.
- + Supporting and advising all BKT employees and volunteers in understanding their child safety responsibilities.
- + Ensuring that all child safety policies and procedures are compliant with legislation, regularly reviewed, and updated.
- + Be available for advice and support to employees and volunteers in relation to disclosures.

Authorized by: Lauren Foster

Reviewed and Updated: October 2023

Next Review Date: October 2025

BIG KIDS' TABLE
SEX IS GOOD. SO IS GOD.