

Child Safety Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the commitment of the Australian College of the Arts Pty Limited (Collarts) either directly, under the trading name Mercer School of Interior Design or through Auspicing Partners and the VET in Schools Program (VETis), to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children. It provides an outline of the procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our organisation, whether that be on campus, online or in other locations used by Collarts.

Scope

This policy applies to all persons enrolled, or seeking enrolment with Collarts, and those employed or contracted to Collarts.

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following college policies:

- Collarts Recruitment Policy (Staff)
- Collarts Performance and Managing Conduct Policy (Staff)
- Misconduct Policy

Policy

Our commitment to child safety

Collarts is committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children. We support and respect children, and support and respect our staff and volunteers.

We have zero tolerance for child abuse, and all allegations of abuse or concerns for the safety of children will be regarded as serious and dealt with in a consistent manner that is in keeping with our policies and procedures.

In the event that we become concerned about a child's safety, we have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities and we will abide by those obligations rigorously.

Our staff are instructed to contact the Police on 000 if they believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse.

Our organisation is committed to preventing child abuse, including physical violence, sexual offences, emotional or psychological abuse, neglect and/or cultural abuse. We will strive to identify risks early, and to remove and/or reduce those risks.

Collarts is also committed to complying with the Victorian Child Safe standards. An overview of the standards is available from the [Department of Human Services](#).

We are committed to the cultural safety of Indigenous children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with disabilities.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

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.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the Working with Children Check website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision making process.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

Fair Procedures for Personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is one of our primary concerns. We are also fair and just to personnel. 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, including investigation updates. 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 any 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, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Legislative Responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a **community**-wide responsibility. 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 the police.¹
- **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.²
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.³

¹ A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed. Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>.

² Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-offence>.

³ Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.

Risk Management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). 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 (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteers are to have contact with a child in organisations on social media).

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 do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Allegations and Concerns

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, 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 (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident.

Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- 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 observed⁴
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Complaints & Advice

Complaints relating to access and equity are to be lodged in accordance with Collarts **Complaints & Appeals Policy**.

⁴ For example behaviour, please see [An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc): <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0005/955598/Child-safe-standards_overview.doc>