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| Good Practice Bulletin |
| Spotlight on Child Safe StandardsOffice of Professional Practice, Issue 4, September 2017 |

# Chief Practitioner’s welcome

# https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CT_R-HeUwAArKqK.jpg Tracy Beaton

As many of you will be aware, the Victorian Government introduced the Child Safe Standards (the Standards) in January 2016 in response to the Victorian Parliament’s Betrayal of Trust Inquiry. The purpose of the Standards is to improve the way organisations, including Child Protection, prevent and respond to child abuse in organisations, as we were confronted with in the Betrayal of Trust inquiry.

The Standards provides a framework for Child Protection to consider our existing policies, procedures and practice through a child safety lens with the aim of protecting children from harm, ensuring that the abuse of children is not tolerated in our organisation and that child safety is everyone’s business across our Child Protection workforce.

In this bulletin, you will find the Standards together with the three overarching principles which underpin the Standards. I encourage you to consider the discussion prompts as a starting point for reflection, perhaps within supervision or team meetings, about how you understand these principles and standards as they apply to the Child Protection workforce. Further detail about the Standards can be found on the [department’s website](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies%2C-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards-resources).

# The role of the Client Safety Practice Leader

As we explore the Standards, I would like to highlight a new role within the Office of Professional Practice, the Client Safety Practice Leader. This ‘whole-of-department’ role has been created to further strengthen the department’s safeguarding of children and families we work with.

The Client Safety Practice Leader is a point of contact for you if you are concerned about service provision to a client and want some assistance in working this through. The Client Safety Practice Leader may provide you with advice and coaching in how to have a conversation with your supervisor or senior manager about your concerns, or agree to liaise directly with senior managers about the safety of the client. In most circumstances, your contact with the Client Safety Practice Leader can remain confidential. If this is not possible due to the issues you raise then the Client Safety Practice Leader will talk to you about this.

The Client Safety Practice Leader can be contacted on 90966103 or clientsafepractice@dhhs.vic.gov.auThe role is directly accessible to all departmental staff to assist in addressing client safety issues or concerns.

# Principles underpinning the Child Safe Standards:

In applying each standard, organisations must reflect and embed the following three key principles in their approach:

* promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
* promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
	+ promoting the safety of children with a disability.

The principles recognise the challenges children from these groups may encounter in reporting incidents of abuse, and the importance of culturally safe and inclusive environments.

## The Child Safe Standards are:

1. Embedding a culture of child safety through effective leadership
2. Making a commitment to child safety with a policy or statement
3. Having a clear code of conduct that establishes appropriate behaviour with children
4. Screening, supervision and training for staff, to reduce the risk of child abuse
5. Clear processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
6. Identifying child abuse risks and ways to reduce them
7. Empowering children to share their feedback and experiences about feeling safe.

# How do the Child Safe Standards relate to child protection staff?

Child Protection responds to reported concerns about children at risk of significant harm from child abuse and neglect within their family, as legislated under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. Child Protection practice is governed by the best interests principles, including that the best interests of the child must always be paramount and that the need to protect the child from harm, protect their rights and promote their development must always be considered. The best interests case practice model provides the framework for Child Protection practice.

The Standards guide how, **as a workforce**, Child Protection will conduct its work with children in a way that promotes and provides for the child’s safety and wellbeing. Introduction of the Standards is also an opportunity for Child Protection staff, at every level, to think about how you can take your part in ensuring child safety within Child Protection.

While the first three standards are focussed at a departmental level, the remaining standards require departmental staff to consider their work practices, including how they work with children in their role. For Child Protection staff this should include:

* Understanding acceptable and unacceptable behaviours towards children and young people and knowing your responsibilities in relation to the [reportable conduct scheme](https://intranet.dhhs.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme).
* Talking to somebody, whether it’s your supervisor or the Client Safety Practice Leader, if you have concerns about the safety of a child and aren’t sure about how to progress these concerns.
* Making sure the children and young people you work with are aware that they can talk to you, their Child Protection case manager about any concerns they have about their safety as well as providing each child with information about other ways they can raise safety concerns. This should include providing the name and contact details of the Child Protection Case Planner to the children or young people you work with.
* Providing children and young people you are working with who are living in out-of-home care a copy of the [Charter for Children in out-of-home care](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/685643/2_charter-for-children-in-out-of-home-care_rights_flyer.pdf) and ensuring they understand their rights as outlined in the Charter.. The Charter also provides important information about organisations children and young people can contact if they are concerned that their right are not being upheld.
* Developing a cultural support plan for all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care that reflects how Aboriginal children are going to be actively supported to positively connect to their culture in a way that gives meaning to who they are.
* Ensuring the cultural needs and disability support requirements for children are actively discussed and planned for in care team meetings.
* Ensuring that a child or young person is regularly visited by a range of trusted people who can talk to them about their safety.

## Discussion Prompts:

I encourage you to consider including ‘child safety’ as a regular agenda item in supervision sessions, team meetings and staff meetings, focusing on the following:

* How you would go about reporting misconduct, reasonable belief or allegations of abuse of a child within the department. Are there any barriers you can identify that would prevent you from making a report? If so who can you talk to ensure you meet your obligations to report your concerns?
* How can we ensure that we receive active and regular feedback from the children we are working with regarding their safety?
* In your role, how can you encourage children to share their feedback and experiences about feeling safe?

On behalf of the Office of Professional Practice, we hope you have found this issue of the Good Practice Bulletin useful. If you have any feedback or ideas about what you would find useful to include, email *officeofprofessionalpractice@dhhs.vic.gov.au*

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