



# Child safe policy and statement of commitment



## Child safe policy

### Our commitment to child safety

Southern FM is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Southern FM is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.

We have specific policies and procedures in place that support our board members, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk, phone 000.

## Our children

This policy is intended to empower children, who are vital and active participants at Southern FM. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and acceptance at Southern FM, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

## Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children at Southern FM.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

## Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at Southern FM understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all board members, staff, volunteers, families and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our board members, staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our board members, staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse and promote the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New board members, staff and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand Southern FM's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse. This will include checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to Southern FM's Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers policy for information about appropriate behaviour). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

While Southern FM is an exempt organisation from requiring Working with Childrens checks, volunteers may optionally hold a Working with Children Check if there is a situation where that may be warranted. In most cases children will be accompanied by their guardian, who aren't required to hold a WWC check if they are with their own child(ren).

## **Fair procedures for staff and volunteers**

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and reasonable to all staff and volunteers. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and actions we as an organisation take.

## **Privacy**

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, families or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it and who will have access to it. This is intended to protect reporters and to ensure that all members of Southern FM are comfortable to disclose any allegations or concerns in relation to child safety without repercussions.

## **Legislative responsibilities**

Southern FM takes its legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to Victoria Police
- Mandatory reporting: Any board members, staff or volunteers who are mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teacher, principals and police officers) must comply with their duties
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- Reportable conduct: The head of our organisation must be made aware of any allegations of physical and sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, significant emotional or psychological harm or significant neglect by an employee or volunteer towards a child. We are also legally required to notify the Commission for Children and Young People of the allegation
- Duty of care: If a child is abused by an individual associated with our organisation, our organisation is presumed to have breached its duty of care unless it can prove that it took 'reasonable precautions' to prevent the abuse in question.

## **Risk management**

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

## **Allegations, concerns and complaints**

Southern FM takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our board members, staff and volunteers are trained to deal with allegations appropriately.

We work to ensure all children, families, board members, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place. If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may include:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

## **Regular review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we will do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.