

CHILD SAFE CODE OF CONDUCT

OCTOBER 2023

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

The Big Kids' Table (BKT) is committed to child safe practice. The care, the safety and the welfare of children are embedded in policies and practices which reflect a commitment to zero tolerance of child abuse.

In all its actions and programs, we seek to maintain high ethical standards and work in accordance with child safe practices and child protection reporting obligations and guidelines.

BKT has zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistent with our policies and procedures. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are concerned about a child's safety, and we will follow through on all.

PURPOSE

Following this code will assist to protect children and young people from abuse and inappropriate behaviour from adults. It will also help staff and volunteers to maintain the standards of behaviour that is expected of them. This code of conduct also serves To protect the organisation from instances of child abuse because opportunities for harm are actively reduced.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CODE IS BREACHED?

A failure to meet a standard or, unless there are cogent reasons for not doing so, to follow a guidelines, as prescribed in this Code is a relevant factor in determining the fitness or otherwise of the staff member or volunteer for any position at BKT and may trigger actions against the person by the Board.

OUR OBLIGATIONS TO REPORT

All staff and volunteers have expectations and requirements by the State as to when and how a report must be made:

UNDER STATE LAW

Failing to Disclose Abuse: Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), s327: Since 2014, s327 requires that all Victorians over the age of 18 years of age who reasonably believe that a child has been sexually abused or groomed by a person of or over the age of 18 years must report the matter to the police as soon as it is practicable to do so, unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so. Failure to do so is a criminal offence punishable by a maximum of 3 years imprisonment.

If a child is in immediate danger of harm or abuse call the police on 000 as a first priority.

Failing to Protect Offence: Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), s490: A BKT worker who knows of a substantial risk of child abuse by someone over 18 years of age associated with the organisation, and has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove that risk and negligently fails to do so, commits a criminal offence under this section, punishable by 5 years imprisonment;

When reporting a matter to police, it is important to report a matter to the Co-Directors and Board of BKT. This will ensure that support can be put in place for the parties where appropriate, that all breaches of child safe codes, policies and procedures are appropriately managed, including adhering to all mandatory requirements and other matters of law, and that consideration can be given to suspending the alleged respondent (where necessary to ensure the safety of the complainant and others) while allegations of misconduct are investigated.

If uncertain, or seeking further information and direction, the staff member or volunteer should contact the Board Director.

Reportable Conduct scheme- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, Part 5A, s15M(4): From 1 July 2017 for schools and 1 January 2018 for other religious institutions, Victorian legislation requires that any allegation or complaint of abuse against a child must also be reported by the Head of the entity to the Children and Young Persons' Commissioner. This includes sexual, physical psychological abuse as well as grooming.

UPHOLDING THIS CODE OF CONDUCT

If a staff member or volunteer knows or have reason to believe that another staff member or volunteer has failed to meet a standard of this Code, or has failed to follow a guideline of this Code, without a cogent reason for not doing so, subject to strict reporting obligations discussed above, the worker or volunteer should, where they believe that a person has not suffered harm or is not at the risk of harm, approach the worker or volunteer and identify the concern. If in doubt seek advice from the Board Director without identifying the worker or volunteer.

If a staff member or volunteer considers that another staff member or volunteer has failed to meet a standard of this Code, or has failed to follow a guideline of this Code, without a cogent reason for not doing so, and a person has suffered harm or is at the risk of harm, you must report this to the Co-Directors and Board. If in doubt, seek advice from the Board without identifying the staff member or volunteer.

The BKT condemns all forms of child abuse, discrimination and sexual exploitation. We are committed to creating and maintaining an environment which promotes safety for people involved in our programs including children, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse background including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

STANDARDS - PART 1: GENERAL

SAFETY AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer must:
 - Conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the values of BKT, taking all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of children in their care
 - Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children, young people, parents, staff and volunteers
 - Challenge behaviour that is unacceptable or otherwise in breach of the standards and guidelines of this Code
 - Not exaggerate or trivialise child abuse issues
 - Not rely on their reputation or that of the organisation to protect them
 - Comply with all relevant legislation, Federal and State with respect to the safety of children or for mandatory reporting
- + Treating Children with Equality and Respect
 - A BKT staff member or volunteer must-
 - Treat with equality and respect all children and young people, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status
 - Avoid favouritism or acting in a way that shows unfair and differential treatment of children and young people
 - Respect cultural differences
 - Encourage open communication between all children, young people, parents, staff and volunteers, and allows children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them
 - Be transparent in their actions and whereabouts
 - Ensure language is appropriate and not offensive or discriminatory
 - Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like
 - Recognise that special caution is required when discussing sensitive issues with children or young people

VENUE AND ACTIVITIES

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer must:
 - Conduct all child related activities in well lit areas-
 - Which are open and can be observed by other adults;
 - Which have doors to rooms or offices left open; and
 - With no fewer than two adults present at all times during a session involving children or young people
 - Except where impracticable, avoid being alone with a child in a motor vehicle or driving a child home unaccompanied. If such a situation is unavoidable, inform your ministry supervisor of the trip and the reason for it
 - Ensure any contact with children and young people is appropriate and within the parameters of the program or event
 - Model good conduct in the activities conducted

ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer must NOT:
 - Engage in behaviour in person or on social media that is intended or likely to bully, shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or young people
 - Use inappropriate, offensive, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning, culturally inappropriate or discriminatory language when speaking with a child or young person
 - Hit or physically assault or otherwise abuse children
 - Dispense corporal punishment or discipline to children
 - Engage in any conduct that constitutes grooming for sexual conduct with a child under the age of 16 years, within the meaning of the Crimes Act 1958, s49M
 - Conduct a sexual relationship with a child or young person or indulge in any form of sexual contact with a child or young person
 - Make available to children or condone the use by children of alcohol or illegal drugs or otherwise condone or participate in behaviour of children that is illegal, unsafe or abusive
 - Make comments or gestures to or in front of children or young people that are sarcastic or sexually suggestive
 - Make comments or gestures to or in front of children or young people that are derogatory, belittling or insensitive and of a personal nature about someone present or known to those present
 - Otherwise act in a way that is or can be perceived as threatening or intrusive
 - Use any technology to exploit or harass children or in a manner that has that effect

MANDATORY REPORTING

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer must:
 - Report any concerns or suspicions of child abuse by a fellow worker or visitor in accordance with State laws, as referred to above in the Duty to Report section
 - Take responsibility for being accountable and not placing oneself in positions where there is a risk of allegations being made. They will ensure that, except where impracticable, another adult is present when working with or near children
 - Self-assess their behaviour, actions, language and relationships with children.
 - Immediately disclose any information of charges, convictions of abuse which they may incur. This includes disclosing any criminal charges or convictions made against oneself or others

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer must NOT:
 - Be intoxicated or under the influence of illegal drugs when exercising their role
 - Develop inappropriate relationships with children or young people
 - Seek to make contact and spend time alone with any child that they come into contact with in their role at BKT outside of designated times and activities set for performing that role
 - Give children or young people their personal contact details (mobile number, email or address) other than on the expressed basis that communication must be for the stated purposes of the approved curriculum, program or activities and not for personal purposes
 - Make inappropriate promises to children and young people, particularly in relation to confidentiality

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- + A BKT staff member or volunteer:
 - Keep confidential all information regarding any child protection concern or complaint only discussing information with relevant and appropriate people
 - Not release or discuss any personal confidential information about suspected or proven child abuse
 - Not take or publish a photo of a child without their parent or guardian's written consent

PART 1: GUIDELINES

WHAT SHOULD STAFF MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS DO IF A YOUTH ARE ATTEMPTING TO DEVELOP A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH A LEADER?

- + You should inform the Co-Directors immediately and/or the Board if appropriate, even if the interaction may only have been misconstrued by the leader. Whenever suspicion arises, inform the Co-Directors, and proceed with caution
- + The Minister or Youth Minister of the church BKT are working with will be informed by the Co-Directors and plans will be put in place to ensure the protection of the BKT worker and youth.
- + Where interactions are a clear attempt by the youth to develop a close relationship, the BKT staff member or volunteer should cease all one to one communication. It should be made clear to the youth or child in question as soon as possible that this change is not because of a change in their relationship or standing with the staff member or volunteer- all effort should be made to explain that this change is not a rejection of the youth or child- rather the change is because the level of interaction has become inappropriate. A relationship with a BKT staff member or volunteer of this type is not an option, but this does not mean that the leader does not or no longer cares about the youth/child.

ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOURS

The following is a list of behaviour which is to be encouraged or avoided, as the case may be. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all acceptable/unacceptable behaviour, but rather to provide examples:

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

- + Taking all practicable steps to protect children from abuse and upholding BKT's commitment to the highest standards of child safety at all times.
- + Promoting the safety, dignity, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with a disability and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- + Not unlawfully discriminating against children for their age, gender, race or sexuality.
- + Understanding and complying with all reporting obligations. Listening and responding immediately to the concerns or allegations.
- + Reporting any child safety concerns to the Co-Directors before any suspected, alleged or actual child abuse is reported to the authorities unless a child is in immediate danger.
- + Using positive reinforcement and avoiding abusive, harassing or discriminatory language.
- + Avoiding, where possible, situations where an adult may be alone with a child, such as in a dressing or change room, or when a child needs to be transported in a vehicle.
- + Not developing any 'special' relationships with children, which could be seen as grooming, favouritism, or misconstrued as unnecessarily physical.
- + Considering tall content posted on personal social media platforms is appropriate and aligns with the BKT values, message and this code of conduct.

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

- + Ignoring or disregarding any suspected or disclosed child abuse.
- + Engaging in any type of sexual activity with children under 18 years of age
- + Exhibiting behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical.
- + Putting children at risk of abuse, for example, by locking doors.
- + Offering alcohol or illegal drugs to children under the age of 18.
- + Engaging in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children, for example, personal social activities on a topic not the subject of the approved curriculum, program or activities.
- + Using inappropriate language in the presence of children, including swearing.
- + Expressing personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children that are not included in the prescribed curriculum.
- + Discriminating against any child because of age, race, religion, vulnerability, sexuality or disability.
- + Photographing or videoing a child without the consent of the child and parent or guardians.
- + Having contact with a child/children outside of a BKT session without the consent of parents/guardians whereby there was no previous relationship. Unintended contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate.
 - Post inappropriate content on their personal social media platforms, e.g. photos of drunkenness or nudity.

CREATING A POSITIVE CULTURE

We know that children and young people flourish when a positive culture is created that builds their social, emotional and physical development and ensures their safety.

A BKT worker or volunteer must promote a positive culture that enhances children's and young person's safety by:

- + Treating everyone with respect;
- + Listening, taking seriously, and responding to the concerns of a child, particularly if the child is complaining or worried about the safety, abuse or harm to themselves or another child;
- + Promoting a culture of safety, participating and empowerment of Aboriginal children, for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal child's self-identification;
- + Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds by having a zero tolerance of discrimination, for example, not ridiculing culturally different family practices;
- + Promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability, for example showing tolerance during activities;
- + Ensuring that children and young persons know whom to tell and how and from where to seek help when they feel unsafe; and
- + Developing a culture where children and young people can talk openly about their interactions with adults and others and have the confidence to raise safety concerns

PHYSICAL CONTACT

- + In general, except in circumstances such as immediate physical danger or medical emergency, a BKT staff member or volunteer should not initiate physical contact with a child. If that contact is initiated by the child, be very careful that you respect the child's feelings and privacy.
- + A BKT staff member or volunteer should ensure that any physical contact they have with children is of a non-sexual nature and appropriate to the situation. Avoid any physical contact that is sexually stimulating, or that may be construed as sexually stimulating. Children may or may not be aware of creating such situations. It is your responsibility to be alert for such situations and to cease any inappropriate contact immediately.

PART 2 : ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

- + General communication is an integral part of youth ministry and is something to be encouraged in ministry. A large part of BKT's ministry is through face to face contact, and another key part is online. As a general policy, BKT aims to embrace the opportunities provided by social media, but avoiding inappropriate or unwise behaviour. In particular, this part focuses on online interactions with people under 18 years of age.
- + We recognise that we engage with young adults and youth through a public Instagram and Facebook page that seeks to educate, encourage and equip young people in following Jesus in the space of sex, relationships and sexual expression. We will be intentional and wise about how we engage with people under the age of 18 in a public way, and never in private.

STANDARDS

- + A child under the age of 18 is able to follow BKT on Facebook and Instagram as it is a public account, but BKT will not follow them back.
- + If a young person under the age of 18 contacts us on a private message we will provide a blanket response saying 'saying "Thank you for contacting us! We really value your what you have to say :) We will address your question in the public forum of our page. So, stay tuned!" This to be pastoral in our response but also ensuring that we are not engaging in private conversations with children online.
- + If a young person under the age of 18 discloses information indicating that they or someone else are at risk of abuse, we will respond by directing them to contact the relevant protection agency e.g. the police. If this person is known by anyone at BKT or if we are aware of their church, the relevant adult with a duty of care for that child will be contacted.
- + A BKT worker or volunteer must never initiate a private conversation online with youth and children, and if it happens, it should always occur with at least one other worker as part of the conversation.
- + BKT staff members and volunteers must:
 - Be courteous and engage in respectful interactions
 - Be knowledgeable about and practice privacy principles
 - Be knowledgeable about and take care in social networking
 - Not knowingly transmit, retrieve or store any communication that is discriminatory, harassing, derogatory, obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic, defamatory or threatening
 - Consider if online communication is the best form for the communication
 - Be mindful that any post may be perceived by the reader as the voice of BKT and opinions given may be thought of as coming from BKT.
 - Not send any online communication that attempts to hide their identity or represent oneself as someone else.
 - Not connect online or follow youth on social media.
- + BKT staff members and volunteers should not seek contact details of minors but direct communication to the ministry or school leader that we are working with.
- + BKT staff members and volunteers are expected to follow the following online guidelines:
 - Set an example of good behaviour, in verbal and visual form
 - Posting written comments, photos, or videos of a personal nature should be done with the utmost care by thinking about how public online engagement may be seen by others.
 - Ensure that privacy settings are up to date and take steps to maximise privacy.

- Do not write negatively about other people or organisations.
- BKT workers and volunteers should not ‘friend’ minors on social media, and should not respond to friendship requests from minors who BKT has been involved with.

PART 2: ONLINE BEHAVIOURS EXPECTED IN THE BKT ONLINE COMMUNITY

All members of the BKT Instagram and Facebook must abide by the following expectations:

- + Online community members should not expect or seek a particularly deep or active online relationship with BKT
- + Online community members should not seek to communicate at-length with BKT in an online setting. Long conversations, especially those of a personal or sensitive nature are always best had in another form.
- + Online community members should not seek to embarrass, defame, or implicate BKT or others by means in any inappropriate or illegal activity. All people engaging on these online forums must be respectful of one another online.
- + Youth should be aware that posts and interactions they make online may be seen by BKT staff members, who then may have a responsibility to report them or take other action as a result.
- + There is zero tolerance for bullying or slander on the BKT online forums and all inappropriate comments will be deleted and reported.

REPORTING ONLINE BEHAVIOUR OF CONCERN

If information that discloses a failure by a BKT staff member or volunteer or a young person whom a BKT worker ministers to adhere to the standards and guidelines of this Code is encountered, then advice from the Board must be sought. If a BKT worker encounters information that requires immediate action, the leader must report the matter to the Co-Directors and if required, as mandatory reporting to the appropriate agency.

REVIEW OF THIS CODE

The Co-Directors and Board will review this Code of Conduct annually.

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