

Child Safe Policy



Our Commitment to Child Safety

Emerald Centre for Hope and Outreach Inc (ECHO) is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

ECHO is committed to preventing child abuse, identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.

ECHO has robust recruitment practices to reduce the risk of child abuse by staff and volunteers.

ECHO is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We have specific policies and procedures in place that support our management committee members, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk, phone 000.

Our Children

This policy is intended to empower children, who are vital and active participants at ECHO. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We promote diversity and acceptance at ECHO, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome and can participate equally.

Our Staff and Volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at ECHO. Our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Child Safe Code of Conduct (Appendix A), which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. Staff and volunteers are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct and we welcome feedback from children and their families.

Training and Supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone at ECHO understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Our organisational culture aims for all management committee members, staff, volunteers, families and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the safety of all children.

New staff and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand ECHO's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to ECHO's Child Safe Code of Conduct for information about appropriate behaviour at Appendix A). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Fair procedures for staff and volunteers

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form (See Appendix 2). All records are securely stored in password protected files. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

Legislative responsibilities

ECHO takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

Failure to disclose: 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 Victoria Police.

Mandatory reporting: Any management committee members, staff or volunteers who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties.

Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

Reportable conduct: The ECHO CEO must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee or volunteer towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation.

Duty of care: If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have 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.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

ECHO takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal with allegations appropriately. 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 include:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour 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 behaviour

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will give staff, volunteers, families and children the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Appendix A: ECHO Child Safe Code of Conduct

All management committee members, staff and volunteers of Emerald Centre for Hope and Outreach Inc (ECHO) are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour by adults towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

All management committee members, staff and volunteers of ECHO are responsible for supporting and promoting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- Adhering to ECHO's child safe policy and upholding ECHO's commitment to child safety
- Taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- Listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they have stated that they or another child have been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another child
- Treating everyone with dignity and respect
- Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- Promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability
- Modelling appropriate adult behaviour in an open and transparent way
- Respecting the privacy of parents and children by only disclosing personal information in line with ECHO's Privacy Policy
- Where child abuse is suspected, ensuring that children are safe and protected from harm as quickly as possible
- Reporting any allegations of child abuse to ECHO's management and ensuring that any allegation is reported to the Victoria Police or Child Protection
- Understanding and complying with all reporting and/or disclosure obligations, including mandatory reporting and reportable conduct
- Encouraging children to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them
- Ensuring that any group activities for children have a minimum supervision ratio of 1 appropriately experienced adult for every 15 children for regular programs, and 1 appropriately experienced adult for every 8 children for excursions or camps.
- Making sure that activities are thoroughly planned and that responsibilities are known in advance.
- Understanding that photographs of children can only be used for promotion of ECHO programs if there is written parental consent.

Management committee members, staff and volunteers must not:

- Develop any 'special' relationships with children that may be seen as favouritism or amount to 'grooming' behaviour including through the provision of gifts or inappropriate attention.
- Exhibit behaviours or engage in activities with children that may be construed as unnecessarily physical.
- Put children at risk of abuse.
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves such as toileting or changing clothes.
- Engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children.
- Use inappropriate language in the presence of children.
- Express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children.
- Discriminate against any child, including on the basis of age, gender, sexuality, race, cultural or disability.
- Have any contact (including online or via telephone) with a child or their family outside of our organisation without the knowledge and/or consent of the ECHO program coordinator or ECHO CEO.
- Ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of child abuse.

By observing these standards, you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code of conduct to ECHO's management. Failure to comply with this code of conduct will be investigated by ECHO and may result in disciplinary action.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, you will phone 000.

I agree to adhere to this code of conduct:

Name (Print):

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B: ECHO Incident Reporting Form

Date of Report	
Name of Reporter	
Name of person(s) involved in the incident	
Time and date of incident	
Exact location of the incident	
Describe what happened, including events leading up to and following the incident (if appropriate)	
Details of any injuries (if applicable)	
Actions taken and/or follow up required	
Names and contacts of any witnesses	
Signature of Reporter	
Date the CEO was notified	