

Child Safety Policy

Interchange Outer East (IOE) is committed to the safety and well being of all children. We have a zero tolerance approach towards child abuse, and all allegations and significant safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently in line with our robust policies and procedures.

Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all children and young people who are involved with IOE (participants, siblings, volunteers, etc.). IOE is also aware that at times, individuals with a disability may be more vulnerable to physical, intellectual or communication challenges than many other members of the community. Therefore, everyone involved within IOE has a responsibility to ensure the protection and safety of people with a disability is still upheld, regardless of their age.

The policy is applicable to all staff, participants, volunteers, families and visitors when they are engaged within IOE. This is also applicable to all IOE locations and when IOE staff, participants and volunteers are accessing the community through their involvement with IOE. Further, the policy also applies to any IOE staff member working within a family home or environment.

Children's rights to safety and participation

Children have the right to give their views and opinions about decisions that affect them and to be listened to. Empowerment is about helping children to have their say. Empowering people we support should underpin and guide our work at all times. Participation is important for children because it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them. Children are more likely to speak up about their concerns relating to feeling unsafe, or to make a complaint, if they feel their views are believed, valued and welcomed.

IOE strives to create and foster an environment where children feel safe and confident to speak up. A complaints process for children has been developed, and we will continue to inform and educate children about their rights.

Valuing diversity

IOE values diversity and will not tolerate discrimination against any person or group directly involved with or affiliated with IOE. We will work to:

- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. See IOE's *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities* document for more information;
- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally diverse backgrounds and their families. See IOE's *Cultural Diversity Policy* for more information;
- Welcome LGBTIQ and gender diverse children and their families; and
- Commit to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

What constitutes child abuse?

Child abuse includes, but is not exclusive to:

- Psychological/Emotional abuse

This can include severe or sustained verbal abuse, coercive or manipulative behaviour, hostility, rejection, humiliation, belittling and scapegoating children. There must be a clear link between the adult behaviour and the child's harm. The harm must be significant and more than trivial or temporary.

- Significant Neglect

When a child or young person's basic need for food, housing, hygiene, health care and warm clothing are not met to the extent that their health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

- Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child or vulnerable person suffers, or is likely to suffer, significant harm from an injury inflicted by another person. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or aggression. This includes hitting, shaking, throwing, biting, burning, or giving children and young people harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a child at risk of being hurt, for example, locking a child outside in cold weather.

- Sexual

Sexual abuse refers to a situation in which a person uses power or authority over a child or vulnerable person to involve them in sexual activity. Physical force is sometimes involved but seldom necessary. Sexual abuse includes a wide range of sexual activity including fondling of the genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration and exposure to pornography.

- Grooming

Grooming is a process used by people with a sexual interest in children or vulnerable adults to prepare a child/adult for sexual abuse. It is often carefully planned and it can take place over weeks, months or even years.

- Family violence

Family and domestic violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear. Children living in homes where family violence occurs are affected through witnessing the behaviour or themselves being subject to abuse.

Signs of abuse

There are some signs that may alert you to the possibility that a child is being abused. These include but are not limited to:

- A child or young person tells you that he or she is being abused or hurt.
- You notice sudden or unexplained changes in mood or behaviour of a child or young person.
- You notice frequent or unexplained bruises or injuries on a child or young person or bruising or injury to unusual areas of the body.
- You see a child or young person with low self-esteem.
- You see a child or young person with poor hygiene.
- You notice that a child or young person becomes withdrawn or unresponsive.
- You notice a child or young person with increased exaggerated fears.
- You notice that a child or young person seems to lack trust in familiar adults.
- You notice that a child or young person has serious difficulties relating to peers and/or adults.
- You see a child or young person who is always angry or aggressive.
- You find out that a child or young person has difficulty sleeping and experiences nightmares.
- You notice a child or young person experiences a change in eating patterns.

Responding to a disclosure of abuse

If a child comes to you to disclose abuse:

- Reassure them they have done the right thing and that you believe them.
- Stress to them that what has happened is not their fault.
- Never blame or interrogate a child or vulnerable adult. Limit the amount of questions you ask about the disclosure. This will be addressed by a professional (police or internal investigator).
- Make sure that you don't make promises that you can't keep e.g., to keep it a secret. Your job is to listen and support the child/adult as best you can and ensure their safety.
- Ensure the immediate safety of the child. If you believe the child is at immediate risk of abuse call 000.

Reporting abuse or suspected abuse

If you suspect child abuse, or that a child is in danger of harm, trust your judgment and report it immediately. Kimberley Rawkins (Team Leader, Knox) has been appointed IOE's Child Safety Officer and has the specific responsibility to respond to any complaints or concerns raised by children, families, volunteers and staff. You can also report any concerns or complaints to an IOE coordinator, team leader or general manager. You can report any suspicions anonymously through the complaints link on our website, and don't require proof to report it. IOE has an emergency after hours phone that can be called upon for assistance and advice every day of the year.

If the allegation involves the child safety officer, or another senior staff member, you can contact any other team leader or manager, or contact the police directly.

The law now requires any adult (aged 18 and over) who reasonably believes that a **sexual offence** has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (under the age of 16) disclose that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence. See [*Failure to Disclose Child Sexual Abuse Policy*](#) for more

information. IOE is also legally required to report any allegations of abuse and neglect by their employees and volunteers through the Reportable Conduct Scheme. More information about this can be found in [Incident Reporting Policy](#).

If you are uncomfortable or unsure about a situation where abuse may have occurred/is occurring, you can seek advice from the police.

Reasonable grounds to report are:

- A child or young person discloses that he or she has suffered, or is suffering, non-accidental physical injury or sexual abuse.
- Someone else advises you that a child or young person has been sexually abused or non-accidentally injured.
- Your own observations of the child or young person's physical condition or behaviours led you to reasonably suspect that the child or young person has suffered, or is suffering, non-accidental physical injury or sexual abuse.

Risk management

Interchange Outer East undertakes a rigorous recruitment, selection and screening process for all volunteers and staff members. See IOE's [Recruitment, Selection and Screening Policy](#).

IOE provides many of its services throughout the community. IOE accepts that there is always an element of risk however, it is every staff member's responsibility to be vigilant in constantly identifying, assessing and reducing risk. Risk management is an ongoing process.

IOE selects Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP) campsites where campsite staff will be present and supporting participants to access activities e.g. flying fox, giant swing, etc. ATAP accreditation ensures businesses meet specific quality assurance criteria, including the screening and training of their staff.

IOE provides training to new and existing staff through Childwise and other organisations. Child safety standards are reviewed by the child safety team on a quarterly basis.

IOE coordinators meet on a weekly basis to discuss allocations, group dynamic, volunteer matches, safety, ratios, room and bed allocations, activity choices, etc. to ensure child safety is paramount on recreation camps and activities.

Ongoing prevention

Child safety is an important focus for IOE. Child safety is reviewed quarterly as part of team and staff meetings. IOE incident reports and complaints are reviewed bi-annually by the quality coordinator to identify any patterns of concerns related to child safety that may require further investigation. The child safety officer is responsible for reviewing the outcomes from both of these.

The child safety committee meets bi-monthly to discuss concerns and strategies to work towards a safe organisation for all people. The child safety team committee is:

Kimberley Rawkins - IOE Child Safety Officer
Lauren Timmerman
Karina Fry
Jesse Baker
Ellen Clacy
Emma Dobrigh
Kat Drake

Other relevant policies:

- *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities*
- *Cultural Diversity Policy*
- *Failure to Disclose Child Sexual Abuse Policy*
- *Incident Reporting Policy*
- *Complaints Policy and Procedure*
- *Recruitment, Selection and Screening Policy*
- *Responding – Investigation of Incidents Policy*
- *IOE Code of Conduct*

Relevant legislation

- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Child, Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)*