



Child Safe Policy

Policy owner:	Assembly / Association Committee
Policy approved:	Assembly
Policy last updated:	
Applies to:	All Al-Anon Family Groups Victorian Southern Area (AFGSA) staff, volunteers and members. This policy applies to all activities within the organisation which involve, result in, or relate to contact with children.
Policy context:	This policy is intended to ensure that the AFGSA Association Committee and Staff (including Service Committee, members, volunteers and contractors) are aware of the organisational wide commitment to create and maintain a child safe environment that meets the Child Safe Standards introduced by the Victorian Government.
Legislation, regulations, standards and/or other external requirements:	Child Safe Standards made under the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)</i> Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) guidance

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 AFGSA is committed to complying with the Child Safe Standards (**Standards**) introduced by the Victorian Government, setting out the compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children and young people (or are used by children and young people), to help protect them from harm. The Standards are administered by the Commission for Children and Young People (**CCYP**).
- 1.2 This policy is intended to ensure that all employees, members, volunteers and contractors engaged by AFGSA are aware of the organisational wide commitment to create and maintain a child safe environment that meets the Standards.

2. Application of Policy

This policy applies to all employees, members, volunteers and contractors and to the broad range of situations where interaction with children and young people may occur in the delivery of AFGSA's services, including those children and young people in Alateen programs and activities.

3. AFGSA's Commitment

- 3.1 This policy affirms AFGSA's commitment to providing a child safe and child friendly environment for all children and young people who engage with AFGSA's service.
- 3.2 AFGSA recognises, respects and promotes its responsibilities to keep children safe from abuse from those associated with AFGSA, and commits to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children as a first priority. AFGSA values diversity and will not tolerate child abuse or discriminatory practices.

3.3 AFGVSA pays particular attention to the safety and cultural safety of the following groups of children, in recognition of their increased vulnerability, and diverse and unique identities and experiences:

- 3.3.1 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- 3.3.2 children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- 3.3.3 children with a disability;
- 3.3.4 children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex and
- 3.3.5 children in and out of home care and youth justice.

4. AFGVSA's Approach to Child Safety

4.1 In continuing to implement and promote a child safe system of work, AFGVSA will:

- 4.1.1 develop an environment in which children feel listened to, valued and their concerns are acted upon, including encouraging and allowing children to participate in decisions important to them;
- 4.1.2 consult as appropriate with staff, volunteers and other parties, including guardians, families and children;
- 4.1.3 proactively assess and manage the risk of abuse and harm to children who interact with AFGVSA, including through its support meetings and services, and in online environments;
- 4.1.4 take a proactive approach to child safety, including fostering a culture of openness that supports all staff, volunteers and members to report any concerns of child safety;
- 4.1.5 report suspected Child Abuse promptly to the appropriate authorities in accordance with applicable policies and laws;
- 4.1.6 ensure children know the options available to them if they are concerned or feeling unsafe, and foster an environment where children are safe to raise such concerns;
- 4.1.7 recruit staff and volunteers who are suitable to work with children and provide them with high quality training, supervision and professional development;
- 4.1.8 have policies, procedures and supports in place to reflect these commitments, and review these on a regular basis; and
- 4.1.9 treat any complaints, suspected or actual breaches of this Policy, and any suspected near misses as significant matters requiring prompt attention to identify reporting obligations, and to identify any deficiencies in AFGVSA's procedures.

5. Child Safety Code of Conduct

All staff, volunteers and members are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who engage with AFGVSA. All staff, volunteers and members are expected to act in accordance with AFGVSA's Child Safety Code of Conduct in their physical and online interactions with children and young people under the age of 18 years.

6. Recruitment and Training

- 6.1 AFGVSA's recruitment procedure, including advertising, referee checks and staff, volunteers and members pre-employment screening, has an emphasis on child safety and wellbeing in line with its commitment to promote child safety. AFGVSA has sound recruitment and selection processes, to ensure the recruitment of suitable staff, volunteers and members to minimise the risk of recruiting individuals who may commit Child Abuse. All staff, volunteers and members must have current Working with Children Checks to support the ongoing culture of child safety.
- 6.2 All AFGVSA staff, members, specific volunteers may be required to provide a current police check at the time of employment and may be required to update this information from time to time.
- 6.3 AFGVSA is committed to ensuring that staff, members, volunteers have access to appropriate induction and ongoing training in relation to their child safety responsibilities, including AFGVSA's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures, external reporting obligations (e.g. mandatory reporting) and the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

7. Reporting Child Safety Concerns or Incidents

- 7.1 It is a community-wide responsibility to report Child Abuse. All adults in Victoria and Tasmania with a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child have a legal obligation to report this to police and failure to do so is a criminal offence.¹ In Victoria, the reporting obligation applies to a person under 16 years of age. In Tasmania, the reporting obligation applies to a person under 18 years of age.²
- 7.2 All complaints and 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 concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly and in a way that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The AFGVSA Child Safety Officer must be notified of any child safety or wellbeing complaint.
- 7.3 AFGVSA also works to ensure all children and young people, families, staff, members and volunteers understand their obligations and know who to tell if they observe abuse, are a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

¹ More information is available at <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>;
<https://www.health.tas.gov.au/health-topics/child-and-youth-health/child-safety-and-wellbeing/how-report-safeguarding-concern>

<https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1997-028> - Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 (Tas)

- 7.4 If an AFGVSA staff, member or volunteer has a reasonable belief that Child Abuse may have occurred, then they must report the incident to the AFGVSA Child Safety Officer (or Association President) directly and immediately. AFGVSA has an obligation to notify the CCYP of any allegations that reportable conduct may have occurred, within three business days of receiving the notification³.
- 7.5 A person could form a reasonable belief if, for example, a child tells them about abuse, they witness victim behaviours or signs of abuse, or another adult tells them they suspect abuse but is unwilling to report it.
- 7.6 If the incident potentially involves a criminal offence or there is concern about the immediate safety of a child, the incident must also be reported to the local police station or by calling 000 (Triple Zero). If reasonably practicable, you should consult with the AFGVSA Child Safety Officer (or Association President) before contacting police.
- 7.7 The AFGVSA Child Safety Officer (or Association President) can be contacted by email at childsafety@alanon-vsa.com or by telephone AFGVSA office on 03 9629 8900 or Helpline 1300 252 696.

8. Child Safety Complaints Handling Procedure

- 8.1 If the incident potentially involves a criminal offence or there is concern about the immediate safety of a child, the incident must be reported to Victoria Police/Tasmanian Police in the first instance. For such incidents, do not follow this complaint handling procedure until and only if Victoria Police/Tasmanian Police have finalised their inquiries (or confirmed that AFGVSA Association is able to commence its own investigation).
- 8.2 Where it has been deemed appropriate by police, and if considered appropriate by the AFGVSA Committee, an internal investigation may be conducted by the AFGVSA Child Safety Officer or Associate Committee President, taking care not to jeopardise any police or child protection investigation. All staff, members, and volunteers must cooperate with the investigation.
- 8.3 Where a staff member receives a complaint relating to child safety, they should follow the below procedure:
 - 8.3.1 Notify the Child Safety Officer and/or Association President.
 - 8.3.2 If appropriate, invite the complainant to a meeting at time and location that is convenient for all, preferably away from children unless their presence is necessary (or the complainant is a child or young person). If the complainant is a child, make sure the parent or guardian is also present.
 - 8.3.3 Assure the complainant that confidentiality will be maintained.
 - 8.3.4 Actively listen to the complaint and take detailed notes.
 - 8.3.5 Ask open-ended questions so as to obtain all the facts, in a neutral and impartial manner. The following questions may be appropriate:
 - (a) can you tell me what happened from the start?

³ *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*, s. 16M

- (b) do you remember when and where the incident occurred?
- (c) do you remember any specific details?
- (d) do you remember who was there, and did anyone else see this happen?

8.3.6 Don't promise any particular action that may be unreasonable or outside your scope of responsibility.

8.3.7 Ask the complainant (or if the complainant is a child, their parent or guardian) whether they have any suggestions for a solution moving forward.

8.3.8 Maintain regular communication with the complainant (and/or their parent or guardian) throughout the complaint investigation process. Keep a record of any further telephone conversations or emails sent.

8.3.9 Follow this process with the respondent and any other persons involved to gain their perspective on the matter.

8.3.10 Where resolution is achieved, arrange a further meeting with the complainant and the respondent to conclude the matter, ensuring everyone involved is comfortable with the resolution.

8.3.11 In the event the complaint cannot be resolved, advise the complainant where they can escalate their concerns.

8.4 **Evaluation and lessons learned.**

8.4.1 After concluding an investigation into any complaint, take the opportunity to summarise the lessons learned to improve the service and make note of any recommendations to amend the procedures if necessary.

9. **Definitions**

Child means a child or young person under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse means:

- a sexual offence or sexual misconduct committed against, with, or in the presence of a child;
- an offence committed against a child under s 49M (1) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic), such as grooming;
- physical violence committed against, with, or in the presence of a child;
- any behaviour that causes serious or significant emotional or psychological harm; or
- serious or significant neglect of a child.⁴

CCYP means the Commission for Children and Young People.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and

⁴ Section 3, Definitions – child abuse, *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic).

can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

10. Consequences of Breaching the Child Safety Policy

A breach of the Child Safe Policy by AFGVSA staff, members and volunteers may result in disciplinary action being taken against them, including possible termination of employment and/or cessation of involvement with the organisation.

11. Contacts

For questions about this policy, contact the Child Safety Sub-Committee Chairperson by email at ChildSafetySC@alanon-vsa.com or by telephone AFGVSA office on 03 9629 8900.

Documents related to this policy	
Related policies	Child Safety Code of Conduct Alateen Safety and Behavioural Requirements Document
Forms, record keeping or other organisational documents	Policy Register
Reviewing and approving this policy	
Review of policy	Association
Approving policy and policy changes	Assembly
Frequency	Annually

Policy reviews and version tracking			
Review	Date Approved	Approved by	Next Review Due
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