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AEC Child Safety Policy

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Purpose

1. The AEC is committed to the safety and protection of the children and young people we serve.
2. This policy:
 - a. outlines the AEC's principles and processes for providing a safe environment for children and young people in all of our offices and business operations, and most pertinently at the National Electoral Education Centre (NEEC) located at Old Parliament House, Canberra
 - b. informs AEC staff of their obligations to act ethically and responsibly towards children and young people at all times. These obligations include the legal obligation to report any real or suspected instances of grooming or abuse of a minor to police as soon as practicable
 - c. is designed to demonstrate and monitor the AEC's compliance with the [Commonwealth Child Safe Framework](#).

Application

3. This policy applies to all AEC employees, including:
 - a. APS employees as defined in the *Public Service Act 1999*
 - b. employees on secondment to the AEC
 - c. employees engaged under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*
 - d. labour hire personnel, and
 - e. statutory appointments.

Rationale

4. AEC staff come into contact with children and young people in the workplace in a variety of ways, for example through:
 - a. community engagement and public relations activities
 - b. at polling places during the conduct of electoral events
 - c. public enquiries, including through social media
 - d. provisional enrolment of young people
 - e. young people coming into AEC offices
 - f. international deployments
 - g. AEC staff who are carers bringing their children into AEC offices
 - h. most significantly, delivery of the AEC's education program, including at the NEEC.
5. All contact between children/young people and the AEC entails significant legal and ethical responsibilities for the safety of the minors involved.

Guidelines and legislation

6. The AEC's commitment to child safety arises out of Commonwealth legislation and the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework.
7. The *Public Service Act 1999* requires all APS employees to comply with the APS Code of Conduct and APS Values, which provides that an APS employee, when acting in connection with APS employment, must:
 - a. treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
 - b. at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values, APS Employment Principles and the integrity and good reputation of the APS, and
 - c. comply with all applicable Australian Laws.
8. The Commonwealth Child Safe Framework requires the AEC to:
 - a. undertake risk assessments annually for AEC activities to identify the level of responsibility for, and contact with, children and young people; evaluate risks to child safety; and put in place appropriate strategies to manage any identified risks
 - b. establish and maintain a system of training and compliance to make relevant staff aware of, and compliant with, the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and relevant legislation, including working with vulnerable people checks (which includes working with children checks) and mandatory reporting requirements
 - c. adopt and implement the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
 - d. publish an annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of the risk assessment conducted.
9. This policy functions in conjunction with the *Privacy ACT 1988* and the Australian Privacy Principles as well as the *AEC Enterprise Agreement 2016-2019*.

Adoption of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

10. Under the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, the AEC is required to adopt and implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. The National Principles provide a benchmark against which to measure the AEC's child safe practices and performance.
11. This policy describes how the AEC facilitates compliance with the National Principles, having regard to the AEC's operations and programs.

National Principle 1: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

12. The AEC holds its staff to the highest standards of ethical behaviour, and cultivates a culture of respect. AEC staff must:
- treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
 - abide by the APS Code of Conduct and uphold the APS Values, APS Employment Principles and the integrity and good reputation of the APS, and
 - comply with all applicable Australian Laws.
13. Staff who come into regular contact with children and young people in the course of their duties, predominantly the staff of the NEEC, undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and their mandatory reporting obligations.
14. This policy is made publicly available on the AEC website and the AEC for Schools website, and is available for AEC staff to demonstrate the AEC's commitment to child safety and wellbeing.

National Principle 2: Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

15. The AEC values the views of children and young people including those visiting the NEEC as participants in public and school programs. This involves:
- seeking survey feedback on NEEC programs and activities from children and young people in order to effectively incorporate their perspectives on our programs
 - making this policy publicly available on the AEC website and the AEC for Schools website, to demonstrate the AEC's commitment to child safety and wellbeing.

National Principle 3: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

16. The AEC seeks to ensure all visitors are informed and contribute to maintaining a child-safe NEEC. This includes:
- making this policy publicly available on the AEC website and the AEC for Schools website, to demonstrate the AEC's commitment to child safety and wellbeing
 - requiring a minimum of two adult supervisors (in addition to NEEC staff) for each session at the NEEC, as outlined in the NEEC [Group Size and Booking Policy](#).

National Principle 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

17. The AEC includes child safety within a broader range of policies promoting diversity and inclusion.
18. As well as upholding the APS Values, APS Code of Conduct and APS Employment Principles, which include respect for all people, the AEC provides support and information for staff to develop their capability for working with children and young people with diverse backgrounds and needs, such as:
 - a. The AEC's People Strategy, which outlines the AEC's commitment to investing in our people
 - b. the AEC's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which outlines the agency's commitment to persons who are culturally and linguistically diverse, from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, have disability, identify as LGBTI+ and/or multi-generational.
 - c. the Diversity and Inclusion Network developing training for AEC staff on issues of equity and diversity
 - d. the AEC's [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), which outlines the AEC's commitment to reconciliation and improving outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - e. the AEC's [Disability Advisory Committee](#), which is the primary mechanism through which the AEC communicates with, and understands issues for, people with disability
 - f. the staff of the NEEC, who undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and their mandatory reporting obligations.

National Principle 5: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

19. The AEC seeks to ensure that staff working with children and young people are suited to their roles by assessing applicants' suitability for employment, child-safe skills and understanding of child safety principles.
20. On engagement, all AEC staff are required to undergo a National Police History Check to identify any police records of offences that would contraindicate the person being given the care, instruction or supervision of children and young people. This includes staff engaged for election-time work, in identified positions, that comprise our Temporary Election Workforce.
21. The AEC requires certain staff, including those at the NEEC who work directly and regularly with children and young people, to hold a Working with Vulnerable People card issued under

ACT legislation. This ensures background checking and risk assessments for all staff engaging with children and young people in their capacity as AEC employees.

National Principle 6: Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child-focused

22. The AEC is committed to providing services to Australians that are impartial, committed to service, accountable, respectful and ethical, and our [Service Charter](#) outlines what the public can expect from us, including mechanisms for providing feedback on our services.
23. The AEC commits to treating all complaints seriously, promptly, and in line with our [Complaints Management Policy](#). This policy sets out how to lodge a complaint and the principles and processes that we follow in managing complaints. Complainants have the right to make an anonymous complaint, but this may limit the action the AEC can take in response to the complaint.
24. Any personal information provided to, or collected by, the AEC will be handled according to the [AEC Privacy Policy](#).
25. Staff who come into regular contact with children and young people in the course of their duties, predominantly the staff of the NEEC, undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and their mandatory reporting obligations.
26. NEEC staff are specifically trained in child-focused handling of disclosures of abuse from minors, and staff are required to report any suspicious or inappropriate conduct towards minors immediately to a supervisor and to the police, in compliance with mandatory reporting legislation.

National Principle 7: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

27. The AEC provides information and support to staff who work with children and young people to improve their skills and awareness of child safety:
 - a. this policy is made available on the AEC website, the AEC for Schools website, and is available internally from the AEC's intranet
 - b. staff engaged for election-time work that comprise our Temporary Election Workforce are made aware of relevant policies and procedures, such as the Child Safety Policy, on the AEC website

- c. staff who come into regular contact with children and young people in the course of their duties, predominantly the staff of the NEEC, undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and their mandatory reporting obligations
- d. NEEC staff are specifically trained in child-focused handling of disclosures of abuse from minors, and staff are required to report any suspicious or inappropriate conduct towards minors immediately to a supervisor and to the police, in compliance with mandatory reporting legislation.

National Principle 8: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

28. The AEC has a risk management framework in place for all AEC programs to address potential risks arising in these environments.

29. The AEC's approach to managing risks associated with child safety includes:

- a. undertaking risk assessments annually for AEC activities to identify the level of responsibility for, and contact with, children and young people; evaluate risks to child safety; and put in place appropriate strategies to manage any identified risks
- b. establishing and maintaining a system of training and compliance to make relevant staff aware of, and compliant with, the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, such as:
 - i. on engagement, all AEC staff are required to undergo a National Police History Check to identify any police records of offences that would contraindicate the person being given the care, instruction or supervision of children and young people. This includes staff engaged for election-time work, in identified positions, that comprise our Temporary Election Workforce.
 - ii. requiring certain staff, including those at the NEEC who work directly and regularly with children and young people, to hold a Working with Vulnerable People card issued under ACT legislation. This ensures background checking and risk assessments for all staff engaging with children and young people in their capacity as AEC employees
 - iii. ensuring that staff who come into regular contact with children and young people in the course of their duties, predominantly the staff of the NEEC, undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework and their mandatory reporting obligations
- c. putting in place appropriate strategies to manage identified risks, such as:
 - i. ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place at the NEEC to support the reporting of any suspicious or inappropriate conduct towards minors immediately to a supervisor and to the police, in compliance with mandatory reporting legislation

- ii. requiring that NEEC staff are specifically trained in child-focused handling of disclosures of abuse from minors, and staff are required to report any suspicious or inappropriate conduct towards minors immediately to a supervisor and to the police, in compliance with mandatory reporting legislation
 - iii. requiring a minimum of two adult supervisors (in addition to NEEC staff) for each session at the NEEC, as outlined in the NEEC Group Size and Booking Policy
 - iv. seeking survey feedback on NEEC programs and activities from children and young people in order to effectively incorporate their perspectives on our programs
 - v. making available our Service Charter which outlines what the public can expect from us, including mechanisms for providing feedback on our services
 - vi. making available our Complaints Management Policy which sets out how to lodge a complaint, including lodging anonymously, and the principles and processes that we follow in managing complaints.
 - vii. handling personal information in accordance with the AEC Privacy Policy.
- d. adopting the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations through this policy, and making this policy available on the AEC website, the AEC for Schools website, and internally for AEC staff from the AEC's intranet
 - e. publishing an annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of the risk assessment conducted.

National Principle 9: Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved

- 30. The AEC commits to undertaking risk assessments annually for AEC activities to identify the level of responsibility for, and contact with, children and young people; evaluate risks to child safety; and put in place appropriate strategies to manage any identified risks
- 31. The AEC commits to publishing an annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of the risk assessment conducted
- 32. The AEC commits to re-evaluating this policy for effectiveness and appropriateness by the review date.

National Principle 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

33. The AEC adopts the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations through this policy.
34. This policy is made publicly available on the AEC website, and the AEC for Schools website, and is available internally for AEC staff from the AEC's intranet, to demonstrate the AEC's commitment to child safety and wellbeing.

Reporting under the Framework

35. NEEC staff undertake annual refresher training on the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, which includes training in child-focused handling of disclosures of abuse from minors and on staff reporting obligations under the law. Procedures are in place to support the reporting of suspected instances of grooming or abuse of a minor to police as soon as practicable.
36. The AEC commits to publishing an annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of the risk assessment conducted
37. AEC employees that require advice on the legal obligations of this policy should contact AEC Legal Services.

Further assistance

For AEC staff

AEC employees that require advice on the legal obligations of this policy should contact AEC Legal Services.

Reporting an offence or suspected offence

Advice for staff if unsure if a concern warrants reporting:

- ACT general public 24-hour line: 1300 556 729
- ACT mandated reporters 24-hour line: 1300 556 728
- Email: childprotection@act.gov.au

To report an offence or suspected offence

- Non-emergency police assistance line (all jurisdictions): 131 444
- Australian Federal Police: <https://www.afp.gov.au/contact-us>
- ACT Police: <https://police.act.gov.au/connect-us>

For members of the public

Enquiries can be made via our [public enquiry service](#).

Definition of terms

Child

A person aged 0-11 years.

Young person

A person aged 12-17 years.

Child safety

Encompasses matters related to protecting children from abuse, such as:

- managing the risk of child abuse
- providing support to children at risk of abuse
- responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

Child abuse

Any act committed against a child involving:

- a sexual offence
- an offence under Section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (grooming)
- physical violence
- serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect.

References

[Commonwealth Child Safe Framework](#)

[National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)

[Public Service Act 1999](#)

[Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918](#)

[APS Code of Conduct](#)

[APS Values](#)

[APS Employment Principles](#)

[AEC Service Charter](#)

[AEC Enterprise Agreement 2016-2019](#)

[AEC Complaints Management Policy](#)

[AEC Privacy Policy](#)

[AEC Reconciliation Action Plan](#)

[AEC Disability Advisory Committee](#)

[NEEC Group Size and Booking Policy](#)

Policy review date

May 2024