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| Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy |
| Department of Families, Fairness and Housing |
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| To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 131 431, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email Operational Child Safeguarding <child.safeguarding@dffh.vic.gov.au>.Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, November 2024.In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.Available at the [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Child Safe Standards website](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> |
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# Purpose

This policy explains how the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) implements the Child Safe Standards (the Standards) to promote child safety and wellbeing in our organisation.

All organisations which work with children have to comply with the Standards under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic). The Standards require organisations to have policies and practices to keep children safe, prevent child abuse and respond properly to allegations of abuse. They aim to drive cultural change, so that protecting children from harm is part of everyday thinking and practice.

This policy sets out the department’s:

* commitment to child safety and wellbeing
* approach to implementing the Standards.

In this document, we use ‘child’ to refer to children and young people up to the age of 18 years.

**The Child Safe Standards**

**Standard 1:** Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued

**Standard 2:** Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

**Standard 3:** Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

**Standard 4:** Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

**Standard 5:** Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

**Standard 6:** People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

**Standard 7:** Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused

**Standard 8:** Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

**Standard 9:** Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

**Standard 10:** Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

**Standard 11:** Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

# Application of this policy

This policy applies to all department staff. This includes:

* employees
* officers and officeholders
* consultants, contractors and labour hire employees, where their agreement with the department requires compliance. Contract managers must draw the policy to the attention of these staff.
* volunteers, interns, cadets, trainees and work experience students engaged by the department.

The policy does not apply to organisations that the department funds. These organisations may need to take their own steps to comply with the Standards. The department’s  [service provider website](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards> provides more information.

# Our commitment to child safety

The department is committed to providing an environment where children are safe and feel safe and have a say in decisions that affect their lives.

We are committed to:

* preventing harm to children by identifying risks and taking steps to reduce or remove those risks
* treating allegations of child abuse seriously, and notifying authorities where required by law and department policy
* hiring the right people to work with children, and training and supporting our staff to provide a child safe environment
* ensuring children, families, communities and staff feel safe to speak up about child safety
* aligning responses to children at risk of family violence with Victoria’s legislated family violence framework ([the MARAM Framework](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management) <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management>)
* ensuring the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and ensuring that decision-making for Aboriginal children is made or informed by Aboriginal people wherever possible
* providing a safe and welcoming environment for all children, including Aboriginal children, children from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds, children with disability and LGBTIQ+ children
* embedding inclusive practice in our systems so we identify and respond to the diverse and intersecting needs of children and families
* listening to and empowering children so they can understand their rights and have a say in decisions about their lives
* listening to and learning from children with lived experience of involvement with the department.

# Implementation of the Child Safe Standards

## Standard 1: Cultural safety for Aboriginal children

The department respects and values the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children. Our senior leaders take responsibility for ensuring staff acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children. We support increased self-determination for Aboriginal people and work to ensure that Aboriginal children are safe, resilient and able to thrive in culturally rich and strong Aboriginal families and communities.

To achieve this, we:

* make Aboriginal cultural safety a priority in our [Strategic plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-strategic-plan) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-strategic-plan>, [Anti-racism action plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/anti-racism-action-plan-2024-2027) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/anti-racism-action-plan-2024-2027> and other department strategies (see Related legislation, standards and policies)
* draw on our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework> to strengthen cultural safety through continuous learning and practice improvement
* work in partnership with Aboriginal communities through initiatives such as the quarterly [Aboriginal Children’s Forum](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-childrens-forum) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-childrens-forum>
* work towards ensuring Aboriginal people, families and communities are stronger, safer, thriving and living free from family violence through the Aboriginal-led [Dhelk Dja agreement](https://www.vic.gov.au/dhelk-dja-partnership-aboriginal-communities-address-family-violence) <https://www.vic.gov.au/dhelk-dja-partnership-aboriginal-communities-address-family-violence>
* provide detailed guidance to staff in operational manuals. We expect our staff to encourage and support children to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights, and to encourage and support participation and inclusion by Aboriginal children and their families.
* draw on the expertise of dedicated teams, such as our Aboriginal Self-determination and Outcomes Division and Aboriginal Housing Unit, and cultural advisers in the department
* require staff to complete training on Aboriginal cultural safety, and offer extra training on request
* provide information and resources about cultural safety on a dedicated staff intranet page
* take a zero-tolerance approach to racism in our organisation and deal with inappropriate staff behaviour through our Positive Workplaces Policy.

## Standard 2: Commitment to child safety and wellbeing

We work to embed child safety and wellbeing in our leadership, culture and governance arrangements.

To achieve this, we:

* publicise our commitment to child safety and wellbeing in this policy and on our website
* prioritise child safety and wellbeing in our [Strategic Plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-strategic-plan) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-strategic-plan> our [Leadership Charter](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/our-leadership-charter) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/our-leadership-charter> and other department strategies (see Related legislation, standards and policies)
* document duty of care obligations in recruitment policies and staff position descriptions
* provide detailed guidance to staff about promoting child safety and wellbeing in our operational manuals
* outline expected standards of behaviour of staff in our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards>, and take appropriate action to deal with breaches
* make staff aware of the Standards through a dedicated staff intranet page and train key staff.

## Standard 3: Taking child participation and empowerment seriously

We recognise the importance of empowering children so they can understand their rights and have a say in decisions about their lives. We also recognise the need to be responsive to their views.

To achieve this, we:

* publish a [Charter](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care) <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/charter-children-out-home-care> that lists the rights of children in out-of-home care. This includes the right to be and feel safe and to have a say and be heard.
* publish child-friendly information about how to raise complaints, feedback or concerns
* publish information about the Standards in accessible formats on our website
* provide detailed guidance to staff in operational manuals about how to ensure we consider children’s voices when making decisions
* promote the value of client voices, including the voices of children, through our [Client Voice Framework for Victorian Community Services](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services>
* support staff to seek, listen to and act on the voices of children through initiatives such as [Young Voices](https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices) <https://www.vic.gov.au/young-voices> and other resources
* embed responsiveness to inclusive practice through our Inclusion for Equity project to ensure we consider and respond to diverse and intersecting needs of individuals and communities.

## Standard 4: Involving families and communities

We also recognise the importance of involving families and communities in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

To achieve this, we:

* publish information about our child safe policies and practices on our [Child Safe Standards webpage](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> and social media accounts
* welcome feedback from families, carers and communities, for example through advisory groups
* publish a [charter for parents and carers with a disability](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/roles-and-responsibilities/charter-rights-parents-and-carers-disabilities-involved) <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-approach/roles-and-responsibilities/charter-rights-parents-and-carers-disabilities-involved> that sets out their rights when involved with child protection services, including rights to participate and be heard
* make it easy for people to provide feedback by giving people multiple options for contacting us, including by phone, email, post or online through the [department’s Complaints webpage](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint>
* publish information on how to make a complaint in community languages on our Complaints webpage, and arrange interpreters on request
* provide detailed guidance to staff in operational manuals about informing and involving families and communities in our work.

## Standard 5: Respecting equity and diversity

We work to create an environment that recognises children’s diverse circumstances and where all children feel safe, welcome and included, including Aboriginal children, children from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds, children with disability and LGBTIQ+ children.

To achieve this, we:

* train our staff on diversity, equity and inclusion
* give children and families an opportunity to identify specific needs when engaging with our services
* provide access to information and complaints processes that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand, for example by publishing information on how to make a complaint in community languages
* act when we identify racism, discrimination or exclusion in our organisation and services
* deliver services that reflect the diverse and intersecting interests, needs, experiences and cultures of the children and families we work with
* strive to reflect the diversity of the community in our staff and senior leadership
* acknowledge or celebrate important cultural dates in our workplace
* maintain a physical and online environment that celebrates diversity and inclusion
* commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities include children of all abilities.

## Standard 6: Ensuring that staff are suitable and supported

We are committed to making sure we hire the right people to work with children, and that we support them to promote child safety in their work.

To achieve this, we:

* state our commitment to child safety in position descriptions for roles involving children
* take reasonable steps to employ skilled people with necessary qualifications and experience. Our recruitment policies and guides include advice on asking interview questions that address experience and qualifications for working with children.
* conduct pre-employment screening, including reference checks and police checks
* require staff engaged in child-related work to hold a Working with Children Check (unless exempt)
* train relevant staff on our child safety policies and procedures
* train relevant staff on our responsibilities for assessing and managing family violence risks with children, to align child safety and family violence ([MARAM Framework](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management) <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management>) responsibilities
* provide information and resources for all staff on our staff intranet about the Standards, our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards>, how to manage feedback from children and notifying reportable conduct (alleged abuse by department staff)
* support staff through day to day supervision, peer support and learning and wellbeing programs.

## Standard 7: Child-focused complaint systems

We want all staff, families and children to feel confident about reporting child abuse, family violence and other child safety concerns. We are committed to making our systems easy to access, responsive and focused on the needs and rights of children.

To achieve this, we:

* publish child-friendly information on our [website](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint-children-and-young-people-out-home-care-care-services) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint-children-and-young-people-out-home-care-care-services> for children in out of home care about how to make a complaint
* publish information on how to make a complaint in community languages on our [Complaints webpage](file:///C%3A/Users/vidw2i2/Downloads/Complaints%20webpage) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint> and arrange interpreters on request
* give people a choice about how to report their concerns, such as by phone, email, mail or online through our Complaints webpage
* register complaints and concerns in our systems, respond within a reasonable time and keep people informed of progress and any delays
* record all service delivery incidents that result in harm to a client
* require staff to treat allegations of child abuse and harm seriously, and make this clear in our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards>
* provide information and/or training for staff about how to respond to allegations and concerns
* notify the appropriate authorities of alleged or suspected child abuse in accordance with the law and department policy we manage information arising from complaints, notifications and investigations under the law and our [Privacy Policy <](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/privacy-policy)https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/privacy-policy>.

## Standard 8: Staff knowledge, skills and awareness

We are committed to making sure our staff have knowledge and skills to keep children safe.

To achieve this, we:

* train key staff who work with children on topics such as identifying potential signs of child abuse and trauma-informed practice
* provide training and resources on Victoria’s legislated family violence framework ([the MARAM Framework](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management) <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management>) to help relevant staff identify, assess and manage family violence risk for children
* provide information to all staff on our staff intranet site about the Standards and child abuse reporting obligations
* support our staff through ongoing supervision and learning programs
* operate a Direct Personal Response Program for our senior leaders, to help them consider organisation practices and culture concerning abuse and opportunities for meaningful reform.

## Standard 9: Safe physical and online environments

We promote child safety and wellbeing in department-operated physical and online environments.

To achieve this, we:

* reflect our commitment to safe physical and online environments in our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> and operational procedures
* follow our social media policy and only depict or identify children in our care on social media, with their or their guardian’s express written permission, as applicable
* work with Victoria Police and other organisations on issues such as sexual exploitation and online safety
* implement procurement policies and funding agreements which outline child safety and wellbeing obligations.

## Standard 10: Review of child safe policies and practices

We regularly review and improve our implementation of the Child Safe Standards.

To achieve this, we:

* undertake reviews to evaluate our child safe practices and make improvements
* draw on learnings following incidents and decisions made by regulators, advocacy bodies and tribunals to inform continuous improvements
* review this policy and our [Child Safe Conduct of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> at least once every two years.

## Standard 11: Documenting policies and procedures

This policy and our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> document our general approach to child safety and wellbeing and our expectations of staff.

As a large organisation with many functions and services, we document detailed requirements of staff in operational policies and procedures (see examples under Related legislation, standards and policies).

When developing policies and procedures, we draw on research, best practice and feedback from a range of sources, including unions, regulatory and integrity bodies, other government departments and the community.

# Roles and responsibilities

The Board (or a committee appointed by the Board) oversees the department’s implementation of the Standards and its compliance with this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

This section summarises the roles and responsibilities for implementing this policy and the Standards:

| Role | Responsibility |
| --- | --- |
| All staff  | **Be aware** of this policy, the department’s commitment to child safety and wellbeing and the Standards’ application to their work**Comply** with the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards> including:* taking reasonable steps to protect children from harm and abuse
* treating allegations of child abuse and harm seriously
* notifying the appropriate authorities of alleged or suspected child abuse in accordance with the law and department policy.
 |
| Managers (including department executives)  | Managers must comply with the responsibilities of all staff. They also have a responsibility to:**Promote awareness** of this policy, the department’s commitment to child safety and wellbeing and the application of the Standards to their team’s work**Encourage reporting** of breaches of the Child Safe Code of Conduct**Act on breaches** by taking timely and decisive action under the *Positive Workplaces Policy* or Managing Misconduct Procedure |
| Children and Families DivisionDisability, Fairness and Emergency Management Division | **Implement** the Standards in the department’s operational policies and frameworks for child protection, secure care, disability, housing and youth services**Maintain** this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct |
| Community Operations and Practice Leadership Division | **Implement** the Standards in the department’s child protection, secure care, disability and housing services |
| Executive Services | **Implement the Standards** in the department’s complaints and reportable conduct systems  |
| People and Culture | **Implement** the Standards in staff recruitment and development policies and practices |

# More information

## Definitions

**Child means a** child or young person under the age of 18 years

**Child Safe Standards mean** the Standards made under section 17(1) of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)

**Child abuse includes a**ny act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or an offence under section 49M(1) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic)*;* the infliction of physical violence or serious emotional or psychological harm on a child; or the serious neglect of a child

**Complaint**means an expression of dissatisfaction with services provided, contracted or funded by the department. A complaint relates to a specific episode, occurrence or provision of service that has resulted in an impact on any individual or group. This can include the complaints handling process itself.

**Cultural safety**is defined in our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework) <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework> as an environment that is safe for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience. See the framework for more detail.

**Family violence** is behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour is physically or sexually abusive; emotionally or psychologically abusive; economically abusive; threatening; coercive; or in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person.

It is also behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, the above behaviours.

**MARAM** means the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework. The Framework ensures that services identify, screen, assess and manage risks of family violence effectively. The MARAM Framework is made under Part 11 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

**Reportable conduct** **means:**

* a sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the offence has been commenced or concluded
* sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
* physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child
* any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
* significant neglect of a child

**Reportable conduct scheme** means the scheme that operates under Part 5A of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic). It requires some organisations (including the department) to respond to and notify allegations of reportable conduct against their employees, volunteers, contractors, officeholders and officers.

## Advice about this policy

Staff who are unsure about their obligations under this policy should speak with their manager or contact Operational Child Safeguarding for advice at child.safeguarding@dffh.vic.gov.au.

Staff may also contact People and Culture if there are concerns about the impact of this policy on employment.

More information about the Child Safe Standards can be found at the department’s [Child Safe Standards webpage](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards) <www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards>.

## Related legislation, standards and policies

### Legislation and codes of conduct

* Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
* Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
* Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
* [Code of conduct for Victorian Public Sector employees](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/codes-of-conduct/code-of-conduct-for-victorian-public-sector-employees/)

### Standards

* Commission for Children and Young People, [A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/)

### Strategies

* [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework#:~:text=This%20framework%20helps%20the%20department,a%20continuous%20quality%20improvement%20approach.)
* [Anti-racism action plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/anti-racism-action-plan-2024-2027)
* [Client Voice Framework for Victorian Community Services](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services)
* [Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way - Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families](https://www.vic.gov.au/dhelk-dja-partnership-aboriginal-communities-address-family-violence)
* [Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM Framework)](https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-multi-agency-risk-assessment-and-management)
* [Korin Balit-Djak Aboriginal Health, Wellbeing and Safety Strategic Plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/korin-korin-balit-djak)
* [Mana-na worn-tyeen maar-takoort, Every Aboriginal Person has a Home – The Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework](https://vahhf.org.au/)
* [Roadmap for reform: strong families, safe children](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/roadmap-reform-strong-families-safe-children)
* [Strategic Plan 2022-26](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/dffh-strategic-plan)
* [Wungurilwil Gapgapduir – the Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement and Strategic Action Plan](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/wungurilwil-gapgapduir-aboriginal-children-and-families-agreement#:~:text=Wungurilwil%20Gapgapduir%3A%20Aboriginal%20Children%20and,Aboriginal%20children%20and%20young%20people.)

### Department policies and procedures

* [Child Protection Manual](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/)
* [Child Safe Code of Conduct](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/child-safe-standards)
* Client incident management guide
* Feedback (including compliments and complaints) management policy
* Feedback (including compliments and complaints) management procedure
* Management of Misconduct Common Policy (Victorian Public Sector Commission)
* Managing Misconduct Procedure
* Positive Workplaces Policy
* Privacy Policy
* Reportable Conduct Policy
* [Residential Services Practice Manual](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/residential-services-practice-manual)
* Social Media Policy

## Document control

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| Document Name | Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy |
| Version Number | 2.2 |
| Date | November 2024 |
| Author | Operational Child Safeguarding |
| Authorised By | Specialist Children and Family Operations |
| Distribution  | PublicDepartment-wide |

### Change History

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| Version | Issue Date | Author  | Authorised By | Reason for change |
| Version 2.0 | May 2023 | Executive Services | Board | To reflect new 2022 Child Safe Standards and update references to department policies and practices  |
| Version 2.1 | October 2024 | Integrity Unit | Executive Services | To update references and links to department policies and practices and capture additional child safe strategies. |
| Version 2.2 | November 2024 | Operational Child Safeguarding | Specialist Children and Family Operations | To update document owner. |