



# Balanced Choice

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## PROGRAM

## The Balanced Choice Program Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

### Purpose

The Balanced Choice Program Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates our organisation's commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This policy provides an overview of our organisation's approach to implementing [Ministerial Order 1359](#) (PDF, 363KB), which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in learning environments.

It informs our staff of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across all areas of our work.

### Scope

This policy applies to all activities - the Anchor Project, workshops, mentoring, fitness, and theatre activities – conducted by the Balanced Choice Program.

This policy:

- applies to all organisation staff, facilitators, and contractors, whether or not they work in direct contact with children and young people.
- applies in all physical and online environments used by participants during or outside of organisation hours, including other locations provided through third-party providers.
- should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes; refer to the related organisation policies section below.

### Definitions

The following terms in this policy have [specific definitions](#):

- child
- child safety
- child abuse
- child-connected work
- child-related work

- information sharing
- mandatory reporting

## **Statement of commitment to child safety**

The Balanced Choice Program is a child safe organisation that welcomes all children, young people, and their families.

We are committed to providing environments where our participants are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views are respected, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, strategies, and practices are inclusive of the needs of all children and participants.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to participants in our program environments.

We promote positive relationships between young people and adults and between participants and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect.

We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to the participants in our program environments. When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of First Nations children and young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, participants with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and gender diverse, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+), and other participants experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting participants based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at our organisation, and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

Child safety is a shared responsibility. Every person involved in our organisation has a key role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child's safety.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices, and seeking feedback from our participants, facilitators, families, staff, and partner organisations to inform our ongoing strategies.

## **Roles and responsibilities**

### **Leadership team**

Our leadership team, comprising our CEO and Founder, Adam Drake, and National Business Manager, Breanna Duncan are responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained and that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359.

The CEO and National Business Manager will:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes, and practices are in place and followed
- champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader organisation community
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of children and young people, families, facilitators, and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety, and wellbeing
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all participants are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between children, young people, and adults, and between participants
- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the organisation community, including at leadership team meetings, staff meetings, and with third party providers.
- undertake regular training on child safety
- facilitate regular professional learning for facilitators and staff (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, participant wellbeing and the prevention of responding to abuse
- create an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities
- approve updates to and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to organisation staff and facilitators
- when hiring employees, ensure that selection, supervision, and management practices are child safe

## **Facilitators and Staff**

All facilitators and staff will:

- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the organisation or a third party, and always follow the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures
- ensure children's and young people's views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives
- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of participants.

## **Child Safety Code of Conduct**

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviour between adults and participants. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable in our physical and online environments.

We ensure that participants also know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable so that they can be clear and confident about what to expect from adults in the program.

## **Managing risks to child safety and wellbeing**

At our organisation, we identify, assess, and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and online organisational environments. These risks are managed through our child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and practices and in our activity specific risk registers, such as those we develop for off-site activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers for participant use.

## **Establishing a culturally safe environment**

The Balanced Choice Program is committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe organisation where the strengths of First Nations culture, values, and practices are respected.

We think about how every participant can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For First Nations children and young people, we recognise the link between First Nations culture, identity, and safety and actively create opportunities for First Nations participants and the First Nations community to have a voice and presence in our organisation planning, policies, and activities.

We have developed the following strategies to promote cultural safety in our organisation's community:

- Community consultation with elders, families, and children and young people's participation in the organisation
- Participant empowerment

To support child safety and wellbeing in the Balanced Choice Program, we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages participants and their families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and responsibilities.

Respectful relationships between participants are reinforced, and we encourage strong friendships and peer support in the organisation to ensure a sense of belonging through our organisation values.

We inform participants of their rights through the organisation code of conduct and give them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other participants and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure our participants know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe, and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time.

Participants and their families can also access information on how to report concerns at [Reporting child abuse - DFFH Services](#)

When the organisation is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, support the

participant, and keep them (and their parents and carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

## **Family engagement**

Our families and the organisation community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns.

To support family engagement, at the Balanced Choice Program, we are committed to providing families and communities with accessible information about our organisation's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns or ideas for improvement.

## **Diversity and equity**

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of our participants, families, and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths, and experiences to draw on.

We pay particular attention to individuals and organisations of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- First Nations children and young people
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children and young people with disabilities
- children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

## **Suitable facilitators and staff**

At Balanced Choice, we apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, facilitators, and contractors are suitable to work with children.

When engaging staff to perform child-related work, we:

- sight, verify, and record the person's Working with Children clearance
- Staff and facilitator inductions

All newly appointed staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document)

- the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures and
- any other child safety and wellbeing information that the leadership team considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our policies and our legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

### **Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness**

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.

In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment.

Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- our organisation's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices
- recognising indicators of child harm, including harm caused by other children and young people
- responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- how to build culturally safe environments for children and young people
- information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- how to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the program environment.

Other professional learning and training on child safety and wellbeing, for example, training will be tailored to specific roles and responsibilities and any identified or emerging needs or issues.

### **Complaints and reporting processes**

The Balanced Choice Program fosters a culture that encourages staff, facilitators, participants, parents, and the organisation's community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the code of conduct, misconduct, or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

Complaints and concerns can be raised with the CEO.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation, or suspicion of child abuse, all staff and facilitators should alert the CEO, who will follow our policy and procedures, address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or young person, organisation staff, facilitators, contractors, service providers, visitors, or any other person while connected to the organisation.

As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant organisation staff have been informed, we will ensure our organisation follows the following actions:

- the [Four Critical Actions](#) for complaints and concerns relating to adult behaviour towards a child \*
- the [Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending](#) for complaints and concerns relating to student sexual offending\*

*\* These documents are written for schools. Balanced Choice will follow the Four Steps to ensure the appropriate reporting steps are taken.*

## **Communications**

The Balanced Choice Program is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the organisation's community through:

- ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on our website, including the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document), the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedure

## **Privacy and information sharing**

The Balanced Choice Program collects, uses, and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws and other relevant laws.

## **Records management**

We acknowledge that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing and manage our records in accordance with legal requirements.

## **Policy status and review**

The CEO, Adam Drake, is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy at least every two years. The review will include input from the National Business Manager, State Managers, facilitators, staff, and organisations we partner with to deliver the program.

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| <b>Next review date</b> | <b>July 2025</b> |
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