



Barking Mad Company Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

Our Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates our strong commitment to child safety and wellbeing and outlines how we keep children safe from harm.

Commitment to child safety

All children who come to Barking Mad Company have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and welcome.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how Barking Mad Company prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, children and other individuals involved in our business. This policy applies to all services provided at our practice location or other locations we may work from.

Definitions

Child abuse means a sexual offence committed against a child. An offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming, physical violence against a child causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child or serious neglect of a child.

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.

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 Barking Mad Company related to one or more of the following:

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



Our Management has the role of making sure Barking Mad Company prioritise children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

Everyone at Barking Mad Company has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. Management will make sure that staff conduct risk assessments and take action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff is identified and completed.

Children's empowerment and participation

Barking Mad Company actively seek to include children's views and ideas in our organisational planning, delivery of services and management of facilities. We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at Barking Mad Company. 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. Barking Mad Company values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families.

Families and communities

Barking Mad Company recognise 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 and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all children. We 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.

We have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and act when discrimination or exclusion is identified. We are committed to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Code of Conduct

Barking Mad Company has a Code of Conduct. Staff 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 employment.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the 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.

Recruiting staff

Barking Mad Company puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff. We only recruit staff who are appropriate and qualified to engage in providing psychological and animal-assisted services to children.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff who have a role with children or 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.



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.

Barking Mad Company has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff at Barking Mad Company must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. Barking Mad Company staff are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police.

Complaints can be emailed to info@barkingmadcompany.com.au

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

Record keeping

Barking Mad Company 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.

Risk management & mandatory disclosure

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse. We undertake risk management activities and mitigate risks presented to the safety of children seeking services with us.

Under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, registered psychologists in Victoria are mandatory reporters, meaning they are legally obligated to report to child protection authorities if they form a reasonable belief that a child needs protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. A reasonable belief is based on the psychologist's professional judgment and experience, considering the specific circumstances of the case.

Psychologists have an ethical and legal responsibility to protect client confidentiality, but mandatory reporting obligations can override this duty when a child's safety is at risk. Under the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, psychologists, as mental health and wellbeing service providers, have specific mandatory reporting obligations regarding child protection and certain other incidents, but generally must not disclose health information without consent, unless authorized or required by law.

Review

Barking Mad Company will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. We 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 business and inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices.