

## **Australian Boys Choral Institute Child Safety Policy**

### **Preamble**

This policy was written to demonstrate the strong commitment of the management, staff and volunteers of the Australian Boys Choral Institute (ABCI) to child safety, and to provide an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone safe from any harm, including abuse. Our Board has approved this statement.

### **Commitment to child safety**

The ABCI is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children and young people, as well as our staff and volunteers.

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.

When we are worried about a child's safety, we follow rigorously our legal and moral obligations to contact authorities.

The ABCI is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks as much as we can.

The ABCI has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers. We are committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse and safety risks.

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

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

All children who come to the ABCI have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children and young people feel safe and have fun.

This policy was developed in collaboration with our staff, our Child Safety officer and the ABCI Board. It applies to all staff, volunteers, singers and individuals involved in our organisation.

The ABCI is committed to the principles of cultural safety and inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and to the safety of children with disability, and we recognise that these principles support the safety of all children.

The Australian Boys Choir condemns all forms of child abuse, exploitation of children and discrimination against children. We are committed to creating and maintaining an environment that promotes safety for people involved in our programs, including all children.

All ABCI staff and volunteers are responsible for promoting the safety, wellbeing and empowerment of children and young people.

All staff of the ABCI, volunteers (including Board members) and contractors are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children and young people.

## **Parents' and Guardians' Responsibilities in Child Safety**

If your child has a significant medical issue (inclusive of physical, mental health and behavioural concerns), the ABCI may request a management plan from your treating clinician(s) to help optimise your child's learning and participation whilst at the ABCI.

## **Children's rights to safety and participation**

The ABCI is a child-centred organisation.

We regularly communicate with our singers about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

The ABCI values the voices of children and will act on concerns raised by our singers or their families in regard to their safety. The ABCI includes the voices of children in the following ways:

- Regular discussions with our singers that facilitates child-led conversation on what makes them feel safe
- A suggestion box accessible to all singers that is regularly emptied and suggestions assessed and acted on where appropriate. Singers are provided with feedback on their suggestions (via the newsletter Chant).
- Communication materials on policies, procedures, staffing and programs are child-friendly and suitable to the relevant age groups and diversity of the children at the ABCI, including materials translated into languages that our singers speak, where needed.

## Valuing diversity

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:

- Support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families.
- Support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families.
- Welcome staff from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Support the rights of children and individuals to express their gender identity, whether or not it aligns with their designated sex at birth.
- Support the safety, participation and empowerment of LGBTIQ+ individuals.
- Have a community that actively celebrates all forms of diversity and recognises differences in culture, ability and gender identity.

## Recruiting staff and volunteers

We take all reasonable steps to employ highly skilled people. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We welcome applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with a disability and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The ABCI applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers:

### ***Deciding to recruit:***

- National Police checks and Working with Children checks are required where roles have contact or responsibility for children and roles that have influence or authority over children, such as leadership positions.
- Positions descriptions will clearly state the responsibilities with regard to children.
- Prerequisite criteria will be listed for positions, for example: National Police Check, Working with Children Check, training and qualifications.
- Advertised positions will state that referee checks will be performed for shortlisted candidates.
- Recruitment material will make it clear that applicants may be cyber-vetted.

**Selection:**

- Where a position includes responsibility for children or is a position of leadership, interview questions will address experience and previous engagement with children and will gauge the applicant's attitudes and values towards children.
- Before commencing in their role, successful applicants must sign the ABCI Child Safety Code of Conduct and attend an induction session on the ABCI child safe and child abuse reporting policies and procedures.

## **Supporting staff and volunteers**

The ABCI is committed to making sure that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety. The ABCI assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decision making and to promote a culturally safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Mandatory Child Safety Training requirements for ABCI leaders, staff and volunteers include:

- Induction: Child Safe Code of Conduct and Child Safety Policy
- Identifying indicators of child abuse
- How to respond to disclosures of child abuse
- Complaint, Code of Conduct breach and child safety incident reporting procedures

This training is essential to supporting the ABCI's zero-tolerance of child abuse approach. Leaders, staff and volunteers are required to undertake all these components before being allowed to work in a child-related role.

## **Child Safety Officer**

The ABCI has a Child Safety Officer who has specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children. If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to the Child Safety Officer, they may report their concern to the General Manager, the Artistic Director or the Chair of the ABCI Board.

The Child Safety Officer is introduced to our singers to ensure they understand who the appointed officer is, and how and when they may contact them.

Photos of the Child Safety Officer, and their contact details, are displayed on the notice boards and in the Chant newsletter.

## Reporting Procedures

The ABCI Incident Reporting Policy and framework includes how to respond to an allegation or incident of child abuse.

The Incident Reporting Policy and framework includes the following elements:

- If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse, the first responsibility is to ensure that the child or young person is safe and the risks of further abuse or harm are mitigated. If the incident or allegation of abuse could involve criminal conduct, the matter must be immediately reported to Victoria Police. If there is any ongoing risk to the child or young person, then the staff member or volunteer should immediately call 000. It may also be appropriate to notify Child Protection via the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing if there is a belief that a child needs protection.
- All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or child.
- When an allegation of child abuse is received, all mandatory reporting requirements must be met, including reporting to:
  - Police
  - Child Protection via the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
  - The Commission for Children and Young People under the reportable conduct scheme
  - Other government departments or regulators as appropriate

## Record keeping and incident monitoring

The ABCI, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, will maintain confidentiality and privacy for children and families in accordance with legislation.

Records will be retained in line with the recommendations from the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV).

Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by the ABCI Board to ensure they are appropriately managed.

Risks to child safety that are identified in complaints and reports of abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan.

## Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. 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 relating to personnel using an incident report form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or safety concern is raised relating to personnel, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we take as an organisation.

## 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.

## Risk management

All identified risks of child abuse are actively reduced by designing and implementing appropriate preventative measures.

Staff, volunteers and contractors are made aware of their responsibility for identifying risks of child abuse and their obligation to work with management on reducing those risks.

Families and singers are made aware of how to report on identified risks of child abuse.

Policies are living documents that are updated as required, referred to regularly and reviewed periodically.

## 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 years have an obligation to report that information to the police.

**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.

Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** will comply with their duties.

## Non-compliance with this policy and the ABCI Child Safe Code of Conduct

The ABCI will enforce this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct. Following any non-compliance we will initiate a review that may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or other corrective action.

## Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and we undertake to seek the views, comments and suggestions from our singers, parents, carers, staff and volunteers as part of this process.

## Document History

Version	Author	Date	Adopted
1.0	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	September 2016	Ratified by ABCI Board 10 <sup>th</sup> October 2016
2.0	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	December 2020	Ratified by ABCI Board 15 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
3.0	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	December 2023	Ratified by ABCI Board 4th December 2023
3.1	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	June 2024	

**Review date: December 2025**

**Responsibility: ABCI Board, Child Safety Officer and CEO**