

# Counselling&

## Child Safe Environment Policy



Date Approved: 15/12/2022

### Purpose of policy

Counselling& have developed this policy for the protection of children and young people from risk of harm, and to safe guard their well-being. This policy has been developed in response to the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, *Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016* and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Counselling& aims to take all practical steps to protect children from harm by ensuring an accessible, trauma-informed and safe environment.

This policy will outline the roles and responsibilities for everyone involved in the organisation.

### Commitment to the safety of children and young people

Children and young people are valued, respected and encouraged to participate in the planning and delivery of Counselling& services. Counselling& is committed to diversity, where all children and young people are embraced regardless of their abilities, neuro-diversity, sex, gender, social economic or cultural background, and where equity is upheld. Bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.

Information about services that can assist children and young people (such as the Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 and Youth Helpline on 1300 13 17 19) will be displayed in areas accessed by them.

The safety, protection and well-being of young people is always the first priority.

### Scope of policy

This policy applies to all staff, employees, contractors, students, volunteers, children, young people and families connected with Counselling& services. Contractors will be required to accept and act on this policy as a condition of contracts and agreements.

Staff and volunteers of Counselling& will be required to sign a copy of this policy as a demonstration of their agreement to accept and act in accordance with this policy.

### Definitions

**Child or young person** - persons under 18 years of age.

**Complainant** – person who makes a complaint.

**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.

**National Police Check** - a summary of an individual's offender history in Australia and a record of their criminal history relating to convictions, finding of guilt or pending court proceedings. They are

available from South Australia Police (SAPOL) or organisations accredited by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Counselling& require a National Police Certificate (NPC) for workers and volunteers, as well as a Working with Children Check.

**Working with Children Check** - People working or volunteering with children in South Australia must, by law, have a valid, not prohibited Working with Children Check. A Working with Children Check is an assessment of whether a person poses an unacceptable risk to children. As part of the process, the Screening Unit will look at criminal history, child protection information and other information.

## Communication

Counselling& makes its child safe policy available to children, young people and families on its website.

This policy will also be provided electronically with any NDIS Service Agreement for participants. By signing the Service Agreement and/or the Child Safe Environment Policy, the signatory will be indicating they have read, accept and comply with the policy.

Counselling& makes this child safe policy, along with all policies and procedures available to employees and volunteers as part of the induction process. Online access is provided to all policies and procedures and a signed copy of the Child Safe Environment Policy is requested prior to staff and volunteers meeting with participants.

Counselling& makes this child safe policy available to contractors prior to finalising contractual agreements, and prior to any participant work or contact occurring.

## Participation of families, children and young people

Counselling& understands it has a responsibility to all participants to defend their right to care and protection. To assist in strengthening this responsibility, Counselling& will follow any procedures recommended by child protection authorities, when dealing with any allegations of abuse or neglect of children and will ensure that all staff undergoes appropriate professional development in this area. Counselling& will also document any concerns where a child may be at risk of harm that may have occurred outside of Counselling& and follow procedures to ensure the child is protected from harm.

It is a firm commitment that any staff member will:

- Promote children's self-esteem and positive self-image through their interactions and relationships with children.
- Always enact trauma-informed approaches and principles.
- Role model appropriate behaviour and language, and
- Build relationships with all children based on trust and empower children to discuss and communicate their needs and concerns.

## Code of conduct

Counselling& has a Code of Conduct which covers working with Children and Young People. The Code of conduct covers standards, issues and risk factors including, but not limited to:

- Standards of behaviour when working with children and young people in physical and online environments.
- The commitment that all children and young people will be embraced regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, neuro-diversity, or social-economic or cultural background and equity.
- The unacceptable conduct and the consequences of behaving outside expectations.
- How to report any breaches of the code of conduct.
- The consequences for breaching the code of conduct.

Access to the code is available through the website: [www.counsellingand.com.au](http://www.counsellingand.com.au)

A copy is also sent electronically with any Counselling Agreement and any NDIS Service Agreement sent to participants and families.

## Recruitment

Counselling& meets the requirements of the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016 and ensures that all staff provide a valid working with children check from the Screening Unit of the Department of Human Services. Counselling& will ensure a new working with children check is obtained every 5 years prior to expiry, or as required by the Department of Human Services.

All persons other than employed staff who perform duties during Counselling&'s hours of operation (paid or unpaid) will be required to present:

- A valid working with children check.
- Safe Environments – Through their eyes training. Or Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect Certificate (RRHAN-EC).
- Valid Police Check
- Australian membership into the appropriate association for example Australian Counselling Association, PACFA etc, where relevant.
- All staff will be oriented to Counselling&'s policies and procedures and code of conduct.

## Supervision, training and support for employees and volunteers

Counselling& requires all staff to participate in training on child protection organised by relevant child protection authorities or support agencies.

Counselling& will:

- Have regular supervision sessions that include a focus on child safety and wellbeing.
- Adhere to the ACA's requirements for supervision s a member of the association, for Counsellors.
- Include an induction which includes new employees receiving a copy of this policy.
- Support regular performance appraisals.
- Ensure that staff are knowledgeable about current legislation and reporting requirements related to child protection and maltreatment and that a system for reporting and recording suspicious incidents is in place.

- Understand their responsibility as mandated reporters.
- Provide access to current information about the procedures to be taken in relation to allegations of child abuse or neglect.
- Provide access to a the Mandatory Notification Information Booklet (see [www.dhs.sa.gov.au/cse](http://www.dhs.sa.gov.au/cse))
- Regularly remind staff about Counselling&'s policies, procedures and confidentiality requirements in regard to child protection.
- Ensure every staff complete the 'Safe Environments: Through their eyes' training every 3 years.

In relation to ongoing training Counselling& will ensure all staff and volunteers:

- Read and understand the Mandatory Notification Information Booklet (see [www.dhs.sa.gov.au/cse](http://www.dhs.sa.gov.au/cse))
- To attend a 'Safe Environments: Through their eyes' training course.
- To view the resources Keeping our Kids safe developed by SNAICC at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/policy-and-research/child-safety-and-wellbeing/keeping-our-kids-safe/>
- Include child safety as a standing item on meeting agendas.
- Access to web-based resources about issues concerning child safety and well-being.
- Have access to professional development opportunities to build knowledge and skills regarding the wellbeing and development of children and young people.
- Update specific training as per requirements or every 3 years.

## Reporting and responding to harm or risk of harm

Mandated notifiers have a legal obligation to notify the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) as soon as practicable if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child is or may be at risk of harm. All Counselling& employees are mandated reporters and are supported and encouraged to report the reasonable belief that a child of young person is or may be at risk of harm and in need of protection, and the child's parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child. Children and Young People are listened to, believed, and always supported

### Reporting Concerns

- In the course of work hours, if the Counselling& staff member forms the view that they have a reasonable belief that a child or young person is, or may be at risk of harm – they, as soon as possible, must contact the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 13 14 78 or if at immediate risk, report to the South Australia Police (SAPOL) on 000. For mandated notifiers, these are legal obligations.
- Any report will be made by the staff person directly. It is a requirement that the individual who identifies the harm or risk of harm is the person who makes the report to CARL, and this is not reported internally for another staff member to determine if it is a reportable matter.
- No other staff will be given identifying information about the family unless the authorised person feels that they need to know.

- An authorised person may be present while the staff person makes the report if required. Note that a counsellor or support worker may independently make a report, regardless of whether the authorised person decides to do so.
- An authorised person or staff person has discretion whether and if so when to notify the family involved that they are making a report. When the suspected abuse involves severe physical injury or sexual abuse, the family will generally not be notified before a report is made. Counselling& will in these cases be guided by Child Protection as to when (or if) to notify the family.
- Counselling& has a right to take any action to ensure that children and staff are always safe. This may involve contacting the police if any person or family makes threats against staff.
- As part of the standard procedure, the authorised person will make careful documentation of concerns and any action taken.

### **Supporting children, young people, and their families**

- Counselling& understands that we still have a role in supporting the child or young person after a report has been made. This could include:
- Referring the child, young person, or their family to other appropriate services.
- Continuing to provide a service to the child or young person and their family and monitoring the circumstances.
- Displaying information about services that can assist children, young people, and their families (such as the Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 and Youth Helpline on 1300 13 17 19) in areas accessed by them.

Counselling& will act thoroughly and quickly, with top importance placed on ensuring the safety and protection of children and young people.

## **Reporting and responding to general complaints or feedback**

Client feedback, both positive and constructive, is an essential part of helping Counselling& continuously improve its service quality. Clients and staff can lodge a complaint in person, over the phone, by email or in writing. Access to the complaints and feedback form can be found at [www.counsellingand.com.au](http://www.counsellingand.com.au)

Counselling& will:

- Address complaints promptly, sensitively, and fairly
- Listen to the complaint/feedback and make a record of it
- Respond to the complaint with an outcome
- Clearly document and securely store decisions and actions taken in response to complaints and feedback
- Make sure that procedural fairness is always followed
- Acknowledge that we have received the complaint or feedback in writing
- Investigate complaints by reviewing the incident in depth

- If appropriate, encourage discussion of concerns openly with the relevant staff member(s) to resolve the complaint
- Communicate the outcome of investigations to the complaint and ensure that any recommended improvements or changes are implemented effectively

Resolving complaints amicably gives Counselling& the opportunity to improve services and to understand the areas that need changing. Counselling& takes complaints very seriously and will work hard to address and resolve them efficiently and effectively.

## Risk management

Counselling& will ensure clear observation of child-occupied areas through the following means:

- Inclusion of parent/guardian or primary support person, at all times, in relation to any other child or young person present on the premises

Counselling& will not:

- Take images of children and young people
- Supervise children and young people that are not clients
- Have physical contact
- Allow children unsolicited use of internet or internet images while the child or young person is in the counselling or support room
- Friend a child or young person on social media or any other social platform

Counselling& will:

- Always protect our privacy and confidentiality, with an exception, of the mandatory reporting requirements
- Conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner
- Adhere to trauma-informed approaches
- Always listen to and believe a child or young person

## Related policies and procedures

Counselling& has the following related Policies and Procedures:

- Code of Conduct for Working with children and young people
- Counselling& Risk Management Policy
- Counselling& Professional Development Policy
- Counselling& DCSI Screening Policy

## Policy review

- Counselling& will, at a minimum, review the policies and procedures once every 5 years as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*
- Counselling& may review policies and procedures prior to 5 years, if there is an incident or risk of harm is observed, relating to children's well-being or safety within that timeframe.
- Counselling& will lodge a new child safe environments compliance statement with Department of Human Services each time we review and update our policy.