

This Child Safe Environment Policy sets out AFS Australia's commitment to ensuring the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. It outlines the mechanisms and procedures that ensure staff and volunteers are able to meet this commitment.

The Policy operates within the framework of AFS International and AFS Australia standards which put the safety and wellbeing of participants at the heart of all our activities. It reflects the legal requirements with respect to child protection in each Australian State and Territory, and complies with National Guidelines and State Departments of Education regulations for the accreditation and operation of student exchange organisations.

There are specific procedures in place for volunteers in each State and Territory.

## Statement of Commitment

AFS is an international volunteer organisation committed to providing intercultural learning opportunities, helping people develop the knowledge, skills, understanding and bonds needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

AFS is committed to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people participating on our programs. We support the rights of children and young people and will act without hesitation to ensure a safe environment is maintained at all times. AFS respects the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

All volunteers and staff are actively encouraged and supported in maintaining a secure environment for all our participants. Those who come into contact with children or young people during the course of their work have a responsibility to ensure that they are undertaking the appropriate duty of care.

## Staff and Volunteer Recruitment, Training and Conduct

AFS Australia will ensure that it recruits, trains and manages staff and volunteers in ways that support a safe environment for our participants.

### Recruitment, selection and management

We will ensure that:

- There are *appropriate role descriptions* in place which make clear the requirements for staff and volunteer positions;
- Recruitment is on merit and conducted by people with appropriate skills and accountability;
- Selection will be *based on appropriate criteria*, including those attributes which are essential for supporting the well-being of children and young people;
- Appropriate *Working with Children Checks* are undertaken, according to Australian State and Territory regulatory requirements, if the position involves interaction with children and young people;
- A *probationary period* is put in place for every new appointment – staff or volunteer;
- Every staff member and volunteer *receives an induction* suitable for their role, including elements relevant to this Policy;
- Staff and volunteers are *provided with training opportunities and resources* appropriate to their roles. This will include relevant training in relation to promoting a safe environment and dealing with issues about child and youth safety, welfare and well-being; and
- There are fair and effective processes in place for dealing with unacceptable behaviour and breaches of policy.

## Code of Conduct

All AFS Australia staff and volunteers are required to adhere to the *Code of Conduct* at all times. In relation to participants, this includes:

### **Appropriate Behaviour**

As an AFS Australia staff member or volunteer, they **will**:

- Follow AFS policies and guidelines for the safety and wellbeing of program participants;
- Ensure that they seek the guidance of a more senior or experienced staff member or volunteer, where necessary, when dealing with issues of potential risk;
- Treat all program participants, volunteers and staff with respect;
- Raise any concerns about participant safety and wellbeing to a staff member as soon as possible;
- Ensure that any allegations or suspicions of any type of abuse (this includes verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, electronic or cyber abuse) are recorded and acted upon in accordance with the Child Safe Environment Policy; and,
- Be aware and respectful of cultural differences amongst participants.

### **Inappropriate Behaviour**

As an AFS Australia staff member or volunteer, they **will not**:

- Knowingly participate in any illegal or unethical activity;
- Withhold information that is pertinent to the safety and wellbeing of a participant;
- Engage in activities that threaten, intimidate or make participants feel significantly uncomfortable;
- Use offensive, derogatory or abusive language; or,
- Discriminate on issues that relate to gender, ability, cultural background, religion, sexuality or age.

## Working with Children Checks

### **Overview**

Across Australia, each State and Territory has in place legislation to require child-related pre-employment screening for individuals who are employed or volunteer in organisations where they will be in contact with, or have responsibility for young people under the age of 18 years. Student exchange accreditation agencies require compliance with these regulations.

In response, AFS Intercultural Programs Australia will:

- Appoint a 'contact person' or 'contact persons' who will be responsible for managing Working with Children Checks within AFS Australia;
- Determine who requires a Working with Children Check and who is exempt;
- Ensure that all persons over the age required in each State or Territory, who are engaged in child-related activity within AFS Australia, hold a valid Working with Children Check;
- Ensure that all information in relation to Working with Children Check applications is kept confidential;
- Maintain a Working with Children Check register of all staff and volunteers.

AFS Australia will ensure its staff and volunteers are aware of specific compliance issues and each State and Territory will have documented procedures.

### **Application and notification**

At the initial application stage, AFS Australia will:

- Notify all applicants for staff or volunteer roles that, by signing the volunteer application form or accepting an offer of employment, they are consenting to the screening process under the Act;
- Be able to certify that the designated 'contact person(s)' has sighted documents to confirm an staff member's/volunteer's identity;
- Inform all potential staff and volunteers that it is an offence for a 'disqualified person' to sign a Working with Children Check application form or a renewal form.

If a new employee or volunteer has a current Working with Children Check, AFS Australia will register AFS Australia with the relevant authority as the person's current employer where required.

AFS Australia requires staff and volunteers to notify if they are aware of any change to the validity of the person's Working with Children Check due to a change in their police information. AFS Australia may be notified by an authority to that effect.

## Employment of staff and volunteers

While a Working with Children Check application is being processed, AFS Australia will not:

- Employ volunteers until they have received their Working with Children Check, unless a State or Territory enables them to be employed once an application is submitted; nor
- Employ any person in regulated employment:
  - Who withdraws their consent to employment screening;
  - Whose application has been withdrawn for any other reason; or,
  - Who is issued with a negative notice or whose Working with Children Check is cancelled or suspended.

If a staff member or volunteer has had a Working with Children Check cancelled or suspended or receives a negative notice after a change in police information, AFS Australia will:

- Ensure the person does not continue to undertake child related work within the organisation; or
- If AFS Australia continues to employ the person to perform work that is not child-related, ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to manage any risks of harm to children and young people that may arise as a result of the person's ongoing employment within the organisation.

If required by an authority, AFS Australia will notify if an applicant or Working with Children Check holder stops working for the organisation.

## Maintaining currency of Working with Children Checks

AFS Australia will:

- Ensure staff and volunteers are aware of the period of currency of Working with Children Checks unless cancelled or suspended, and that the renewal process involves a new national police information check, a check of disciplinary information where applicable and a complete reassessment of an applicant's eligibility;
- Maintain an employee register/s of all paid staff and volunteers involved in child-related activities within the organisation or who regularly come into contact with children and young people;
- Undertake regular reviews of the status of staff and volunteer Working with Children Checks and take corrective action if necessary; and
- Notify the relevant authority of any changes in their status within the required number of days

## Handling Disclosures, Allegations and Suspicions of Harm

AFS Australia will ensure that staff and volunteers respond as quickly as possible, and in the best interests of a participant under 18 years of age, when disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm are received. AFS Australia recognises that children and young people are vulnerable members of the community and that extra measures must be taken to protect and support them.

All staff and volunteers will receive, as soon as possible upon commencing employment, information relating to identifying risks of harm and handling disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm. Volunteers will report disclosed, alleged or suspected harm to AFS Australia staff, and staff will report disclosed, alleged or suspected harm to relevant authorities who will decide on an appropriate course of action.

## Definitions

**Harm** may be categorised in the following types:

- *Physical abuse*, for example: beating, shaking, burning, biting, causing bruises or fractures by inappropriate discipline; inappropriate restraint/excess force; giving children alcohol, drugs or inappropriate medication;
- *Emotional or psychological abuse*, for example: constant yelling, insults, swearing, criticism, bullying and harassment. This may include electronic or cyber abuse – for example: abusive, insulting, sexual or harassing text messages, emails, photographs or videos, posts on websites and social networking sites, or fake social profiles;
- *Neglect* for example: not giving children sufficient food, clothing, enough sleep, hygiene, medical care, leaving children alone or children missing school;
- *Sexual abuse or exploitation*, for example: sexual jokes, inappropriate touching, overt sexual behaviour, exposing children to sexual acts or pornography or having sexual intercourse with a child or young person under 16 years of age (even if the child appears to have consented).

Staff and volunteers may suspect harm if there are significant changes in behaviour or the presence of new unexplained and suspicious injuries. A disclosure of harm occurs when someone, including a child, tells a staff member or volunteer of about harm that has happened or is likely to happen or there may be an allegation of harm against a specific person.

## Procedures to minimise harm to children and young people

AFS Australia will work to minimise harm to children and young people and support their interests and wellbeing, by:

- *Contact support* - providing 24/7 emergency support, monthly contact and contact details of the regulatory body in the relevant state;
- *Orientation and information* - delivering comprehensive orientation programs, including safety tips and cultural information; ensuring they know that it is their right to feel safe at all times and that they understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour;
- *Involvement in AFS Australia* - letting them know who is an employee or volunteer in the organisation and allowing them to be a part of decision-making processes;
- Ensuring that official *AFS Australia events meet appropriate safety requirements*; and
- *Handling issues effectively* – encouraging them to speak up about concerns; taking what a child or young person says seriously, and following up their issues.

## Reporting disclosures or suspicions of harm

AFS Australia will take action immediately following a disclosure or suspicion of harm. AFS Australia will not conduct its own enquiries in relation to the disclosure or suspicion of harm or try to come to an agreement between the parties involved.

- Staff and volunteers who have concerns about the safety of a child will refer the issue to appropriate staff immediately; they will record their concerns and observations in a non-judgemental manner.
- Where a child is at risk of unsafe or harmful actions, staff and volunteers may intervene immediately, provided it is safe to do so or, if it is unsafe, call the Police for assistance.
- At least one AFS Australia staff member will be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via the AFS Australia emergency phone (+61 414 594 694).
- Staff will contact the relevant Police or regulatory authority immediately and ensure information provided is comprehensive and accurate.

## Processes for those involved in the report

**Children and young people involved** will be offered appropriate counselling and support. This may include increased levels of support and contact from their local AFS Support Contact Person and access to professional counselling, which will be covered by the AFS Medical Plan if necessary.

Under relevant legislation, **a person who reports suspected child abuse** is protected from civil or criminal legal actions and is not considered to have broken any code of conduct or ethics.

If the **person responding to the allegation of harm** is a member of AFS Australia, AFS Australia staff may review their duties. If the person continues to interact/work with children, AFS Australia will ensure that they are appropriately supervised at all times. If necessary, AFS Australia will seek legal advice as to the extent to which that person can carry out duties in the organisation.

## Risk Management of High-Risk Activities

AFS Australia recognises that, in engaging with young people in a wide variety of contexts, there is a need to ensure risks are appropriately identified, evaluated and managed.

The risks relating to AFS participants can be physical, emotional, sexual and cultural in nature, including the risks from:

- Other children or young people;
- Someone outside the organisation;
- An employee or volunteer; and
- Themselves.

Risks can reside in a number of settings such as: the family home; school, community; and AFS Australia activities such as orientation programs, camps and safaris. AFS Australia staff and volunteers will:

- Identify risks of potential harm: for example activities where young people are unsupervised and in areas open to the public; situations where staff or volunteers are alone with a young person; situations where cultural differences require attention.
- Evaluate the risk in terms of how likely it is to occur and the seriousness of its consequences.
- Consider options and plan to reduce, manage or eliminate the risk.

AFS Australia will provide appropriate resources, training and advice to staff and volunteers in risk management as well as supporting young people in recognising and avoiding high risk situations.

## Managing Breaches

This Policy, and associated AFS Australia procedures relating to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm, apply to staff, interns, volunteers and AFS participants. AFS Australia will address any breaches in a fair, unbiased and supportive manner.

The process will ensure:

- All people concerned will be advised of the process;
- All people concerned will be able to provide their version of events;
- The details of the breach, including all parties' versions and the outcome will be recorded;
- Matters discussed in relation to the breach will be kept confidential; and
- An appropriate outcome will be decided by AFS Australia staff and/or Board of Directors

Depending on the role of the person and the nature of the breach, outcomes may include:

- Providing closer supervision;
- Further education and training;
- Mediating between those involved in the incident (where appropriate);
- Disciplinary procedures if necessary; and
- Reviewing current policies and procedures and developing new policies and procedures as appropriate.

## Responsibilities

Within AFS Australia, the Partner Director is responsible for the effective implementation of this Policy and is the primary contact person with regulatory agencies.

The Volunteer Development Manager is a nominated contact with respect to Working with Children Checks and other contacts may be determined as appropriate.

## Communication and Review

This Policy will be made available to all staff and volunteers in AFS Intercultural Programs Australia. It will be reviewed on an **annual basis** to ensure it remains up-to-date with any legislative changes and continues to be effective in addressing the risks to children and young people on AFS programs. Reviews may take place more frequently if required.

## Other Resources

- AFS Code of Conduct
- AFS Mandatory Reporting of Disclosed, Suspected or Alleged Harm to Young People
- There are a range of documents for volunteers and students which relate to risk management and child safety, for example: Learner Guides for Hosting and Support; Host Family Packs; and the Student Guide – Welcome to Australia.