

<b>Child Safety Procedure</b>			
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## Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to describe how Distinctive Options meets the Victorian Child Safe Standards, creates a child safe organisation that protects the wellbeing of children and responds to child safety incidents. It aims to minimise the risk of abuse, ensure that all cases of suspected abuse and misconduct are handled thoroughly, ensure that staff and supports are safe, and ensure that all people are respected and valued.

## Scope

This policy relates to the Board, CEO, all staff, including volunteers, students and independent contractors, and all participants of Distinctive Options.

## Procedure

This procedure provides detailed information about managing child safety at Distinctive Options:

- Identifying Child Abuse
- Responding to Child Abuse
- Reporting Child Abuse
- Investigating Child Abuse
- Risk Management of Child Abuse
- Meeting the Victorian Child Safe Standards
- Responsibilities

## Identifying Child Abuse

### Duty of Care

All adults associated with Distinctive Options have a duty of care to support and protect children from any suspected or identified risk. Duty of care is breached if a person does something that a reasonable person would not do in a particular situation, fails to do something that a reasonable person would do, or acts and fails to act in a way that causes harm to someone else.

### Reasonable Belief

A reasonable belief is formed where a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. It does not require proof of abuse or neglect. Examples include:

- A child states that they have been abused or neglected
- A child states that someone they know has been abused or neglected
- Someone who knows the child states that the child has been abused or neglected
- A child shows signs of being abused or neglected, including non-accidental or unexplained injury, persistent neglect, poor care or lack of supervision
- There is known persistent family violence or parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the child's safety, stability or development

### Types of Child Abuse

<b>Physical abuse</b>	<p>Intentionally causing or threatening to cause physical injury to a child, as well as inadvertently causing injury as a consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child.</p> <p><i>Possible physical indicators:</i> bruises, cuts, burns or fractures</p> <p><i>Possible behavioural indicators:</i> wariness or distrust of adults, keeping arms and legs covered on hot days, fear of specific people or unexplained absences</p>
<b>Sexual abuse</b>	<p>Using power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity or putting the child in the presence of sexual behaviours that are inappropriate to the child's age and development. Sexual abuse may involve a range of sexual activity including exposure to pornography, grooming behaviour, fondling, masturbating in the presence of a child and penetration.</p> <p><i>Possible physical indicators:</i> presence of sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy or vaginal/anal bleeding or discharge</p> <p><i>Possible behavioural indicators:</i> sophisticated or unusual sexual behaviour or knowledge, difficulty sleeping, being withdrawn, difficulty interacting and forming relationships with peers, complaining of headaches or stomach problems, fear of specific people, wariness or distrust of adults, displaying aggressive behaviour</p>

<b>Emotional and psychological abuse</b>	<p>Engaging in inappropriate behaviours, such as rejecting, ignoring, threatening or verbally abusing a child, or allowing others to do so. Emotional and psychological abuse may take the form of name calling, put downs or continual rejection to the extent that it significantly damages the child’s physical, social, intellectual or emotional development. This also includes exposure to family violence.</p> <p><i>Possible physical indicators:</i> delays in emotional, mental or physical development, physical signs of self-harming</p> <p><i>Possible behavioural indicators:</i> low self-esteem, high anxiety, aggressing or demanding behaviour, being withdrawal, passive and/or tearful or self-harming</p>
<b>Neglect</b>	<p>Failing to provide a child with basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, hygiene, shelter, medical attention or supervision to the extent that the child’s safety, health and development is at risk.</p> <p><i>Possible physical indicators:</i> frequent hunger, malnutrition, poor hygiene, inappropriate clothing</p> <p><i>Possible behavioural indicators:</i> stealing food, aggressive behaviour, misuse of alcohol or drugs or academic issues</p>
<b>Grooming</b>	<p>Sex offenders typically plan in advance who they will target, how they will get close to the child and how to prevent the child from disclosing the abuse. They may isolate children, target vulnerable communities, create ‘special’ relationships with children and their families, or spend time with children outside of their job. Perpetrators may groom children or families to form a bond with the child or family. This may take place over days, weeks, months or years. Signs of grooming include purchasing children things of value, paying special attention to a particular child, asking children to keep secrets, showing pornography to or sexualising conversation with children, gradual touching (from appropriate to inappropriate) and the use of threats, bribes or physical violence.</p>

## **Responding to Child Abuse**

### Responding to Signs of Child Abuse

Staff must report their reasonable belief of child abuse immediately after forming that belief and on each occasion they become aware of any further reasonable grounds for the belief. Reports made about issues that may seem minor to staff (e.g. a bruise on the child's arm) should be made as per the [Incident Reporting and Response Procedure](#) as they can assist Child Protection to establish patterns of abuse or neglect. If another staff member disagrees about making a report and the staff member continues to hold the belief that the child is in need of protection, that person is required to make a report to Child Protection.

Each situation is different but standard actions should be employed, including:

- Make notes – record what was observed and then date/sign the entry. Do this on an ongoing basis as required.
- Consult colleagues – get support and advice from colleagues and supervisors. Compare notes and brainstorm possible strategies.
- Develop action plans based on procedures
- Talk to other agencies – collaborate or engage with the child's school, family support services, Child First and the Department of Education.
- Talk to the child – do this with respect for the child's need for privacy and confidentiality.
- Talk to the child's family – only if you believe it will not put the child in danger.

### Responding to a Disclosure

If a child makes a disclosure of abuse or neglect, the adult should stay calm, listen to the child and let the child know that they believe them. The adult should reassure the child that they did the right thing telling an adult and let them know what will happen next. The adult should not make promises that cannot be kept, show anger toward the alleged perpetrator, become overly emotional or push the child into providing details of the abuse.

Following the disclosure, the adult should record observations, follow the protocols listed below and consult with appropriate colleagues or support agencies if necessary. Observations of indicators of abuse should be documented as per the [Incident Reporting and Response Procedure](#).

### Where a Parent, Carer or Guardian Makes a Disclosure about a Staff Member or Volunteer

If a parent, carer or guardian says that their child has been abused whilst in care or raises a concern, staff should reassure the parent that Distinctive Options has processes to ensure all abuse allegations are taken very seriously and that these processes will be undertaken immediately.

The staff member receiving the disclosure should submit an incident report with the parent and take detailed notes about the incident (as per [Incident Reporting and Response Procedure](#)). The parent should be informed that information may need to be repeated to management and/or authorities and advised about the next steps. The parent should be provided with contact details for the Executive Manager Support Services. As required, the Executive Manager Support Services will complete the reporting process (e.g. Victoria Police, Child Protection, NDIS Commission).

The CEO will launch an investigation, in line with the Reportable Conduct Scheme. The possible risk of harm to children posed by an accused person should be evaluated and managed in respect of the child involved and any other children in the accused member of staff's home, work or community life. Management will act to manage and minimise the stress inherent in the allegations process.

Individuals should be informed of concerns or allegations as soon as possible and given an explanation of the likely course of action, unless there is an objection by Child Protection or the Police. Support will be offered to the staff member or volunteer as appropriate, including supervision, counselling and time off from work.

## Reporting Child Abuse

### Reporting Process

A family member, guardian, child or staff member develops a reasonable belief that a child is in danger. Observations of concerning indicators, probable non-accidental injuries or disclosures of sexual or physical abuse are documented as per the [Incident Reporting and Response Procedure](#).

If desired, the person with the reasonable belief speaks with the Coordinator or Executive Manager Support Services about the reasonable belief.

The person with the reasonable belief and the Coordinator or Executive Manager Support Services will determine whether a report should be made and who the belief should be reported to.

The Coordinator and Executive Manager Support Services will offer to support the child and their family, the person who made the report, and the accused (where the accused is a staff member).

Where required, an investigation will be conducted by the relevant authority and the outcome decided. Relevant family members, guardians, children or staff members will be notified of the outcome of the investigation.

Management will assess and review any risk management issues, complete the [Child Safety Allegations Register](#) and update policies and procedures where necessary.

### Making a Report to Victoria Police

Victoria Police provide a point of call where a child or young person is at imminent or serious risk. Victoria Police must be informed immediately where a child is deemed to be at imminent or serious risk or where there is an allegation of abuse by any adult associated with the service.

### Making a Report to Child Protection

Child protection provides services to children, young people and their families in order to protect children and young people from significant harm within their families. If an adult forms a reasonable belief that a child under the age of 18 is in need of protection they are legally required to make a report to either the Child Protection or the police. Disclosures of sexual or physical abuse or probable non-accidental injuries must always be taken seriously and require immediate disclosures to Child Protection. Staff should consult with the Coordinator and the Executive Manager Support Services before contacting Child Protection.

Confidentiality is provided for any adult who makes a report to Child Protection. Disclosure of the reporters name or any information likely to lead to their identification will be withheld, unless the reporter chooses to identify themselves to those involved in the report, consents in writing to the identity being disclosed or a court decides it is necessary to identify the reporter.

### Making a Report to Child FIRST

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Team) provide a community-based referral point to connect vulnerable children, young people and their families to services they need to protect and promote their health development. If an adult forms a reasonable belief that the concerns have a low-to-moderate impact on the child and the child's immediate safety is not at risk they should make a referral to Child FIRST. Upon receiving the referral, Child FIRST will conduct further assessment of the child and their family. Staff should consult with the Coordinator and the Executive Manager Support Services before contacting Child FIRST.

### Making a Report to the NDIS Commission

The NDIS commission must be informed of reportable incidents *that occur in connection with the provision of supports or services*. Reportable incidents include:

- Death a child with a disability
- Serious injury of a child with a disability
- Abuse or neglect of a child with a disability
- Unlawful sexual or physical contact or assault of a child with a disability
- Sexual misconduct committed against or in the presence of a child with a disability, including grooming for sexual activity

Where any reportable incident occurs, the Executive Manager Support Services must be informed immediately. They will:

1. Notify the NDIS Commission. Executive Manager Support Services to complete the immediate notification form via the portal within 24 hours of becoming aware of an incident or allegation
2. Submit a 5 day form. Executive Manager Support Services to complete the 5 Day form via the portal within five business days of becoming aware of an incident or allegation

Further details of the reporting process are described in the [Incident Reporting and Response Procedure](#)

### Advising Parents, Carers or Guardians of a Report

#### *Abuse or Neglect in the Child's Home*

Where a Child Protection or police report involves abuse or neglect from a child's family, adults associated with the Distinctive Options are not required to seek permission from parents, carers or guardians to make a report or to tell them that they have done so.



### *Abuse or Neglect Outside the Child's Home*

Where a Child Protection or police report involves abuse or neglect from an adult outside the family home or an adult associated with Distinctive Options, the child's parents, carers or guardians should be informed as soon as possible.

### Legal Issues Related to Reporting

**Failure to Disclose Offence:** All adults are required to report to police or child protection a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child under the age of 16 by an adult above the age of 18 (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so). Failure to do so may result in a maximum penalty of 3 years imprisonment.

**Failure to Protect Offence:** All adults with a position of authority in an organisation that works with children must protect children from any adult associated with the organisation that they feel is a substantial sexual abuse risk to children under the age of 16. Failure to do so may result in a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment.

**Professional Protection:** If a report is made on the basis of reasonable belief, the reporter will not be held legally liable for the eventual outcome of any investigation of the report.

**Reportable Conduct Scheme:** Distinctive Options has implemented the Reportable Conduct Scheme (the Scheme) as required by the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005. This scheme relates to the safety of children who access Distinctive Options and requires that risks to children are managed. The CEO must be made aware of and report any allegation of reportable conduct made against an employee or volunteer to the Commission for Children and Young People (within three business days). The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 states that the head of an organisation (CEO) is required to make the report to the Commission. Reportable conduct includes sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical violence, behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child, and significant neglect of a child. Appropriate investigation of allegations will be undertaken and outcomes will be reported to the Commission at the conclusion of the investigation (within 30 calendar days). More information about the Reportable Conduct Scheme including reporting processes can be found at [ccyp.vic.gov.au](http://ccyp.vic.gov.au).

### Staff Responsibilities after Making a Report

After making a report, ongoing responsibilities can include:

- Acting as a support person for the child or young person during interviews
- Attending a case conference
- Participating in case planning meetings
- Continuing to monitor the child's or young person's behaviour in relation to ongoing harm
- Providing written reports for case planning meetings or court proceedings
- Helping families make the changes required to keep children safe



## Reporting Process

Who can report?	Anyone! Children, staff, volunteers, etc.
What to report?	<p>Any child safety concerns, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disclosure of abuse or harm</li> <li>• Allegation, suspicion or observation</li> <li>• Breach of Code of Conduct</li> </ul>
<b>Call 000 if a child is in immediate danger</b>	
How?	Incident Report, face to face, letter, email, telephone call, meeting
Who to?	Coordinator, Executive Manager Support Services, CEO
What happens next?	<p>The Coordinator, Executive Manager Support Services or CEO will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer support to the child, the family, the person who reports and (where relevant) the accused staff member or volunteer</li> <li>• Initiate internal processes to ensure safety of the child and clarify the complaint</li> <li>• Decide, in accordance with legal requirements and duty of care, whether the matter should be reported to Victoria Police and/or Child Protection and make a report as soon as possible</li> <li>• If the incident is a Reportable Incident, notify the NDIS Commission as soon as possible</li> <li>• Document the incident internally according to the <a href="#">Incident Reporting and Response Procedure</a></li> </ul> <p>Where a report is made, the Coordinator, Executive Manager or CEO will, as necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct an investigation</li> <li>• Decide on the outcome</li> <li>• Notify relevant staff, volunteers, parents and children of outcomes</li> <li>• Review and update risk management plans and documents</li> <li>• Summarise learnings and make improvements to mitigate risk of re-occurrence</li> </ul>

Any queries or concerns about child safety at Distinctive Options should be reported to the Executive Manager Support Services. As at August 2023, this is Rick Dunn.

Email: [rick.dunn@d-o.com.au](mailto:rick.dunn@d-o.com.au)

Phone: 03 9740 7100

Address: 40 Macedon Street, Sunbury VIC 3429

Authority	Number	Role	When to Contact
<b>Child FIRST Referral and Support Teams</b>	Brimbank: 1300 138 180 Greater Bendigo: 1800 260 338 Hume: 1300 786 433	Family services practitioners experienced in assessing the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Child FIRST teams work closely with community-based Child Protection workers. A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need.	Contact Child FIRST where family dynamics may be impacting on a child's safety, stability or development and referral to support services would be beneficial (e.g. parenting problems, family conflict, isolation, social or economic disadvantage that impacts on children).
<b>Child Protection</b>	13 12 78	The lead agency responsible for the care and protection of children and may bring cases before the Children's Court and support orders granted by the Children's Court.	Contact Child Protection where there is suspicion on reasonable grounds that a child is at risk of significant harm (e.g. serious injury, disclosure of abuse, family violence, the caregiver is unable or unwilling to protect the child).
<b>Victoria Police</b>	000	Responsible for criminal investigations into alleged child abuse.	Contact Victoria Police in an emergency where there are urgent concerns for the child's health or life.
<b>Child Wise</b>	1800 991 099	Australia's leading child protection charity committed to the prevention and reduction of sexual abuse and exploitation of children around the world.	Contact Child Wise for child safety information and referrals.

## **Investigating Child Abuse**

Where external authorities have been contacted about a concern, allegation or incidence of child abuse, they may undertake an investigation. All employees must fully cooperate with any internal or external investigation that takes place.

Even when an external investigation is not required, an internal investigation may be conducted. Investigations are completed in accordance with the principles of natural justice and will remain confidential (as far as possible).

While an investigation is in progress, the employee against whom an allegation is made may be stood down until a decision is made about whether an offence has been committed. If the investigation concludes that an offence has been committed, or is likely to have been committed, disciplinary action will be taken proportionate to the severity of the offence.

Where a person is terminated from the organisation due to being found to have completed an offence, the CEO will be responsible for notifying the relevant regulatory bodies.

## **Risk Management of Child Abuse**

When identifying and assessing potential risks, Distinctive Options will:

- Identify risks in both the physical and online environments
- Recognise the different situations and specific activities which may expose children and young people to risk
- Consider circumstances where there is a low level of parental involvement, when there may be a greater likelihood or severity of risks and factors which may expose children to harm
- Include information regarding the child's history of trauma, socio-economic, familial, cultural or religious background and how these factors may make some children more risk-exposed than others
- Consider when children have a cognitive or physical disability, the ways in which their disability may expose them to greater risk of harm

Risks that may occur during support provision include:

<b>Accidental Harm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor supervision</li> <li>• Poor physical environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-risk activity</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical punishment</li> <li>• Restrictive practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punching, shoving, slapping, pushing, biting, kicking</li> </ul>
<b>Psychological/ Emotional Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threatening language</li> <li>• Bullying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentional ignoring and isolating</li> <li>• Shaming</li> </ul>
<b>Neglect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of supervision</li> <li>• Not providing adequate nourishment</li> <li>• Not providing adequate clothing or shelter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not meeting the child's specific physical or cognitive needs</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual abuse, assault and exploitation</li> <li>• Grooming</li> <li>• Singling a child out for a 'special' relationship</li> <li>• Inappropriate touching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature</li> <li>• Crossing professional boundaries</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural/Spiritual Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Racial or cultural vilification or discrimination</li> <li>• Lack of support to allow a child to be aware of and express their cultural identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of cultural respect</li> <li>• Use of positional power and control and using prayer/scripture as a means of manipulation</li> </ul>
<b>Online Abuse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abusive texts and emails</li> <li>• Hurtful messages, images or videos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimidating others online</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Harm, Dangerous or Violent Behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-inflicted physical harm</li> <li>• Intentional or unintentional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scratching, biting, hitting or head banging</li> </ul>

Risks that may occur at Distinctive Options include:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
No culture of child safety; lack of or minimal awareness and commitment to child safety	Possible x Major = High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child safety policy and procedures</li> <li>Child Safety Code of Conduct</li> <li>Identified risks managed</li> </ul>	CEO, Board, Executive Manager Support Services, Coordinators
Children exposed to risks during supports	Unlikely x Major = Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Safety Code of Conduct</li> <li>Road safety rules and licence restrictions followed</li> <li>Social media policy and procedure</li> <li>Record keeping/privacy policy and procedure</li> <li>Child safety training</li> </ul>	Coordinators, Staff, Volunteers
Recruitment of an inappropriate person	Unlikely x Major = Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WWCC and NDIS Worker Screening</li> <li>Robust interviews, reference checks and inductions</li> <li>Probation periods</li> <li>Child Safety Code of Conduct signed</li> </ul>	HR Business Partner, Executive Manager Support Services, Coordinators
Inappropriate behaviour is not reported and addressed	Unlikely x Severe = High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Safety Code of Conduct</li> <li>Clear child safety reporting procedures</li> </ul>	CEO, Executive Manager Support Services, HR Business Partner, Coordinators
Unquestioning trust of long term employees or norms	Possible x Major = High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear child safety reporting procedures</li> <li>Child safety training for Coordinators</li> </ul>	CEO, Executive Manager Support Services, Coordinators

Distinctive Options will manage these risks by:

Risk factor	Analysis	Controls
Activities (situational risk)	<p>Workers provide 1:1 supports in home and in the community with minimal to no supervision from other adults. Physical contact between workers and children occurs frequently during the delivery of supports. Personal care is provided to some children. Transport is often provided using the workers personal vehicle. These activities make it easier for child abuse or harm to occur or go undetected.</p>	Safety screening Induction by HRBP Child Safety Code of Conduct Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure Training in child safety
Physical environment (situational risk)	<p>The physical environment of support delivery is in the child's home and in the community. These environments make it easier for child abuse or harm to occur or go undetected.</p> <p>Children are at very minimal risk of being unsupervised in shared spaces with adults that are not from Distinctive Options.</p>	Safety screening Induction by HRBP Child Safety Code of Conduct Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure Training in child safety
Online environment (situational risk)	<p>Most child participants are unable to access the online environment in ways that could provide risk. Clear policies are in place for social media use for workers. The online environment current carries minimal risk that may make it easier for child abuse or harm to occur or to go undetected.</p>	HR Procedure Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure

Risk factor	Analysis	Controls
The children (vulnerability risks)	The characteristics of all children accessing supports involve an increased risk of abuse and harm, including physical and intellectual disabilities. Some children carry a history of trauma, abuse or neglect. Some children are living in foster or kinship care. Some children have mental or physical health issues. All of these factors make the children more vulnerable to abuse or harm.	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure
Our people (propensity risk)	Clear procedures are in place to ensure workers are screened for appropriateness to engage with children before providing supports to participants under 18, including reference checks, Working with Children Checks and NDIS Checks. This process is overseen by a single person – the HRBP – who ensure that staff are recruited according to procedures. There are no workers who have a known history of harmful behaviour towards children. A clear child safe code of conduct is in place that is signed by all workers who support children. All workers must declare that they have informed Services Victoria that they are working at Distinctive Options with their WWCC.	HRBP implements screening checks HRBP to complete annual child safety training
Our structures (institutional risk)	Support delivery is provided to less than 10% of participants and is not provided on site. This means it is often not seen as a key part of the organisation’s business which can increase the risk of child abuse and harm going undetected.	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure Management and Board to consider child safety training



Risk factor	Analysis	Controls
Our culture (institutional risk)	Policies and resources are in place to help workers understand and identify child abuse and harm. Due to the separation of ILS, child safety is not seen as a priority for all workers and minimal information is provided following the completion of workers induction. This can decrease the risk that child abuse and harm will be prevented, detected and/or stopped.	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure Regular communication with staff about child safety from HRBP Training delivery to key staff and workers who support children
Our policies and procedures (institutional risk)	Policies and resources are in place that are properly implemented and up to date, however they are not communicated to everyone. The HR Procedure describes recruitment practices, the Child Safety Code of Conduct establishes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour towards children with consequences for breaches, and the Child Safety Procedure clearly describes processes for reporting and responding to allegations of child abuse or harm and child safety concerns. Child safety is a topic in all worker inductions however there is minimal to no training and ongoing communication with staff about their role and responsibility to protect children from abuse and harm.	HR Procedure Child Safety Code of Conduct Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Child Safety Procedure Regular communication with staff about child safety from HRBP Training delivery to key staff and workers who support children

## **Meeting the Victorian Child Safe Standards**

Distinctive Options meets the Victorian Child Safe Standards. A description of how each standard is met is described below.

### Standard 1: Culturally Safe Environments

Distinctive Options is committed to the safety of Indigenous Aboriginal children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We acknowledge that a child's cultural identity is fundamental to their wellbeing and support the cultural needs of each child. Distinctive Options aims to provide information in a culturally sensitive, relevant and accessible manner. Distinctive Options will not tolerate discriminatory behaviours or practices from staff, students or families. Cultural and spiritual information is collected during the intake process by the Coordinator. This information is provided to staff on Supportability and taken into account when planning supports and choosing staff. Distinctive Options acknowledges the importance of land, culture and identity for children who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We are dedicated to supporting the many cultures children may bring and educating other people in our community about the importance of Indigenous cultures in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children will be provided with opportunities to practice self-determination as appropriate to their age and development with support from Indigenous adults and communities. Staff and volunteers must encourage and support children to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights. Staff and volunteers must actively support and facilitate participation and inclusion within the organisation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. Distinctive Options does not tolerate racism and the organisation will respond to any instances of racism.

### Standard 2: Leadership, Governance and Culture

Distinctive Options is committed to ensuring governance and leadership that prioritises child safety. Child safety is championed across all organisational levels. Disclosure is encouraged, action is taken and those who disclose are supported. Participation of all interested parties in child safety at Distinctive Options is encouraged. Distinctive Options is committed to the NDS Zero Tolerance initiative. The organisation will never tolerate or normalise abuse, neglect or exploitation. Distinctive Options promotes a culture that upholds the rights, dignity, welfare and safety of all persons with a disability, including children. All employees must sign the Code of Conduct that affirms their own commitment to Zero Tolerance.

### Standard 3: Child Empowerment

Distinctive Options believes each child should be empowered and taught about their rights. To achieve this, we aim to build their confidence and skills. Children are provided with choices and encouraged to take control over their lives. Staff assist and support children to make decisions about their body and their privacy. Children are provided with opportunities to be involved in planning supports, including choosing staff and activities. Staff must ensure that children are supported to develop, hold and express their personal views, beliefs and preferences.

Staff and coordinators must support children to participate in decisions that affect their lives, including choosing supports, activities and workers. Examples of how this can be achieved include:

- Listening to children
- Supporting children to express their views
- Providing children with information that is relevant and that they can understand
- Taking children's views into account and recording them
- Taking into account children's age, ability to understand and psychological state

#### Standard 4: Family Engagement

Distinctive Options recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time using their preferred contact method and are encouraged to raise any concerns that they have as per the [Feedback and Complaints Policy](#). We provide information to families and communities about our child safe policies and practices including through sharing information about this policy, our code of conduct and our child safety approach. Distinctive Options involves families and communities by:

- creating an inclusive environment for all families
- ensuring information is easy to understand and accessible
- seeking input on decisions affecting children and young people
- ensuring transparent complaints handling

#### Standard 5: Diversity and Equity

Distinctive Options values diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

- Welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families
- Offer children and families the opportunity to provide information about themselves through our intake and induction process, including any specific needs for support delivery
- Have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- Deliver supports that reflect the diversity of children, their interests and cultures
- Strive to reflect the diversity of our communities through representation in our staff and Management team
- Acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates throughout the service
- Have physical and online environments that actively celebrate diversity
- Commit to ensuring our facilities and online environments promote inclusion of children of all abilities

Distinctive Options understands that many children and families from refugee backgrounds have experienced trauma, dislocation and loss. We are dedicated to supporting children and families with difficult pasts and take the experiences of the family into consideration, however this will not diminish a child's right to be safe or our responsibility to protect children. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children will have their cultural perspectives and beliefs considered at all times, with language diversity accounted for, including the use of interpreters and translators as required.

Distinctive Options acknowledges that children with a disability are at an increased risk of abuse or neglect than the general population. We are dedicated to educating people about the rights of children with disabilities and improving the lives of these children and their families.

#### Standard 6: Suitable Staff and Volunteers

Distinctive Options employs staff and volunteers who are highly suitable for work with children.

Selection criteria requires applicants to have experience working with children, particularly with children who have a disability. The criteria clearly states the experience, qualifications, qualities and attributes that are expected and outlines the importance of child safety in our organisation.

Advertising is used to find staff to work for Distinctive Options. All advertising involving work with children includes a message about our commitment to child safety, our code of conduct and our child safe policy. Applicants are informed that they will be subject to rigorous reference and background checks.

All staff employed by Distinctive Options, including casual staff, volunteers and students are interviewed about their experience with and behaviour towards children. Open-ended questions are used to gain insight into the applicant's values, attitudes and understanding of professional boundaries and accountabilities, particularly involving children.

All staff are screened before beginning work with children. They are informed about screening in the selection criteria, advertising and interviews. All staff are required to undertake an NDIS Worker Screening Check, a Working with Children Check and referee checks. At least two referees are spoken to in order to establish how long the applicant and referee worked together, the specifics of the position, the applicant's personal strengths and weaknesses and whether the referee would hire the applicant again, particularly in a role that involves working with children who have disabilities and whether they have any concerns about the applicant working with these children.

All new staff and volunteers who work with children receive a copy of the organisation's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, the Child Safety Procedure and the Child Safety Code of Conduct and be guided through the application of these policies and procedures throughout the staff induction process.

New staff and volunteers are placed on a probation period where they are supported and closely supervised to ensure that they understand their role and that their behaviour towards children is appropriate. Probation periods are typically 6 months long. Following probation periods, ongoing supervision is provided as required.

#### Standard 7: Child-Focused Complaints Processes

Distinctive Options takes seriously all concerns, complaints and allegations of abuse or suspected abuse against any child or young person in the service. They will be handled sensitively, investigated in a timely manner, and with the safety of the child as the primary consideration. Children who disclose that they are feeling unsafe or being abused must be heard, must be taken seriously and must be treated with sensitivity and compassion. This includes:

- recognising that the safety of children is everyone's responsibility
- having a clear procedure for reporting concerns and allegations
- encouraging children to report if they feel unsafe or concerned
- making people within the organisation aware of their duty of care and legal responsibilities
- appropriately acting on concerns and complaints
- keeping and securely storing accurate records

#### Standard 8: Child Safety Knowledge, Skills and Awareness

Distinctive Options aims for all staff and volunteers to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any concerns about or allegations of child abuse. Staff and volunteers are educated in the prevention of, identification of and response to child safety risks, including reporting requirements and procedures. Information about child safety, legal obligations and methods for reporting is included as part of the induction process. Refresher training is provided as required. Staff and volunteers who work with children will be provided with information during induction on issues such as:

- children's rights
- the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- recognising signs of child abuse or harm
- responding to disclosures
- record keeping
- risk assessment and management
- external reporting obligations
- creating culturally safe and inclusive environments and responding to racism

### Standard 9: Physical and Online Environments

Distinctive Options promotes a culture of online and physical safety for all participants. Appropriate supervision is provided in all settings, including out in the community and in the home. There is a focus on each child's diverse needs and vulnerabilities. Each child has an individual Support Plan that details how the support worker can identify that the child is concerned about something, including non-verbal children. Risk alerts are detailed on Supportability that alert workers to individual risk factors. Detailed HR and IT Procedures are in place to clearly define how employees are to use social media. The Child Safety Code of Conduct provides guidance on interactions with children both in person and online.

### Standard 10: Review of Child Safety Practices

Distinctive Options regularly reviews, evaluates and improves child safe practices. Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement. The organisation reports on the findings of relevant reviews to staff and volunteers, community and families and children and young people.

### Standard 11: Implementation of Child Safety Practices

Distinctive Options has policies and procedures that support implementation of child safe practices. Distinctive Options ensures that all relevant policies and procedures are clearly stated and readily available to staff and volunteers. This and associated policies and processes are championed by leaders, well understood by those they apply to and implemented effectively.

Policies and procedures are also accessible to and able to be understood by children and young people in a style of communication best suited to their individual needs and preferences including child-friendly, plain language, accessible and translated versions. Distinctive Options will endeavour to involve all stakeholders including children and young people in the development, implementation and review of policies and procedures to the greatest extent possible.



## Responsibilities

The governing body has ultimate responsibility for policies and procedures to be in place that are appropriate for the size and type of services provided, and for ensuring that all staff and volunteers abide by these to prevent and respond to child abuse. They must also be aware of their legal liability for failure to disclose abuse or failure to reasonably protect based on known risks.

Management should be aware of all mandatory and voluntary reporting obligations which apply in the jurisdiction in which Distinctive Options operates and ensure that all staff and volunteers are made aware of the obligations that apply to them. Management is also responsible for being aware of and managing any risks to children, and to facilitate internal and/or external reporting by any members of staff/volunteers. Managers and coordinators must:

- Implement this procedure
- Be aware of all reporting obligations and relevant legislation which apply in the jurisdiction in which Distinctive Options operates, and ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the obligations that apply to them
- Facilitate internal and/or external reporting by any members of staff or volunteers
- Provide a copy of this Policy to all staff and volunteers who work with children
- Support staff and volunteers to gain appropriate training, knowledge and skills for the implementation of this Policy
- Ensure that all adults supporting children on behalf of Distinctive Options have a current Working With Children Check
- Ensure staff and volunteer recruitment and orientation processes are robust and compliant with this procedure and the Child Safe Standards
- Maintain confidentiality at all times
- Read and understand the Child Safe Standards

Staff and volunteers have a responsibility to act in accordance with the Code of Conduct and be aware of and comply with their obligations relating to reporting concerns, allegations and incidents of child abuse, including internal and external reporting. Staff and volunteers who work with children must:

- Read, understand, sign and act in accordance with this procedure and the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Provide supports to children in a way that:
  - Encourages children to express themselves and their opinions
  - Maintains children's dignity and rights at all times
  - Has regard to the cultural and family values, age and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child
- Maintain confidentiality at all times



## Relevant Documents

The following documents are related to this procedure:

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Child Safety Code of Conduct

[Feedback and Complaints Policy](#)