

Child Safety Policy

Introduction

All staff, tutors, parents and volunteers share responsibility for the wellbeing and safety of children. The Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre has zero tolerance for child abuse and is committed to acting in the best interests of children and keeping them safe at all times.

Commitment

The Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre and its Board are committed to:

- promoting child safety in its environment
- ensuring the safety and best interests of the children in its care, taking into account children of cultural and linguistic diversity and those with disabilities
- a zero tolerance to child abuse
- actively working to empower children in the centre
- implementing and continuously improving procedures and systems that promote and influence an organisational culture of child safety and that provides a safe environment for children.

We will ensure child safety by balancing expectations while complying with legal obligations. It is not about creating an atmosphere of suspicion. It is the role of the Board and the Centre Manager to monitor SHNC's adherence to this policy. This will be done by:

- ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at Board meetings
- having the Centre Manager and other responsible staff report regularly to the Board
- consideration by the Centre Manager, responsible staff members and the Board of areas for continual improvement.

Recruitment

SHNC will implement recruitment processes that will assist in the effective selection of suitable personnel, including staff, volunteers and tutors.

These processes will ensure:

- new and existing staff, volunteers and tutors whose role involves interaction with children understand the importance of child safety and are aware of SHNC's policies and procedures

- each job or category of job that involves child-connected work has a clear statement, which includes the job's requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and the essential or relevant qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety
- compliance with policy for recruitment and selection of staff for obtaining, verifying and recording information about a person whom it proposes to engage to perform child-connected work, including processes for screening and background checks
- induction of new staff, volunteers and contractors into the Centre's policies, codes, practices and procedures governing child safety and child-connected work
- a staff member's continuing suitability for child-connected work is regularly monitored and assessed.

All applicants for positions that involve child-connected work for SHNC must be informed about the Centre's child safety practices and its Child Safety Code of Conduct.

SHNC will implement practices that enable the Centre Manager and the Board to be satisfied that people engaged in child-connected work for the Centre perform appropriately in relation to child safety.

Procedures for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will implement and continually improve its procedures for responding to and reporting suspected abuse of a child currently in its care or that occurred in the past. SHNC will also implement practices and programs that will support, encourage and enable Centre staff, parents and children to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters.

Our procedures will be based on the following:

- complying with mandatory reporting laws and obligations imposed by the criminal law to report a belief that child abuse may have occurred
- ensuring any situation is handled appropriately
- reporting concerns of child abuse to the Victoria police and relevant authorities
- providing support to the person/s making allegations of child abuse
- treating all parties involved in an allegation of child abuse fairly and consistently
- clarity around who should notify any concerns and who to notify within SHNC
- what processes should be followed during and after an investigation
- ensuring that reviewing and improving our processes is continuous
- procedures will be easily accessible for all persons within SHNC and they will be simple and easy to understand for children.

Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse, by:

- ensuring their situation is treated confidentially and with sensitivity
- providing such other support or assistance as may be reasonable.

Reducing or removing risks of child abuse

Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will implement appropriate policies and practices for the early identification and response to risks of abuse in its physical and online environment. Such policies and practices will:

- promote understanding by all personnel of its expectations in relation to behaviour and conduct when interacting with children and the consequences of failing to abide by those expectations
- seek to achieve ongoing risk assessment to identify and mitigate risk in the Centre's physical and online environment, taking into account the age and needs of the children, the nature of the activities undertaken at the Centre and the particular risks they might present
- provide for ongoing training, education and support for all Centre personnel in relation to understanding child abuse, identifying risks and areas for improvement, the Centre's policies and practices for reporting concerns of child abuse and how to respond
- require appropriate human resource policies for appraisal and assessment of personnel in relation to compliance with their child safe obligations.

Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will implement practices that increase the awareness within the Centre of the need for our internal systems to protect children.

Promoting child empowerment and participation

The Centre Manager and the Board are responsible for developing strategies to deliver appropriate education about:

- standards of behaviour for children attending SHNC
- healthy and respectful relationships
- resilience
- child abuse awareness and prevention.

Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will ensure that the prevention approaches it adopts for its students will be focused on initiatives that build their awareness and encourage them to disclose behaviour that makes them feel unsafe.



Communication

The SHNC community will be informed about this policy. It will be publicly available. It will be available on the SHNC website and communicated in the Centre's newsletters, personnel induction programmes and during recruitment and enrolment processes for staff, tutors and volunteers (where applicable).

All Board members, staff, volunteers and tutors of Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre will be made aware of this policy and the Centre's commitment to child safety.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed annually or more often as circumstances require.