

Dance Partners Child Safety Policy



Introduction

'Dance Partners is committed to providing a safe space for all children - through detailed policy, ongoing staff training, and a rigorous and transparent reporting process'

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Principle, Dance Partners | Child Safety Officer

Statement of commitment to child safety

Dance Partners is a child safe organisation which welcomes all children, young people, and their families.

We are committed to providing an environment where our students are safe and feel safe, where their participation is valued, their views respected, and their voices heard.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and take proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to children in our care.

The welfare of children in our care will always be our priority and we are committed to reviewing our child safe practices regularly, seeking input from our students, families, staff, and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

Purpose

Dance Partners Child Safety Policy demonstrates our commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child-friendly organization, where children and young people are safe and feel safe.

This Policy provides an overview of our approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments.

It informs our school community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of our students.

Scope

This policy:

- applies to all staff, contractors, volunteers, parents, and other individuals involved in our organization whether or not they work in direct contact with students.
- applies in all physical and online environments, classes, events, and performances conducted by Dance Partners.

Definitions

Leadership Team means the Studio Owners and senior staff.

Child abuse means:

- *Physical abuse*: purposefully injuring or threatening to injure a child.
- *Emotional abuse*: an attack on a child's self-esteem e.g. through bullying, threatening, ridiculing,

intimidating, or isolating the child.

- *Sexual abuse*: any sexual act or sexual threat imposed upon a child.
- *Neglect*: harming a child by failing to provide basic physical or emotional necessities.
- *Harm* is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to Dance Partners related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with Dance Partners
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at Dance Partners
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Roles and Responsibilities

The leadership team at Dance Partners is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented.

The leadership team will champion and model a child safe culture at Dance Partners. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern.

The leadership team will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable raising concerns.

Everyone at Dance Partners has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The leadership team will make sure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The leadership team will conduct an annual review of how effectively Dance Partners is delivering child safety and wellbeing. Input of people involved with Dance Partners will be sought as part of this review.

Code of Conduct

Dance Partners has a Child Safety Code of Conduct which sets the boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults and children. It also clarifies behaviours that are not acceptable.

Staff, volunteers, and the leadership team must always comply with the Code of Conduct. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation.

All contractors are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

Risk management

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Dance Partners.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at Dance Partners. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children.

We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at Dance Partners. The leadership team is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Creating a culturally safe environment

Dance Partners is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all performances
- consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices in the Dance Partners studio and programs.
- providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including through performance and during Dance Partners community activities.
- supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal organisations.
- providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children.
- visit Indigenous cultural learning centres, such as Koorie Heritage Trust (Melbourne) or Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre (Melbourne).

Children's empowerment and participation

Dance Partners is a child-centered organisation. We actively seek to include children's views and ideas in our organisational planning, delivery of services including rehearsals and performances, and management of facilities.

We want children to develop new friends through Dance Partners and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and act if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at Dance Partners. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation.

We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Dance Partners values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families. Dance Partners supports children's participation in the following ways:

- Regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical or online environments, policies, procedures, programs or staffing. Children's views are collected by staff, provided to the leadership team and considered in the decision making process.
- Information provided to children and families about Dance Partners operations, staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children.
- Child safety information sessions will be offered where needed.

Family engagement

Dance Partners recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address (admin@dpstudios.com.au) and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

Dance Partners provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- Informing new families of important child safety policies and procedures as part of our enrolment process.
- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website.
- Informing families and the school community about any significant updates to our child safety policies or processes.
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families and communities on their experience at Dance Partners, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

Diversity and equity

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate and value the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. To achieve this, we:

- provide training for all leadership team members, staff, and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety.
- welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ+ children and Aboriginal children and their families.
- offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs.
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and act when discrimination or exclusion is identified.
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests, and cultures.
- strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff and leadership team.
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our classes.
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

Dance Partners puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers as outlined in the recruitment and screening policy. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the leadership team must also be screened.

We require a valid Working with Children Check for all adults including volunteers who have a role with students and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have access to children's personal information.

We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

Child safety knowledge, skills, and awareness

Dance Partners is committed to ensuring that the leadership team, staff, and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. Dance Partners assists its leaders, staff, and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

The Dance Partners leadership team, staff and volunteers are required to complete annual child safety training. Training will be recorded in the Child Safety Training Action Plan.

Staff and volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for

compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Dance Partners has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet will be provided for children, families, and the community to know about the complaint process and the support available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at Dance Partners must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. Dance Partners staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation.
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at Dance Partners.
- not allowing unsupervised contact with children at Dance Partners.
- removing their access to the Dance Partners IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to admin@dpstudios.com.au or you can speak with a Child Safety Person.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Child Safety Person

The leadership team at Dance Partners are trained child safety persons with responsibility for responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns.

Child safety persons are introduced to children so they know and understand who they are, and how and when they may contact them.

If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a child safety person, they may report their concern to any staff member.

Record keeping

Dance Partners is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child- related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by Dance Partners for at least 45 years.

Privacy and information sharing

Dance Partners may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests.

Dance Partners will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety.

We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

Dance Partners will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies.

Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action. More information can be found in our disciplinary policy.

Review

Dance Partners will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years.

We will also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our organisation and will inform us of our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices.

Reviews are overseen by the leadership team and will be informed by consultation with children, families, and staff.

Related policies and procedures

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all our operations:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaint handling policy

Supporting legislation

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (including Child Safe Standards)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (including reporting to Child Protection)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)

Policy status

- This policy was approved on 15/03/2024
- The next review date of this policy is January 2026