



# Dance Stream Victoria Child Safe Policy

**This Child Safe Policy was approved by Rebecca Bickerton. It is due to be reviewed on 19/01/23.**

**This policy was written to demonstrate the strong commitment of Dance Stream Victoria's management, staff and volunteers to child safety, and to provide an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone safe from any harm, including abuse.**

## Context and Legislation

This policy has been developed in line with Victorian legislation, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (VCSS). The VCSS are compulsory minimum standards for ensuring organisations are able to detect and respond to child safety concerns and more effectively prevent risk from occurring.

## Commitment to child safety

All children who come to Dance Stream Victoria have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and have fun.

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, children and individuals involved in our organisation.

Dance Stream Victoria is committed to the principles of cultural safety and inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and to the safety and inclusion of children with

disability, and we recognise that these principles support the safety of all children.

## Key Terms Related to Child Abuse

In order to create a child safe environment, it is important for management, employees and and volunteers to understand the various ways in which child abuse can occur. The following section defines the various forms of abuse and harm relevant to this policy. As per the Dance Stream Victoria Code of Conduct, management, employees and volunteers of Dance Stream Victoria must not engage in any of the following forms of abuse or harm and must report any concerns of abuse or harm to the police or Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

### *Forms of Abuse:*

- **Emotional Abuse** - Occurs when a person is subjected to behaviours or actions aimed at preventing or controlling their behaviour, with the intent to cause emotional harm or fear through manipulation, isolation or intimidation. It can result in damage to

the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development. This may involve being repeatedly rejected, name-called or put down. It may involve being frightened by threats or subjected to continual coldness so that self-esteem, physical and emotional growth are affected.

- **Family Violence** - Witnessing family violence is a specific form of emotional or psychological abuse. Family violence is defined as violence between members of a family or extended family or those fulfilling the role of family in a child or young person's life. It includes behaviour that causes a child to hear or witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of family violence. Exposure to family violence places children and young people at increased risk of physical injury and harm and has a significant impact on their well-being and development.
- **Neglect** - Involves the failure to meet a child's basic needs, such as providing adequate food, drink, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene and medical attention to the extent that the child's health and development are, or are likely to be, placed at risk.
- **Physical Abuse** - Occurs when a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. This may take the form of punching, beating, shaking or otherwise physically harming a child.
- **Sexual Abuse** - Occurs when a person uses power, force or authority to involve a child in any form of sexual activity whether contact or non-contact. Sexual

abuse may involve: touching or fondling; obscene or suggestive phone calls/texts; exhibitionism and/or voyeurism; showing children or involving them in the production of pornographic images; penetration with penis, finger or other object into the mouth, anus or vagina.

- **Grooming** - The offence of grooming concerns predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity. The offence applies where an adult communicates by word or conduct with a child under the age of 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with the intention of facilitating a child's involvement in sexual conduct. Grooming does not need to involve any sexual contact or even discussion of sexual activity if it is deemed to have the purpose of facilitating sexual activity at a later time. The offence can be committed by any person aged 18 years or over.

#### *Related Terms:*

- **Cumulative Harm** - involves repeated and ongoing abuse and/or neglect which detrimentally impacts on a child's development and well-being.
- **Multi-dimensional Harm** - occurs where multiple abuse types are experienced at the same time, e.g. sexual abuse also involves physical and emotional abuse.
- **Sexually harmful behaviour in children** - refers to harmful behaviour perpetrated by a child (17 years of age or younger) to another child. Harmful sexual behaviours in children may be an indicator that they have experienced abuse or neglect. Where sexually harmful behaviour occurs, organisations have a duty of care to both children. Note that in

children under 10 years of age, such behaviour is usually referred to as *sexually problematic behaviour*.

### **Children's rights to safety and participation**

Dance Stream Victoria is a child-centred organisation.

Dance Stream Victoria actively seeks to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation.

Dance Stream Victoria values the voices of children and will act on concerns raised by children or their families in regard to their safety. Dance Stream Victoria includes the voices of children in the following ways:

- regular discussions with children that facilitate child-led conversation
- Ensuring that age-appropriate, accessible personal safety information is built into programs and activities
- Ensuring that children know that Dance Stream Victoria management, staff and volunteers take their opinions and concerns seriously

### **Valuing diversity**

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

- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families

- welcome children with disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- welcome same-sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse children and families
- have a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural difference
- commit to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities

### **Recruiting staff & volunteers**

Dance Stream Victoria applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers.

#### ***Deciding to recruit***

- Assess the level of contact and responsibility the role will have in regard to children.
- Working with Children Checks are required where roles have contact or responsibility for children and for roles that have influence or authority over children, such as leadership positions. Dance Stream Victoria must retain the details of Working with Children Checks and ensure that all Working with Children Checks are electronically linked to Dance Stream Victoria.
- Assess the qualifications and prerequisites required to ensure the staff are appropriately skilled for the role.
- Assess the training, guidance and supervision required for the position and the current resources available to meet these requirements.

## **Advertising**

- All positions are advertised with the Dance Stream Victoria Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
- Positions will clearly state the responsibilities with regard to children
- Prerequisite criteria will be listed for positions, e.g. Working with Children Check, training and qualifications
- Advertised positions will state that referee checks will be performed for shortlisted candidates

## **Selection**

- Where a position includes responsibility for children or is a position of leadership, interview questions will address experience and previous engagement with children and will gauge the applicant's attitudes and values toward children
- Before commencing in their role, successful applicants must sign the Dance Stream Victoria Child Safe Code of Conduct.
- Dance Stream Victoria will undertake 2-3 reference checks for all potential staff and will ask questions designed to assess candidates' suitability to work with children. Dance Stream Victoria must be assured the references are provided by the nominated individual.
- Where candidates have worked outside of Australia during the preceding 12 months, Dance Stream Victoria will require that they provide evidence of an international police check undertaken within 4 weeks of application to Dance Stream Victoria.

## **Supporting staff and volunteers**

Dance Stream Victoria is committed to ensuring that all staff receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety.

Dance Stream Victoria assists its staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decision-making and to promote a culturally safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Mandatory training requirements for Dance Stream Victoria staff are as follows:

- induction: Child Safe Code of Conduct and Child Safe Policy
- Identifying indicators of child abuse
- How to respond to disclosures of child abuse
- Complaint, Code of Conduct breach and child safety incident reporting procedures

Training will be provided to update ongoing staff at 12 month intervals thereafter. Management will maintain a register of training to ensure all staff have had access to appropriate training.

## **Child Safety Person**

Dance Stream Victoria has one Child Safe Person (the Dance Stream Victoria Director) who will have specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children.

## Reporting Procedures

In the event of an incident or expected incidents, the steps below will be followed:

- If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse, the first responsibility is to ensure that the child or children are safe and the risks of further abuse or harm are mitigated. If the incident or allegation of abuse could involve criminal conduct, the matter must be immediately reported to Victoria Police. If there is any ongoing risk to a child or children, then the staff member or volunteer should immediately call 000. It may also be appropriate to notify the Department of Health and Human Services if there is a belief that a child is in need of protection. This may involve notifications to the police or Child Protection.
  - The staff member, volunteer or contractor with the concern will coordinate reporting the matter, alongside management, to relevant authorities, i.e. DHHS and/or Police. It is best practice for the person who first received the disclosure/identified the concern to make the report. Where child protection concerns relate to intra-familial (within the family) risk, they must be reported to the DHHS in the first instance. Where child protection concerns involve professionals or other alleged perpetrators, they should be reported to the Police.
  - Should the child protection concern relate to risk posed by a Dance Stream Victoria staff member, volunteer or contractor, management will have overall responsibility for dealing with the matter and must follow reporting procedures. Internal reporting procedures must never delay the reporting of child protection concerns to the DHHS and/or Police. Should management be unavailable, the employee, volunteer or contractor who has formed the belief that a child is at risk, must make the report directly to DHHS or Police without delay, i.e. within 24 hours.
- All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or a child.
  - When an allegation of child abuse is received, all mandatory reporting requirements must be met, including reporting to:
    - Police
    - Department of Health and Human Services
    - The Commission for Children and Young People under the reportable conduct scheme
    - Other government departments or regulators as appropriate.
  - Staff members, volunteers and contractors will ensure that, where concerns arise, confidentiality is maintained. Considerations need to be given to ensuring that communication does not compromise the safety and well-being of all parties and it does not compromise any subsequent investigation processes.
  - Any person who believes, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection may report their concerns. If a report is made in good faith, the reporter cannot be held legally liable, regardless of the outcome of the notification. Permission is not needed from parents or care-givers to make a report and they do not need to be informed that a report

is being made. Reports can be made anonymously.

### **Record keeping and incident monitoring**

Dance Stream Victoria is committed to ensuring all records are managed.

All reports of child abuse shall be recorded within the incident reporting system.

Dance Stream Victoria, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, will maintain confidentiality and privacy for children and families in accordance with legislation.

Records will be retained in line with the recommendations from the Office of Public Records.

Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by Dance Stream Victoria management to ensure that they are appropriately managed.

Risks to child safety that are identified in complaints and reports of child abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan

### **Risk management**

We recognise the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policies, procedures and activity planning. Dance Stream Victoria has a duty of care to prevent harm before it occurs and will do

its utmost to assess and mitigate risks in relation to its activities and programs.

### **Reviewing this policy**

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

### **Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct**

Dance Stream Victoria will enforce this policy and the Code of Conduct. Following any non-compliance we will instigate a review that may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or other corrective action.