



Horsham Rural City
Council urban rural balance

Council Policy

CHILD SAFE

1. PURPOSE

This policy reflects the strong commitment of the Horsham Rural City Council, management, staff and volunteers to child safety and the establishment of Council as a child safe organisation. It provides an outline of the measures Council has developed to keep people safe from any harm, including abuse, and reflects Council's legislative responsibility in meeting the requirements of Child Safe Standards.

2. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Horsham Rural City Council is committed to providing and promoting child safe environments. Council has zero tolerance to child abuse and aims to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and secure and have fun. This includes the physical, emotional, cultural and social wellbeing of all children.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors, staff, volunteers, contractors, sub-contractors and individuals involved in Horsham Rural City Council services or activities.

This policy acknowledges that there is a continuum of abuse of children and views all such events, regardless of whether they are seen as 'harm' or 'abuse', as damaging.

4. BACKGROUND

In April 2012 the Victorian Government initiated the *Betrayal of Trust Inquiry*. From this, 15 recommendations were made including compulsory minimum standards for creating child safe environments.

In November 2015, the Victorian Parliament passed the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act* to introduce Child Safe Standards.

5. DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child - A person under the age of 18 who identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Abuse - Any act committed against a child that involves:

- neglect or abuse of a physical, emotional, psychological or cultural nature
- Physical violence
- Sexual offences

Child/children - A person under the age of 18

Child Safety Officer - A council employee with a specific responsibility for responding to any issues associated with child safety

Child safe organisation - An organisation which takes deliberate steps to protect children from physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and cultural abuse, and neglect. Child safety is proactively embedded in all areas of the organisation.

Failure to Disclose - When an adult has a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child they have an obligation to report it to police, (unless exemptions apply). Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.

Failure to Protect - Applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but did not act to protect the child. This is a criminal offence.

Harm - Describes an event that is seen as possibly less detrimental than 'abuse' but is clearly not in a person's best interest of promoting their safety and wellbeing.

What is child abuse

Emotional/psychological	Occurs when a person engages in inappropriate behaviours, such as rejecting, ignoring, humiliating, isolating, threatening or verbally abusing a child, or allowing others to do so. Because this kind of abuse does not leave physical injuries, it is often hidden and underestimated.
Grooming	Is a criminal offence which targets communication by an adult, including online communication, with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse.
Neglect	Is failing to meet a child's basic needs, such as providing adequate food, drink, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene and medical attention.
Physical	Is intentionally causing, or threatening to cause, physical injury to a child, or inadvertently causing injury as a consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.

<p>Racial, cultural, religious abuse</p>	<p>Is conduct that demonstrates contempt, ridicule, hatred or negativity towards a child because of their race, culture or religion. It may be overt, such as direct racial vilification or discrimination, or covert, such as demonstrating a lack of cultural respect (attitude and values) and awareness (knowledge and understanding) or failing to provide positive images about another culture.</p>
<p>Sexual abuse</p>	<p>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 fondling genitals, masturbation, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis or any other object, voyeurism and exhibitionism.</p>
<p>Sexual exploitation</p>	<p>Is considered a specific form of sexual abuse because children, by virtue of their age and development, are unable to give informed consent. It can include children being involved in sexually exploitive relationships, exposing a child to pornography, receiving money, goods, drug or favours in exchange for sex with one or more adults, or being exploited in more 'formal' forms of sex work.</p>

6. PRINCIPLES

6.1 Our Children

Council staff and volunteers encourage children to express their views. As an organisation and as individuals we listen to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them. We actively encourage all children who use our services to 'have a say' about things that are important to them.

Wherever applicable, we teach children about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents, raise with us. We do this by actively soliciting feedback from children and parents on their experiences interacting with Council.

6.2 Valuing diversity

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- seek appropriate staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.

6.3 Recruitment

Council applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers. We interview and conduct referee checks on all staff and volunteers and require police checks and Working with Children Checks for relevant positions. Our commitment to Child Safety and our screening requirements are included in all relevant advertisements.

6.4 Supporting staff and volunteers

Council seeks to attract and retain the best staff and volunteers. We provide support and supervision so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated. We have developed a Code of Conduct of behaviour by adults towards children to provide guidance to our staff and volunteers, all of whom receive training on the requirements of the Code.

6.5 Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

Council will appoint two appropriate Child Safety persons with the specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children. Details of the appointed Child Safety persons will be made available on the intranet and internet. The associated complaints processes are detailed in the Reporting a Child Safety Concern or Complaint Procedure.

6.6 Privacy

While safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern, Council is committed to protecting an individual's right to privacy. All personal information considered during the process of report or investigation will be dealt with in accordance with Council's privacy policy unless there is a legislative requirement to disclose.

6.7 Risk Management

Council recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and this informs all associated policies, procedures and activity planning. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, Council proactively manages the risks of abuse to the physical, emotional, cultural and social wellbeing of all children.

7. COMMUNICATION

Internet, intranet, posters, handouts, annual report, staff and volunteer induction /guidance documents and material (including Code of Conduct)

8. RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Director Community Services

The policy will be reviewed every two years and Council undertakes to see views, comments and suggestions from children, parents, carers, staff and volunteers.

9. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document	Location
Victorian Child Safe Standards	Internet (Victorian Department of Human Services)
Betrayal of Trust Inquiry Report	Internet (Victorian Department of Justice)
<i>Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012</i>	Internet
<i>Working with Children Act 2005</i>	Internet
HRCC Working with Children Policy and Procedure	Intranet
<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i>	Internet
<i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i>	Internet
HRCC Code of Conduct of Behaviour by Adults Towards Children	Intranet
HRCC Staff Code of Conduct	Intranet
Reporting a Child Safety Concern or Complaint Procedure	Intranet
United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child	Internet
Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities	Internet
Reporting a Child Safety Concern Procedure	Intranet

10. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
01	20 November 2017	Council	New Policy	20 November 2020

Flowchart: Child safety reporting process



