



Yaleela Torrens
SOCIAL WORKER PTY LTD

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR WORKING SAFELY WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS



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Yaleela Torrens Social Worker Pty Ltd

Code of Practice for Working Safely with All Participants

- Yaleela Torrens Social Worker Pty Ltd is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all participants, especially vulnerable people involved in your programs.
- When you work within this Code of Practice you will help provide a safe environment for all.
- Your organisation may have its own Code of Conduct for your conduct. It is important that you are familiar with this.
- As a Team Member you will have power and influence over others. This can sometimes be abused. The Code of Practice safeguards against abuse of positional power. It provides boundaries for appropriate behaviour.
- The Code of Practice provides guidelines for behaviour when running a program.
- The Code of Practice means that everyone on the team understands the expectations – we are all ‘on the same page’.

The Code of Practice Covers

- Behaviour
- Language
- Physical contact
- Program style
- Cultural awareness
- Special needs
- ChildSafe Ratios
- Privacy
- Social media



Get to Know the Code of Practice

- Read and understand the Code of Practice or your organisation Code of Conduct.
- Know your responsibilities and what is expected of you before running a program.
- Attend training.

Behaviour

All people are valued

What we do as Team Members reflects our values. Behave in a way that shows that all people are valued and are treated with respect and dignity.

Be a Good Role Model

- Take care that your actions match your words. Children take more notice of what adults do than what they say.
- It is easy to 'love the lovable'. Those who are difficult to relate to often need to be shown more support. Make sure that no one is left out.
- Avoid favouritism or behaviour that gives the impression of 'special' relationships with individuals.
- Your behaviour should show that you care and demonstrate the positive values of your organisation to the community.

Respect Others

- Treat all participants with respect. Take notice of their reactions to your tone of voice and manner.
- Do not be alone with a participant. For a private conversation make sure that you are in view of others.
- Do not enter the sleeping accommodation of members of the opposite gender, except in emergencies.
- Be aware of situations when people might be changing, showering or using the toilet. Seek their permission if they require assistance with these personal tasks and inform another responsible adult.

Language

Words can Hurt

- Words are powerful and can build others up or tear them down.
- Your language should reflect the values of your organisation.

Affirm Others

- Use language that affirms the worth, dignity and significance of the participants.
- Negative or critical language can sometimes be used in an attempt at humour.
- Ensure that jokes are not made at the expense of others. This can undermine their sense of safety.
- 'In-jokes' and jargon alienate people and exclude them from the 'in' crowd.

Mind Your Language

- Avoid using derogatory language – even if meant as sarcasm or as a joke.
- Avoid 'in-jokes', negative language, put downs and sexist language.
- Avoid jargon. Make sure the words you use are understood by everyone.
- Do not speak down to vulnerable people but respect them as people of value.
- Where private conversations are necessary, make sure both of you are visible to another adult.





Physical Contact

Safe Touch

- Many vulnerable people enjoy physical contact and will seek it as a simple expression of affection and confidence. Others may not want or seek physical contact.
- Physical contact between adults and children may be misconstrued. Vulnerable people, and especially children, may not be aware of creating such situations. Be alert to such circumstances. We must always be SEEN to be doing the right thing as well as knowing that we are.
- Physical touch has an important role in building healthy relationships. It needs to be done within clear guidelines. Be aware of changing community attitudes around safe and appropriate touch.
- In some contexts, physical contact is essential for safety and learning e.g. sports such as gymnastics. In such cases the principles outlined below should still apply, but may need to be modified for the specific situation e.g. the area touched may need to include acceptable areas covered by swimwear but this must always be in the presence of others, open and not secretive.



Expectations

Physical contact should:

- Be in response to the need of the participant and not that of the Team Member.
- Occur only with permission – resistance from a person should be respected.
- Never be in the area normally covered by bathers/swimwear and a person's mouth.
- Be open and not secretive.
- Be guided by the age and developmental stage of the person

Let the Participant Choose

- People should be allowed to choose the degree of physical contact they have with others, apart from exceptional circumstances such as when needing medical attention.
- Do not initiate close physical contact; this should come from the participant, if at all.
- Physical contact is inappropriate if it could be perceived as a threat or causes embarrassment to either person.





- You should always allow the vulnerable person to disengage easily.
- As a general rule, open displays of affection initiated by a vulnerable person in the presence of others, are acceptable.
- An adult may initiate physical contact such as to comfort a vulnerable person after an injury but always with their permission and in view of others.
- Consistent contact with the same person may give the impression of favouritism. It is unwise. It may result in others competing for attention or feeling left out.
- Any physical touch that could be construed as sexual in nature, is inappropriate and must be avoided.

Appropriate Touch

- Avoid touching a child or vulnerable person between the shoulders and the knees.
- Contact with the bony areas of the body such as the shoulder, elbow or head is generally acceptable.
- A sideways hug around the shoulder is more acceptable than hugging with both arms or with an arm around the waist
- It is inappropriate to sit a child on your lap. If you need to support a child to participate in an activity, sit the child on a small chair and kneel behind them. This way you can guide their shoulders, elbows or wrists as necessary
- If a child initiates a hug with both arms, remember to:
 - o Minimise the length of time of the hug
 - o Make sure they can disengage easily
 - o Encourage other more appropriate greetings such as a high five
 - o Always make sure other people are present
- There will be occasions where displays of affection are natural. A vulnerable person should not be shunned if they initiate a need for comfort. Keep in mind the age of the vulnerable person and the circumstances.
- Never touch or hug a vulnerable person in private.
- Do not use any form of corporal or physical punishment, even in jest.
- Physical restraint is appropriate only to protect vulnerable people from harm. This includes reasonable restraint to stop a fight, to stop bullying or to avoid an accident.
- Some people will not be comfortable with any physical contact. Respect their wishes. Maintain the boundaries outlined above.
- What is reasonable and lawful will depend on the circumstances. In some contexts, such as disability, dance or gymnastics, there will need to be variations in what is considered appropriate. Be wise. Use good judgement and be guided by your Code of Conduct.



Program Style

Perceptions are Important

- Vulnerable people are not always able to sense the risks associated with participating in activities.
- Keep the group's capability and risk appetite in mind when making choices about activities in your program.
- Choose activities that match the values of your organisation.

Be Inclusive

- Clear boundaries and rules are needed to ensure that participants are kept safe.
- Avoid situations that may cause participants to feel stupid or embarrassed.
- Competitive games and activities can be fun. Ensure that gender, intellectual and physical differences are not exploited.
- Ensure all activities are age appropriate.

Plan Well

- Activities or 'wide games' that require participants to be alone or in pairs out of sight of Team Members should be managed carefully. This includes activities that occur in public places.
- Be willing to drop an activity if you sense that it is not working safely or is making participants feel angry or isolated.
- Plan well and add extra support measures when an activity has extra challenges or participants have high needs.
- Ask your Team Leader to help you plan well.



Cultural Awareness

Sensitivity

Be sensitive to cultures and family traditions different from your own. These differences may affect the degree of participation of vulnerable people in activities and games.

Respect

- Don't pressure participants from other cultures and traditions to participate. Let them choose when they are ready.
- The family has many forms so respect a participant's support structures.
- Be sensitive about using words which make assumptions about a participant's background, family status or principal caregivers.
- Avoid language or activities that discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age or ability.

Be Aware

- Show respect for the authority structures of other cultures and traditions.
- Do not make statements which reflect ignorance, bias or ridicule about other religions and cultures.
- Do not hold or touch vulnerable people in an inappropriate and/or culturally insensitive way.
- Clarify expectations or restrictions with caregivers if you are unsure.



Special Needs

Inclusion

- People with special needs are those with an illness or condition that makes it difficult for them to do the things that others do.
- It is highly likely that people with special needs will be involved in your programs.
- People with special needs may need assistance to be included.

Types of Special Needs

- Physical e.g. epilepsy, asthma, allergies
- Developmental e.g. autism, dyslexia, Down syndrome
- Behavioural/emotional e.g. depression, ADHD
- Sensory-impaired e.g. visually impaired, deaf

Be Aware

- Refer to Chapter 4 for more detailed information on special needs and equity.
- ChildSafe also have brief modules on a variety of special needs, or through your organisation, consult specialist organisations for related





ChildSafe Ratios

More is Not Always Better

- A larger crowd of participants at your program does not always mean that it is a greater success. Don't neglect safety standards for the sake of a bigger event.
- Every program must have a safe number of Team Members in relation to the number of participants. This will differ according to the activity, as well as the age and capacity of the participants.

1:8

- ChildSafe recommended Team Member to participant ratio for general activities must be at least 1:8 (i.e. 1 leader for every 8 participants) for children 6 years and over.
- When young children or people with disabilities are present the ratio will vary (See table below).
- Some organisations prefer a smaller number of participants to each responsible Team Member. This provides a greater opportunity to build quality relationships and provide higher safety standards.

Be Safe

- Ensure that you have sufficient Team Members to run your program safely.
- Junior Team Members are not adults so should be counted as participants in a 1:8 ratio.
- Use this matrix as a general qualified guide.

ChildSafe ratios	Education sector qualification					
	NQF	Education centre-based services	Out of school care	Family day care	Girl Guides - unit meetings	Girl Guides - adventure
1:4	1:4	1:4	1:15	1:7	1:8	1:6
1:5	1:4	1:5		1:7		
1:7	1:10					
1:8					1:12	1:8
					1:15	1:10
		1:11				

National Quality Framework Australia, 2018

Education and Care Services National Regulations [NSW] 2014

Girl Guides Australia, 2018

Notes:

1. Some variation occurs State to State
2. Consult relevant industry guidelines, esp. outdoors and water
3. 2 adult leaders minimum per activity, recommended



Water activity and other higher risk activities

- For all water activities, ratios need to be determined based on the water activity context and environment.
- At least one of the supervising adults must have life-saving qualifications (Bronze Medallion).
- There must be at least one adult supervisor out of the water at all times.
- Where a person with a disability has one-on one support, this will be in addition to the given ratios.
- Where the group size exceeds these numbers, the second qualified supervisor may include a public lifeguard if on duty.
- While a lifeguard can be expected to assist in a rescue, remember that they will not be actively supervising your group.
- Consider the skill level of swimmers and elevated risk that may present, relevant to context / environment.



Privacy

Personal Information

- As a Team Member you may require access to private information about a participant (e.g. medical information).
- You have an obligation to abide by your organisation's privacy policy to protect the privacy of participants and their families.

Permission

- Personal information and photographs obtained through your involvement in programs must be used appropriately.
- Appropriate use includes within the program itself or uses for which permission has been obtained from the caregiver or participant (as appropriate).
- It may be necessary to continue to keep contact with participants outside a program. Ensure that the caregiver has given permission, and that the vulnerable person welcomes such contact.

Be Aware

- Ask your Team Leader for a copy of your organisation's privacy policy.
- Photographs taken during programs must not be kept for personal use or shown in public, or on social media sites, without written permission.
- Keep a record of ongoing contact with participants.
- Communicate with the vulnerable person in an open manner, keeping in mind what you would be happy for their family to hear or read.
- Do not take a vulnerable person to your home or encourage meetings outside the program activity.
- Ongoing contact with participants should occur only within strict guidelines set by your organisation.
- Be creative with photos e.g. take group photos from angles that identify few or no people using side or rear profiles.





Social Media



Access is Easy

- Internet use starts young. 81% of parents with pre-schoolers say their children use the internet, particularly YouTube.
- The use of social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok can pose a danger to participants, Team Members and organisations unaware of associated risks.
- We cannot control the way others use social media. We can provide guidelines for our own Team Members.

Keep Safe Online

- Be aware that whatever you post online cannot be taken back. Share only what you would be happy for a caregiver to see.
- Do not post photos that are indecent or demeaning or of a person who is upset or distressed.
- Sexting (sending sexual images) and cyber bullying (using information technologies to intentionally harm or harass another person) have become prevalent. Be alert to the dangers of these practices. Refer also to Internet use in Chapter 8.

Be Open and Accountable

- Ask your Team Leader for a copy of your organisations' social media policy.
- Participants under 18 should not be 'friended' on personal social media sites.
- Your program may choose to set up an authorised site, which can be used to keep in touch with participants and moderated by a responsible person.
- 'Friending' within this limited group would normally be acceptable.
- Do not share personal information of participants or their location on social media.
- Talk about appropriate social media guidelines with other Team Members so that you are all 'on the same page.'

Note: A specific Social Media policy is a useful tool in the face of its growing use and associated and emerging risks arising from their misuse. Also find helpful resources at - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>





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