



Policy

# Safe Environments for Children and Young People

Organisational

## Policy Statement

Unity Housing Company Ltd (Unity) acknowledges that safeguarding the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is the shared responsibility of the whole community and as such aims to provide an environment which is both child safe and child friendly, where children and young people are welcome and feel respected, valued, encouraged to reach their full potential and are protected from harm or risk of harm. Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.

## Purpose

This policy demonstrates the strong commitment by Unity to child safety and establishing and maintaining child safe and child friendly environments. It complies with the requirements of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017, Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016 and aligns with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

## Scope

This policy applies to all Unity staff, students and volunteers. In this policy, the term 'staff' is intended to cover all of these roles but excludes maintenance contractors. Staff are required to agree in writing to accept and act in accordance with this policy.

As a social landlord and provider of low cost housing, Unity has a moral responsibility for child safety. Whilst the majority of Unity staff are not mandated notifiers as defined in Section 30 of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017, Unity is committed to the establishment and maintenance of child safe and child friendly environments and aims to meet the requirements of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017.

Unity provides housing directly to a small number of young people (aged 16-18) through the Stimulus – Homeless Ex-Institutional Youth program which involves less than six properties. Staff providing these services are mandated notifiers.

Whilst this policy does not apply to maintenance contractors engaged by Unity, they have the same responsibility of anyone in the community to keep children safe and report suspicions or evidence of harm. When selecting and registering new maintenance contractors, Unity reminds them of this responsibility and requires maintenance contractors to provide Unity with evidence they have a current, not prohibited Working with Children Check.

## Definitions

**Harm** means physical harm or psychological harm (whether caused by an act or omission) and includes such harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect.

**Psychological harm** does not include emotional reactions such as distress, grief, fear or anger that are a response to the ordinary vicissitudes of life.

**Unity staff** – in the context of this policy refers to staff who visit tenant properties or who interact with tenants face-to-face.

**Vicissitude** – a change of circumstances, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant.

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### Participation

Unity encourages and respects the views of children and young people who live in our properties. We listen to and act upon any concerns that children, young people or their families raise with us.



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We ensure that children, young people and their families know when and how to access complaints processes available to them. Information about complaints and feedback processes are provided to new tenants in the Tenant Welcome Pack and are available on the Unity website. We will listen to and act upon any complaints or concerns that a child, young person or their family raises with us.

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices.

## Recruitment practices

Unity takes all reasonable steps to employ the most suitable and appropriate people in accordance with the requirements of the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016.

Unity uses a range of screening measures and applies best practice standards in the screening and recruitment of staff, including:

- providing accurate job descriptions that include required qualifications, experience and personal attributes for all positions;
- undertaking face-to-face interviews;
- verifying the identity of successful applicants;
- verifying educational status;
- conducting a minimum of two reference checks;
- obtaining National criminal history checks for all staff; and
- requiring staff to have a current, 'not prohibited' Working with Children Check (WWCC) issued by the DHS Screening Unit.

Maintenance contractors engaged by Unity are required to have a current, 'not prohibited' Working with Children Check (WWCC) issued by the DHS Screening Unit.

The above processes and standards are documented in the following Unity procedures: Criminal and Relevant History Screening, Recruitment and Selection and Contractor Registration and Engagement.

## Support for staff

Unity seeks to attract and retain staff who are experienced and capable of providing quality customer service. We provide support and supervision so staff feel valued, respected and fairly treated.

We require that Unity staff have ongoing supervision, training and support to enhance and develop their capacity and capability and promote the establishment and maintenance of a child safe environment.

Relevant Unity staff are required to complete Safe Environments for Children and Young People training within three (3) months of commencement and every two (2) years throughout the course of their employment. Roles which require this training are identified in the Mandatory Training Matrix.

## Reporting and responding to suspected harm or risk of harm

Section 17 of the Safety Act defines 'harm' to mean physical or psychological harm (whether caused by an act or omission), including harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect.



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Mandated reporters in our organisation are workers who:

- provide services to children and young people
- hold a management position in the organisation the duties of which include direct responsibility for, or direct supervision of, the provision of those services to children and young people.

Mandated notifiers are aware of their legal obligation to notify the **Child Abuse Report Line** on **13 14 78** or online via eCARL as soon as practicable if they have a reasonable suspicion that a child or young person has suffered harm, or there is a likelihood that the child or young person will suffer harm. If immediate risk, call SA Police on 000.

An online reporting system (the Department for Child Protection eCARL system) is available and any staff member can register to make notifications using this system ([www.reportchildabuse.families.sa.gov.au/](http://www.reportchildabuse.families.sa.gov.au/)) by creating an account.

Even if not a mandated reporter, any person can report harm or risk of harm to a child or young person. The individual who identifies the harm or risk of harm is encouraged to make the report to authorities and can request the support from another worker to do so if required.

All adult workers (even if not a mandated reporter) have a legal obligation to report child sexual abuse to the police and to protect a child from sexual abuse. Failure to meet these obligations may be considered a criminal offence.

Reasonable grounds to report suspected harm may include:

- when a child or young person tells you they have been harmed
- when your own observations of a particular child's or young person's behaviour and/or injuries lead you to suspect harm is occurring
- a child or young person telling you that they know of someone who has been harmed (they may be referring to themselves)
- when suspicions are reported to you by someone who is in a position to provide reliable information, for example a relative or friend, neighbour or sibling of the child or young person who is at risk.

Information about making appropriate reports of harm or risk of harm is available from the SA Department of Child Protection website: [www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse](http://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse)

Staff are required to inform their Line Manager via email as soon as possible once a notification has been made to authorities. This enables the Line Manager to ensure the staff and the child or young person and their family are encouraged to seek support through appropriate agencies or services.

A record that a notification has been made should be recorded on the tenant or person file in the tenancy database, including date, time and a summary of the issues/concerns leading to the report.

Unity ensures that staff have access to relevant information and resources such as:

- Department for Child Protection reporting child abuse website: <https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/reporting-child-abuse>
- Free online training – Understanding of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations: <https://childsafefhumanrights.gov.au/learning-hub/e-learning-modules>



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- Unity's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides staff with free, confidential counselling to assist with any personal, family or work-related problem: Access Programs: 1300 66 77 00 (Free Call) or email [enquiries@accesssa.com.au](mailto:enquiries@accesssa.com.au) or Cognition: 08 8373 2688 or email [psychologists@cognition.com.au](mailto:psychologists@cognition.com.au)
- Unity ensures that managers have appropriate training to enable them to offer support to the staff member making the report. Unity encourages staff to seek support, particularly when ongoing interaction with the child or young person and their family is expected.

## Assisting children and young people and their families

Unity recognises that once a report is made, there is a need to liaise with relevant support agencies and offer assistance by:

- referring the child or young person or their family to other appropriate services, as required.
- displaying information about services that can assist children or young people and their families (such as Kids Helpline and Youth Healthline) in areas accessed by children or young people and their families.

A list of agencies that may be able to help is included in [Appendix 2](#).

## Dealing with reports, suspicions or concerns relating to the actions of Unity staff or contractors

If reasonable suspicion is formed that a child or young person might be, has been, or is being, harmed by a person associated with Unity, such as a staff member or contractor, then staff are required to also advise the Executive Manager Group Services (EMGS) once a report to the Child Abuse Report Line has been made.

If a staff member is reported to CARL or SAPOL for causing harm or risk of harm to a child or young person, they will be removed from any role that involves working with any child or young person until authorities have concluded their investigation.

## Risk Management

To help maintain a safe environment for children and young people, Unity adopts a risk management approach that identifies, assesses and takes steps to minimise the risks of harm to children and young people resulting from the actions or inactions of staff.

Line Managers will undertake a risk assessment considering areas of potential risk including but not limited to:

- accommodation evictions involving children or young people and their families
- unsafe accommodation, due to hoarding or squalor
- parents or guardians being arrested or detained
- deteriorating mental health of parents or guardians
- any crisis situation where a child or young person is present, including in the office environment
- evidence or suspicion of domestic or family violence, drug and alcohol misuse
- taking photos of children or young people, e.g. at tenant events



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Actions identified and implemented to minimise and control risks to children and young people include:

- All staff being made aware of and required to abide by this Safe Environments for Children and Young People Policy, including the attached appendices.
- Responding to any concerns raised by children or young people, or their families or caregivers, quickly and fairly.
- Ensuring staff understand their obligation to notify via the Child Abuse Report Line as soon as practicable if they have a reasonable suspicion that a child or young person has been, or is being, harmed.
- Working collaboratively with support agencies to manage at risk tenancies and highlighting the need for those agencies to source alternative exit strategies.
- Avoiding where possible evicting tenants with children or young people into homelessness and where such an eviction is necessary, notifying the Child Abuse Report Line about the eviction and the children or young people involved.
- Ensuring the child or young person and parent or guardian approval is obtained prior to taking photos of children or young people, that they understand how the image is to be used and that they are present when photos are taken.

Evaluation of these actions and the development of additional actions, to minimise and control risks to children and young people, occurs as part of our ongoing risk management activities.

The following are high risk situations and in the provision of housing services it is not necessary for staff to engage in any of these activities involving children or young people.

- Physical contact
- Online communications e.g. via social media
- Transport
- Supervision

## Implementation

It is essential that all staff are aware of and comply with all relevant legislative requirements and internal policies and procedures. The Safe Environments for Children and Young People Policy and associated documentation are available to staff through the Document Library on the intranet and are provided to new staff during the induction process.

This child safe policy and related documents are available on Unity's website and on request.

## Review

The Safe Environments for Children and Young People Policy will be reviewed every three years in accordance with our document review process. A new child safe environments compliance statement will be lodged with DHS each time the policy is reviewed and updated.

## Responsibilities

Unity staff are responsible for:

- notifying the Child Abuse Report Line if they have reasonable suspicion that a child or young person has been, or is being, harmed;
- undertaking mandatory training within three months of commencement and every two years throughout the course of employment (when required for their role);
- providing appropriate assistance or referral to services for children and young people or families after reporting, where possible;
- informing their Line Manager once a report has been made; and
- taking appropriate action to mitigate risks to children and young people, as identified in risk assessments.



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Line Managers are responsible for:

- ensuring that their staff undertake mandatory training as specified in this policy;
- ensuring staff report any concerns to the appropriate authority and to Unity; and
- ensuring staff, the child or young person and their family are supported in the event of a notification, where possible and as required.

Executive Manager Group Services is responsible for:

- responding to reports of harm of a child or young person concerning a staff member or contractor in line with organisational policies and procedures.

Executive Managers are responsible for:

- undertaking a risk assessment to minimise the risks of harm to children or young people resulting from staff or contractor action or inaction; and
- implementing identified risk mitigation actions.

**Associated Documentation**

- Child safe environment: Guidelines for mandated notifiers and information for organisations Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017
- Code of Conduct (Unity)
- Contractor Registration and Engagement Procedure
- Criminal and Relevant History Screening Procedure
- Grievance Resolution Procedure
- Information Sharing Guidelines
- Mandatory Training Matrix
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- Privacy and Confidentiality Procedure
- Privacy Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Procedure

**Endorsements**

Unity Housing Company Ltd

Chief Executive Officer

3 September 2024

Next Review Date:

**1 August 2027**

**Version History**

Version No.	Date	Endorsement
1.0	8 January 2019	17 January 2019
2.0	19 January 2022	1 April 2022
3.0	23 January 2024	29 January 2024
4.0	19 July 2024	3 September 2024



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## Appendix 1

### Child Protection Guidelines for Staff, Students and Volunteers of Unity Housing Company Ltd

All Unity staff are responsible for promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people by:

- Acknowledging that the safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount at all times.
- Treating all children and young people with dignity, equality and respect.
- Adhering to Unity's Safe Environments for Children and Young People Policy at all times.
- Listening and responding appropriately to the views and concerns of children and young people we interact with.
- Taking all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and protection of children and young people they interact with.
- Responding quickly, fairly and transparently to any complaints made by a child or young person or their parent/guardian.
- Notifying the Child Abuse Report Line on 13 14 78 or online as soon as practicable if they have a reasonable suspicion that a child or young person is at risk of harm, has been or is being harmed.

Unity staff **will not**:

- Take part in any unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person.
- Discriminate against any child or young person because of age, gender, cultural background, religion, vulnerability or sexuality.
- Develop any 'special' relationships with children or young people outside of the professional relationship.
- Communicate with children or young people via social media.
- Take images of children or young people without their consent and the consent of their parent/guardian.

As a social landlord and provider of low cost housing, Unity has a community responsibility for child safety. Unity is committed to the establishment and maintenance of safe and friendly environments for children and young people.

## Appendix 2

### Family support services

There are a range of services providing additional support to families in South Australia.

- [Anglicare SA](#) provides a wide range of services in various localities to assist families in difficulty and crisis.
- [BreakEven Services SA \(BESSA\)](#) provides assistance for problem gambling.
- [Children's centres](#) are locally distributed centres offering care, education, health services, community development activities and family services.
- [Crisis helplines](#) provides a directory of all South Australian emergency service crisis helplines and crisis counselling.
- [Dads in Distress](#) provide support for divorced or separated fathers.
- [Domestic violence crisis service](#) provides support services for women, men, teenagers, children and seniors affected by domestic violence.
- [Grandcarers SA](#) provides support services for grandparents and other kinship carers caring for their grandchildren.
- [Mensline](#) provides professional phone and online support, information, counselling and referrals for men with family or relationship concerns.
- [Mission Australia](#) provide support services that help individuals and families to stay housed, access education and gain the skills, training and confidence to find employment.
- [Parenting SA](#) provides Parent Easy Guides on a wide range of parenting topics from birth to 18 years including some specially designed for Aboriginal and migrant families.
- [Relationships Australia](#) provides relationship support services such as counselling, mediation and education programs for individuals, families and communities.
- [SAPOL](#) provides support and services for women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence.
- [St Vincent de Paul](#) provides national support services and support referral for all people in need.

For current and further information on support services available for children, young people and families, use the link below:

<https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/child-protection-initiatives/support-services-for-children,-young-people-and-families/counselling-support-services>