

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. It is intended to be read in conjunction with Appendix 1: Mapping the ABCI Child Safety Policy to the Victorian Child Safe Standards (2025).

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(s) 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.

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 facilitate child-led conversations 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 (either via the newsletter Chant or in classes, or individually if requested by the child).
- 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 the primary languages our singers speak, where needed.

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:
excellence is... taken care of

- 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 with, responsibility for, and influence or authority over children(including staff and 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 at least one Child Safety Officer(s) who has/have specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children. If a person does not feel comfortable making a report the Child Safety Officer(s), they may report their concern to the General Manager, the Artistic Director or the Chair of the ABCI Board.

The Child Safety Officer(s) is/are introduced to our singers each semester to ensure they understand who the appointed officer(s) is/are, and how and when they may contact them.

Photos of the Child Safety Officer(s), and their contact details, are displayed on the notice boards, on the ABCI intranet, 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 Social Services Regulator 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 three years, or sooner if there are changes to Victorian law, regulatory guidance, or Institute operations. 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 th October 2016
2.0	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	December 2020	Ratified by ABCI Board 15 th 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	
4.0	The Australian Boys Choral Institute	February 2026	Ratified by ABCI Board (pending)

Review date: February 2028

Responsibility: ABCI Board, Child Safety Officer and CEO

1. Organisations establish a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal children and young people

- We acknowledge and respect the cultural rights and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
 - We actively work to create a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal children by:
 - Incorporating respect for Aboriginal culture into rehearsals and performances.
 - Consulting with Aboriginal families, community members and organisations where relevant.
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2. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in leadership, governance and culture

- The Board and Artistic Director are committed to child safety and allocate resources for safeguarding measures.
 - Child safety is a standing agenda item at governance and leadership meetings.
 - At least one **Child Safety Officer** is appointed to oversee compliance and serve as a point of contact for children and families.
 - All decisions about Institute operations are guided by the principle: *the safety and wellbeing of children comes first*.
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3. Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

- Children are informed about their right to feel safe and respected, reiterated in Child Safety weeks and camp briefings.
 - Age-appropriate ways for children to raise concerns are available (e.g. feedback box, named Child Safety Officer, family end-of-semester voluntary feedback-forms).
 - *Camps / tours*: Where appropriate, children are encouraged to participate in decision-making about choir activities (e.g. rehearsal planning, performance feedback, where age-appropriate).
 - *** Incorporate above into all age groups*
 - Reports or disclosures made by children are taken seriously, acted upon promptly, and handled sensitively.
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4. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

- Parents and guardians are partners in safeguarding; they are regularly updated on policies, expectations and incidents (where appropriate).
 - All performance/tour planning includes opportunities for families to raise concerns.
 - Families have clear points of contact (Child Safety Officer, General Manager, Artistic Director, Caring Team Leader) for raising issues.
 - Feedback regarding policy review and improvement is regularly sought from the ABCI community and the wider community as required.
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5. Equity is upheld, and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice

- We welcome and support all children with strong choral ability who have successfully auditioned for the ABCI regardless of cultural background, language, gender identity, or socio-economic situation.
 - Wherever possible, we work with families to provide additional support to children with a disability, those from diverse cultural or faith backgrounds, and LGBTIQA+ children.
 - Participation and access are adjusted where needed, if possible, (e.g. travel support, inclusive rehearsal practices with safe breakout spaces).
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6. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported

- All staff, tutors, accompanists, conductors, contractors, volunteers and chaperones must review and sign the child safe code of conduct.
 - All staff / tutors / volunteers who work directly with children must hold a valid Working With Children Check (WWCC). All Staff who have positions of leadership and responsibility must undergo reference and police background checks.
 - Additional checks (police checks, declarations of prior conduct) are required for roles involving overnight supervision.
 - Recruitment includes child-safety questions and assessment of candidates' attitudes to working with children.
 - All personnel and volunteers sign a **Child Safety Code of Conduct** outlining acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.
 - Induction and training includes a mandatory child safety module.
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7. Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused

- Clear, accessible complaints procedures are published online and in print.
 - Children and families are supported to make complaints without fear of reprisal.
 - Complaints are handled sensitively, promptly, and with transparency.
 - Confidentiality is maintained except where the law requires reporting (e.g. mandatory reports to police/child protection).
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8. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe

- All staff and volunteers complete regular child safety training (including grooming, boundaries, online safety, and responding to disclosures).
 - Training is refreshed every 3 years, or sooner if laws or risks change.
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9. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising opportunities for harm

- **Rehearsals and Performances:**
 - Adequate supervision ratios (no child left alone with one adult).
 - Site visits for performance and accommodation venues and backstage spaces, including high-risk locations (e.g. toilets).

- **Tours and Billeting:**
 - Pre-screening of billeting families (eg. Working with children check), where used. There is a billeting policy in place and any potential billeting families are screened.
 - Two-adult rule for overnight activities.
 - Clear protocols for travel, curfews, accommodation and supervision.
 - **Online & Media:**
 - Consent required for use of photos/videos of children.
 - Monitored choir social media channels — no private adult–child online communication.
 - Cyber-safety guidelines are taught to singers in an age-appropriate way.
 - Children are not permitted to have devices at choir or if devices are present, they must be put away during the time at choir.
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10. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

- Bi-annual (or sooner if the Child Safe Standards change) review of this policy by the Board, including consultation with children and families.
 - After each tour or major programme, a debrief is conducted to capture lessons learned, including child safety issues.
 - Audits against the 11 Child Safe Standards are conducted bi-annually, or whenever Child Safe Standards change.
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11. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

This policy works alongside:

- **Child Safety Code of Conduct**
 - **Risk Management Processes** (auditions, rehearsals, tours, billeting, travel, online)
 - **Discipline Procedures**
 - **Incident Reporting Procedures**
 - **HR Policy**
 - **Social Media Policy (under review)**
 - **Tour and Billeting Policy**
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Role	Responsibility
<i>Board</i>	Endorses and resources child safety systems, reviews compliance.
<i>Artistic Director</i>	Ensures child safety is prioritised in artistic and operational planning.
<i>Child Safety Officer</i>	First point of contact, receives reports/complaints, overview of policy.
<i>General Manager</i>	Manages reports / complaints, overseas compliance.
<i>Team Leaders / Tour and Concert Supervisors</i>	Implement safeguarding during travel, billeting, and performances.
<i>Staff, Tutors, Volunteers</i>	Follow policy and Code of Conduct, complete training, report concerns.
<i>Children & Families</i>	Participate in safety culture, speak up about concerns.