

# A guide for board and committee members



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## Implementing and monitoring the Child Safe Scheme

March 2025

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# 1

## The Child Safe Scheme



Children's safety should be the most important focus of any child-related organisation.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that many organisations did not have a culture where the best interests of children were a priority nor were they championed by leaders. Some leaders didn't take responsibility for their organisation's failure to protect children from sexual abuse. This included poor practices like inadequate governance, not recording or reporting complaints, and downplaying the seriousness of the complaints.

The NSW Government acted in response to the Royal Commission. In February 2022, new laws were introduced to create the Child Safe Scheme.

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## The NSW Child Safe Scheme

The Child Safe Scheme is built on ten Child Safe Standards. The Standards are based on principles and focus on outcomes. They seek to drive cultural change by embedding child safety into everything that organisations do – how they deliver services, operate and make decisions in ways that keep children safe and supported.

By applying the Standards:

- the best interests of children are always at the forefront
- child abuse is never tolerated, and everyone understands they have a role to play in creating a safe and supportive environment, and
- concerns about child safety are taken seriously and everyone is empowered to report allegations of abuse without obstruction.



**Standard 1**  
Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture



**Standard 6**  
Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused



**Standard 2**  
Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously



**Standard 7**  
Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training



**Standard 3**  
Families and communities are informed and involved



**Standard 8**  
Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur



**Standard 4**  
Equity is upheld and diversity is taken into account



**Standard 9**  
Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved



**Standard 5**  
People working with children are suitable and supported



**Standard 10**  
Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

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## How to comply with the Scheme

The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) is responsible for overseeing the Child Safe Scheme. This includes making sure that child-related organisations in NSW are implementing and meeting the Child Safe Standards to keep children safe.

The OCG can take a range of actions to monitor or investigate compliance with the Child Safe Scheme. These include:

- requesting information about your organisation's child safe systems, policies and processes
- inspecting the places your organisation operates
- directing your organisation to complete the OCG's Child Safe Self-Assessment, and
- reviewing your organisation's response to our recommendations to improve your organisation's child safe systems, policies and processes.

Following an investigation, the OCG may decide that enforcement actions are needed to make sure that an organisation changes what they are doing to comply with the Child Safe Standards.

To start this process, the OCG may either send out a compliance notice or put in place an enforceable undertaking from the organisation.

- A compliance notice includes a list of actions that we require an organisation to take to improve their child safe systems, policies and processes. The organisation must then show us how they have implemented the actions in the compliance notice.

- An enforceable undertaking is a written agreement in which an organisation agrees to take actions to improve child safe systems, policies and processes by a particular date.

The OCG can issue fines if an organisation fails to follow the compliance notice or the enforceable undertaking.

The OCG also posts a list of the organisations and their compliance notices or enforceable undertakings on its public website.

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## The role of board and committee members

Board and committee members play a crucial role in implementing and upholding the Child Safe Standards, and ensuring their organisation meets the Standards to protect children.

They must foster a culture of transparency, accountability, and zero tolerance for abuse. Boards and committee members must embed child-safe practices across the organisation and put clear policies, systems, and processes in place.

Board and committee members are responsible for ensuring their organisation's actions align with child safety principles, such as taking concerns seriously, preventing the obstruction of reporting, and making these principles publicly known.

Leading by example, board and committee members must make child-safe practices an everyday priority.

Failure to meet these responsibilities can result in serious consequences, including fines, reputational damage, and insurance risks.

A strong organisational culture that prioritises child safety, rather than protecting the organisation's reputation, fosters community trust. This can only be achieved if board and committee members are visibly committed to creating a child-safe environment.

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**Child safe cultures develop over time. They need consistent focus, effort and action by board and committee members.**

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# 2

Practical steps for  
board and  
committee  
members

## Practical steps for board and committee members

Below are some practical steps to support board and committee members implementing and monitoring the Child Safe Standards in their organisations.

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### Establish a child safe governance framework

Board and committee members should ensure child safety is a priority within their governance structure. This can include:

- Adding child safe as a standing agenda item in all board and executive meetings.
  - Creating a nominated child safe position to oversee your organisation's approach to keeping children safe from harm or a dedicated Child Safeguarding Committee (if possible and commensurate to organisational size) to give advice on best practice approaches to child safety, reporting and provision of support for survivors of abuse.
  - Ensuring governance mechanisms incorporate the participation of children, families and communities and that children, families and communities are made aware of the organisation's leadership and governance structures.
  - Making the organisation's statement of commitment to child safety public and embedded throughout the organisation.
  - Monitoring the organisation's compliance with legal requirements related to child safety (for example Working with Children Check verification requirements, probity and reference checking, other probity checks where required, mandatory reporting and reportable conduct obligations for relevant entities).
  - Ensuring that staff and volunteers receive training and support related to child safe practices, so they are well understood and embedded in everyday practice.
  - Ensuring strategic and business plans include implementing child safe culture throughout the organisation.
  - Modelling child safe behaviours.
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### Address conflicts of interest to promote accountability and trust

Board and committee members should always be transparent and declare conflicts of interest. Any conflicts of interests could potentially impact reporting, investigations and how a breach of policy or misconduct is addressed.

Policies and procedures should clearly document how to manage conflicts of interest. This will help staff feel comfortable to act or report on incidents or allegations that relate to them without fear of repercussions. To support this, board and committee members should:

- report concerns or incidents of child abuse, and cooperate with investigations as required by law
  - have clear protocols for responding to and investigating allegations of abuse or misconduct
  - ensure that confidentiality is maintained by all board and committee members (even if you are a parent) if an incident involves the safety of a child, to protect the child, family and others involved in the matter, and
  - ensure that the organisation's response to complaints is child-focused. This helps build trust and shows that the organisation is committed to keeping children safe, rather than just protecting its own reputation.
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## Embed a risk management approach

A risk management approach integrated into the organisation's operations and culture can reduce opportunities for harm to occur. Board and committee members should:

- take appropriate action to address any risks or incidents of child abuse
- identify, assess, manage and oversight child safety related risks at every organisational level
- ensure a Child Safe Risk Management Plan is in place for all environments where staff or volunteers interact with children including events, special activities and overnight camps
- confirm there is a process in place for reviewing risk management plans if harm is identified and following a serious incident to ensure the safety of children, and
- regularly review risk management plans and risk registers as part of board meetings to ensure child safe practices remain robust and relevant in an ever-changing environment.



## Develop and embed child safe policies and procedures

Board and committee members should make sure that child safe policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, updated and embedded across the organisation. Board and committee members should ensure:

- the organisation has key policies and procedures including:
  - Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
  - Child Safe Policy
  - Child Safe Code of Conduct
  - Child Safe Reporting Policy
  - Child Safe Recruitment, Induction and Training Policy
  - Child Safe Risk Management Plan
- policies and procedures are clear, comprehensive and accessible to all board and committee members, staff, volunteers, children, families and community members
- policies and procedures have clear protocols for board and committee members responding to, and investigating, allegations of abuse or misconduct
- policies and procedures address the prevention of abuse and reporting mechanisms and include specific procedures for handling complaints
- policies and procedures are developed in consultation with children and young people (plus families and community if relevant) and then regularly reviewed with them and following critical incidents, and
- feedback from children, parents and carers and staff is used to guide improvements.

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## Foster a culture of child safety

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. Board and committee members should prioritise, facilitate and promote a child-safe culture and empower staff and volunteers to also lead by example. Some actions to promote this can include:

- regularly reinforcing the importance of child safety through the organisation's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and in communications publicly and internally
- training board and committee members in child safe principles and practices and ensuring these are embedded into their processes. All staff and volunteers within the organisation should be supported to access training appropriate to their role (for example: not all roles will need to be familiar with child safe recruitment practices)
- creating opportunities for children and young people to participate in the organisation's decision-making processes from strategic planning to operational and program decisions
- regular reporting to the board and committee members on how the organisation is meeting its child safe obligations (for example: internal audits of recruitment practices, complaints, risk and training registers)
- identifying staff and volunteers who can act as champions to promote child safe practices, and
- reinforcing that child safety and the paramouncy principle underpin the organisation's operations.

## Legal Obligations

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. However, board and committee members have a crucial role in ensuring organisations meet their legislative and ethical obligations and lead by example to set a child safe organisational culture.

Board and committee members should also be aware that organisations may also have responsibilities under any funding agreements, accreditation or licencing to implement child safe practices.

Further to the Child Safe Scheme, some key legal obligations that board and committee members should familiarise themselves with to understand their duties include:

- [Children's Guardian Act 2019 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Crimes Act 1900 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Child Protection \(Working with Children\) Act 2012 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Civil Liability Act 2002 \(NSW\)](#)

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## Next steps for board and committee members

- **Immediate action:** Begin by adding child safety as a standing agenda item at your board or committee and executive meetings, assigning child safety as a key responsibility of your board or committee and review your current policies.
- **In the next 3-6 months:** Implement training for your board and committee members, conduct a child safety review and ensure that children and families are informed and involved. Board and committee members can complete the [OCG's Child Safe Self-Assessment](#) tool to align all members on what it looks like in their organisation and help identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in implementing the Child Safe Standards.
- **Ongoing:** Maintain regular reviews (at least annually and following any critical incidents) of child safe systems, policies and procedures. Board and committee members continue fostering a culture of child safe practices within the organisation and facilitate opportunities to involve children and young people in decision making.

## Getting Started?

If you are part of an organisation who is getting started on its child safe journey, please refer to the [OCG's Getting Started](#) resources to help put the foundations in place.

## Summary of key responsibilities for board and committee members

- Ensure that child safe policies and procedures are in place and regularly reviewed particularly following any critical incidents.
- Monitor the organisation's compliance with legal requirements (for example Working with Children Check verification and staff understand reporting obligations).
- Take appropriate action to address any risks.
- Ensure clear reporting processes are in place and that all staff are aware of how to report an incident or concern of child abuse.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers receive an induction, ongoing training and support related to child safety.
- Establish a culture of child safety within the organisation, ensuring that safeguarding practices are prioritised and embedded in all aspects of operations.
- Report concerns or incidents of child abuse and cooperate with investigations as required by law. Use these as opportunities to review your child safe practices.

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## Further information and support

- [Child Safe Scheme](#)
- [NSW Office of the Children's Guardian](#)
- [National Office of Child Safety](#)

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When a child or young person interacts with an engaged and compliant child safe organisation, it builds their capacity and understanding of what they should rightfully expect and makes it more likely that they will speak up if they don't feel safe in other settings.

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## Office of the Children's Guardian

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Office of the Children's Guardian

Locked Bag 5100  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Office hours:  
Monday to Friday  
9.00am – 5.00pm

T: (02) 8219 3600  
E: [childsafes@ocg.nsw.gov.au](mailto:childsafes@ocg.nsw.gov.au)  
W: [www.ocg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ocg.nsw.gov.au)

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