



## MC2T Child Safe Policy

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### PURPOSE

All children engaging with MidCoast 2 Tops Landcare Landcare Connection (MC2T) have a right to feel safe, protected and included.

This policy is part of MC2T's ongoing commitment to protecting the children in our care from harm and abuse. It:

- outlines the child safe practices we have put in place to minimise the risks to child safety,
- informs all staff and volunteers of their obligations and responsibilities in keeping children safe.

### Scope and Audience

At MC2T we commit to the safety and wellbeing of every child attending MC2T or affiliated Junior Landcare events or activities. Please read our Statement of Commitment to Child Safety, which is available on our website <https://midcoast2tops.org.au/>

This policy describes what is required from all staff and volunteers in the organisation and related Junior Landcare groups when taking part in any activities, services and events that involve children.

### Responsibilities for children's safety

All staff and volunteers in MC2T and related Junior Landcare groups are expected to carry out the requirements specific to their role to keep children safe. This includes:

- upholding MC2T's Commitment to Child Safety
- reading, signing and upholding the behaviours set out in our Child Safe Code of Conduct
- conducting appropriate child safety risk assessment of events and activities
- meeting requirements across all other child safe policies and procedures, including child safe recruitment practices and risk management
- where appropriate taking part in our regular reviews of our child safe documents
- reporting all breaches of our policies or any allegations of child harm or abuse, and meeting all external reporting obligations.

Please contact the MC2T Support Officer or the Child Safety Officer (a nominated member of the MC2T Committee) with any of your child-safety related questions or concerns.

### Active participation of children, families and communities

- All our child-related policies and procedures are easily accessible on our website for everyone who accesses our services and events, including children, parents, carers and community members.

- Children, parents and carers from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are encouraged to provide feedback on our child-related policies and procedures, including our Child Safe Code of Conduct that describes acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours and our Child Safe Risk Management Plan.
- We provide opportunities for children to provide feedback to staff or Junior Landcare Convenors on what makes them feel safe, supported and included.

## Definitions of harm and abuse

For the purposes of this policy we provide the following definitions of harm and abuse.

### **Psychological abuse** (also known as emotional abuse)

This includes bullying, threatening and abusive language, intimidation, shaming and name calling, ignoring and isolating a child, and exposure to domestic and family violence.

### **Physical abuse**

This includes physical punishment, such as pushing, shoving, punching, slapping and kicking, resulting in injury, burns, choking or bruising.

### **Sexual abuse**

This includes the sexual touching of a child, grooming, and production, distribution or possession of child abuse material.

### **Grooming**

This is a process where a person manipulates a child or group of children and sometimes those looking after them, including parents, carers, teachers and leaders. They do this to establish a position of 'trust' so they can then later sexually abuse the child.

### **Misconduct**

This is inappropriate behaviour that may not be as severe as abuse, but could indicate that abuse is occurring. This could include showing a child something inappropriate on a phone, having inappropriate conversations with a child or an unrelated adult sitting with a child on their lap.

### **Lack of appropriate care**

This includes not providing adequate and proper supervision, nourishment, clothing, shelter, education or medical care.

## What the policy covers

This policy applies to all MC2T events and affiliated Junior Landcare groups and events. Below are the child safe practices expected to be upheld in different situations.

### **Recruitment and Induction of staff and volunteers**

All MC2T employees and all volunteers working with affiliated Junior Landcare groups are required to hold a valid NSW Working With Children Check (WWCC). MC2T as an organisation registered with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian will verify the WWCC online. As a registered organisation we have two people in MC2T, the Support Officer and Child Safety Officer, who are authorised to receive confidential information about a worker's or volunteer's WWCC.

MC2T keeps a record of the following information for a period of 7 years:

- (a) the person's full name and date of birth,
- (b) the working with children number of the person's clearance or the application number of the current application,
- (c) the expiry date for each clearance of the person, being the date on which the clearance ceases to have effect.

MC2T will ensure that the records kept in relation to each person are updated no later than 5 working days after the expiry date for each clearance of the worker.

Induction of new MC2T staff or volunteers if associated with Junior Landcare will require that each person is given access to the MC2T Child Safe Policy, MC2T Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and the MC2T Child Safe Code of Conduct to read. Once having understood all material they will be required to sign the MC2T Child Safe Code of Conduct and this will be kept on file.

### **Responsible adult accompanying children**

Any child attending events/activities must be accompanied by a parent or authorised carer unless other arrangements have been made by the child's parents/authorised carers and supplied in writing to the relevant Landcare Coordinator before or at the time of the activity/event.

### **Conduct a risk assessment for the particular activity.**

A risk assessment should be conducted prior to the event/activity by the organiser and include:

- (a) identification of the key risks when undertaking an activity or delivering a service, noting this should be tailored to risk factors in the particular environment, e.g. physical risks specific to the region;
- (b) consider who will be delivering the activities, and the level of supervision required for children who are attending.
- (c) consider the nature of the activities or services being delivered and precautions to be put in place, e.g. in relation to use of equipment.
- (d) consider the characteristics and needs of the children and young people you will be engaging with; and
- (e) document any controls or strategies put in place to address risks.

### **Physical contact**

Physical contact with children should be kept to a minimum. Everyone involved in the organisation is expected to have healthy physical boundaries with children.

### **Social media use and online communication**

Staff and volunteers must never communicate privately with children online or on social media. Any necessary online communication should include the child's parent or carer in the correspondence.

### **Photography and the use of images**

Photos and videos of children can only be taken with the permission of parents or authorised carers. Parents and authorised carers must also approve any images used on our social media channels. It is unacceptable for staff or volunteers to take photos or videos of children, other than their own, on personal devices, or to share images without permission.

### **Gifts and benefits**

Staff and volunteers must never give gifts to children, or bestow benefits of any kind to a child, unless they have direct permission from the child's parents or carers.

### **Illness and injury management**

Injuries must be reported to the first aid officer on duty and first aid administered in a safe space within lines of sight of other adults.

### **Out of hours contact with children**

It is unacceptable for staff or volunteers to participate in the lives of children attending events/activities, outside the organisation without a valid reason. Professional boundaries with the children in our care must be maintained at all times.

## **Reporting requirements for different types of concerns or incidents**

### **Child safe reporting**

We have the following procedures for internal complaints and reports and external reporting obligations. child safe reporting and complaint handling.

We intend that everyone in MC2T and affiliated Junior Landcare groups:

- knows what to report, who to report to and how to report
- report any concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or young person immediately
- ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount when responding to a disclosure or allegation about a child being harmed or at risk.

These reporting practices will be regularly reviewed and updated to make sure they remain effective and comply with legislation.

In the **MC2T Child Safe Code of Conduct**, we list acceptable and unacceptable behaviours around children and young people

### What to report

All complaints should be reported. This includes:

- criminal conduct
- disclosures or reports of abuse
- [risk of significant harm \(ROSH\)](#)
- [reportable allegations](#) (an allegation that an employee has engaged in conduct that may be reportable conduct)\*
- unacceptable behaviour around children and young people that breaches our Child Safe Code of Conduct.

### Making an external complaint/report

It can be a criminal offence for adults not to report to police if [they know, believe or ought reasonably believe that a child abuse offence has been committed](#) against another person. In addition, it can be a criminal offence for people employed in an organisation that provides child-related services if [they fail to reduce or remove the risk of a child becoming a victim of child abuse](#). None of our staff or volunteers are mandatory reporters.

### How to make an external complaint/report

As people working with children, there may be circumstances where you receive disclosures about child safety incidents. It's important to feel confident in how to respond to these disclosures, and support children and young people appropriately while also looking after yourself.

If there is an immediate or serious risk to the health and safety of a child, please call NSW Police or an ambulance on 000.

If there is no immediate risk to the health and safety of the child, it is important to listen, share information, and provide the child with access to services. The **HEARTS** response is a useful tool to guide any conversation involving a disclosure of harm, such as sexual or physical abuse, harassment, discrimination or bullying.

**Hear:** the first step is to listen actively to what the child is sharing with you. It is not your job to investigate the matter. If you would like to ask questions, please keep these open-ended and do not draw any conclusions.

**Empathise:** when engaging with a child, it is important to be sympathetic and understanding and show genuine engagement and respect for what they are sharing with you.

**Affirm:** remind the child that they are doing the right thing by speaking up and sharing the incident with you. It takes a great deal of courage to make a disclosure, so children should feel that they are believed when they share.

**Record:** when receiving a disclosure, it's crucial to keep current notes of your conversation. The first disclosure will usually provide the most detail as memories can fade over time, so this can be invaluable if the Police or other bodies need to get involved.

**Tell someone:** Once having this initial conversation, you should report the allegation or incident to someone more senior in your organisation. This may be the MC2T Support Officer or the Child Safety Officer from the MC2T Committee. It may be necessary to report to Police or other regulators. You can also contact Landcare NSW for further guidance on next steps to take.

**Self-care:** Seek support if you need it, this is not a burden you have to carry on your own. If an incident has been escalated to you, be sure to check in on the person who received the disclosure and provide them with appropriate support.

Support services are available including Lifeline 13 11 14 (crisis and suicide support) and 1800RESPECT (counselling for people impacted by sexual assault, domestic and family violence and abuse).

## Reporting Obligations

As adults, you have a range of reporting obligations in order to ensure you are addressing risks of harm to children.

**Step 1:** Determine whether the child is in serious or immediate danger: stay with the child (if within their presence) and take all reasonable steps to ensure their safety and wellbeing, which may involve calling for support from another appropriate adult. If the child is at serious or immediate risk of child abuse or risk of harm, notify police immediately by telephoning 000.

**Step 2:** Consider whether there is an obligation to report:

(a) If you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, you may make a report to the Department of Communities and Justice (DoCJ).

(b) If you know, believe or reasonably ought to know that a child has suffered sexual abuse, serious physical abuse or extreme neglect you must report that information to police as soon as practicable.

(c) If you know that another adult worker or volunteer who engages in child-related work poses a serious risk of sexually or physically abusing a child, you must not negligently fail to reduce or remove that risk. Reporting to police is one way to reduce or remove that risk.

**Step 3:** Make a report to:

(a) DoCJ by reporting your suspicion by making a telephone notification to the NSW Child Protection Helpline on 132 111; or

(b) NSW Police by: (i) dialling 000 in an emergency; or

(ii) contacting your local police station -Taree Police Station 02 5594 8299

(c) An Office Bearer of MC2T Committee, the MC2T Support Officer or relevant Junior Landcare convenor

**Step 4:** Complete an incident report. [MC2T Form for Child Safe reporting](#) It is important to ensure you keep clear records of the disclosure and the steps taken to report the matter and minimise the risk of harm.

**Step 5:** Cooperate with regulatory authorities, including any investigations conducted by Police or DoCJ, and provide appropriate support to the child.

**Step 6:** Ensure confidentiality throughout the process. Do not share information about the incident, children involved and individuals who made the report unless it is required.

**Step 7:** Once the process is finalised, consider any actions that can be taken to minimise future risk of harm in MC2T and affiliated Junior Landcare groups if relevant.

## How we publicise our Child Safe Policy

To make sure everyone in our organisation is aware of our Child Safe Policy and their reporting obligations, we:

- hold information sessions about our child safe documents and how they apply to staff (including volunteers), families and children

- create and display important information from our Child Safe Policy that describes what to report, who to report to and how to report,
- share links to the Office of the Children’s Guardian’s [Reporting Processes and Obligations](#) handbook

## AUTHORISATION

Signature: CM Davies Date: 15 April 2025

Name: Carolyn Davies Position President, MC2T