

Department: OOHC

Policy Name: Child Protection and Child Safety

Purpose:

Pathfinders are committed to be a Child Safe Organisation by upholding the Care and Protection of all Children and Young People within Pathfinders Programs. We aim to ensure Children and Young People are safe and protected from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

This policy ensures the safety, well-being, and rights of children under our care and supervision, by providing clear guidelines and associated procedures to protect them from all forms of harm. Pathfinders strives to create a safe and supportive environment where children are treated with respect, dignity, and care. It outlines the responsibilities of staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders in maintaining a culture of child safety throughout our programs, services, and activities.

This policy outlines:

- The commitment of our organisation to protecting children from all forms of harm.
- Accompanying Procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of children in all interactions, whether in person, online, or through any organisational activity,
- Guidelines for maintaining a safe physical and emotional [environment](#) for children.
- Regular training and awareness programs for all staff and volunteers to recognise and respond to child safety issues.

By adhering to this policy, we aim to create a protective and nurturing environment where children can grow, learn, and thrive free from fear and harm.

Policy Statement:

Pathfinders Commitment to Child Safety

Pathfinders stands united in our commitment to ensuring the safety, well-being and dignity of all children. We hold a zero tolerance to any form of abuse, neglect or psychological harm.

Protecting children is our top priority and firmly believe that every child deserves a safe environment to thrive and to live freely through mutual trust and acceptance

As an organisation, we have a social responsibility to protecting children from harm, this is both a moral and ethical responsibility as well as a legal obligation. We are fully dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment where children can thrive, free from any form of abuse, exploitation, or neglect.

Our commitment to child safety includes:

- **Zero Tolerance for Abuse:** We hold a strict zero tolerance to any form of abuse, exploitation, neglect or mistreatment of children. All staff, volunteers, carers and partners are expected to adhere to this.
- **Strict Screening and Training:** We ensure thorough background checks for all staff, carers and volunteers who work with children. Additionally, we provide regular training on child protection protocols, including recognising signs of abuse and responding appropriately.

- **Clear Reporting Mechanisms:** We have established clear and accessible reporting systems for children, families, and staff to report concerns or incidents of abuse. All reports will be taken seriously, investigated promptly, and acted upon in a manner that prioritises the safety and well-being of the children and young people.
- **Child-Centred Approach:** We are led by the child or Young Persons fundamental right to be protected from harm and have their voice heard. The perspectives of Children and Young People are a central part of our work, ensuring they are heard, respected, and involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- **Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement:** We regularly review and strengthen our child focused policies, procedures, and practices to ensure they remain effective and up to date.

At Pathfinders, we stand firm in our resolve to protect children and create environments that foster their growth, health, wellbeing and happiness. We are dedicated to working collaboratively with our communities, families, and stakeholders to uphold the highest standards of care to keep children and young people safe.

Together, we can ensure a safer and more secure future for children and young people.

The best interest of Children and Young People are our priority in all decisions about how programs and services are delivered. Pathfinders recognises the basis for healthy child development and overall wellbeing is a holistic approach of physical, emotional, cultural, social and psychological safety. Pathfinders are committed to the care and protection of the Children and Young People we support; this includes protecting them from intentional and unintentional harm

- Sharing the responsibility across the organisation for Child Safety
- Expectations of Staff and Carer behaviour in relation to Children and Young People
- The importance of reporting concerns, disclosures and observations in relation to child safety and child abuse

Authority:

This policy is a policy endorsed and authorised by **National Director of Child, Youth & Family**.

Application:

This Policy and accompanying [Procedure](#) applies to all people Employed or Volunteer for Pathfinders Out of Home Care (OOHC) programs. Including but not limited to paid Employees, Authorised Carers and other volunteers, students, contractors.

Legislation

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 Sections: 8-10, 23, 24, 27, 29, 29A, 140, 154(2)(a), 157, 158, 162, 185, Chapter 16A, 248, 254

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Regulation 2012 Clauses: 8, 15, 30, 31, 33-37, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45(2) (d)-(f), 48, 87 Schedule 3 – Clause 3

Adoption Act 2000 Sections: 7, 8, 11, 45, 67(1)(C)&(d), 79A, 79B, 92

Adoption Regulation 2015 Clauses: 44, 58

Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 Sections: 4, 6 – 11, 11A, 12, 13, 22-24, 26-30

Child Protection (Working with Children) Regulation 2013 Clauses: 5, 22A-D, 24, 25, 35

Children's Guardian Act 2019

Online safety amendment act 2024

Zero Tolerance for Abuse

- Pathfinders adopts a strict Zero Tolerance stance on abuse, exploitation, neglect and any other mistreatment of children. All individuals within the organisation are expected to foster a safe environment and respond immediately to any form of abuse.
- Pathfinders maintain a Child Safe culture where all people within the organisation can be confident and comfortable in raising concerns about Children's Safety.
- **Children and Young People** understand their rights and are empowered to talk to support networks if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable
- **Children and Young People** have access to trusted adults outside of the home or care environment.
- If a **Child or Young Person** raises a concern, Pathfinders representative will explain to them what will happen next and, where formal investigations are required and where appropriate, the **Child or Young Person** will be kept informed about what will happen next
- Any complaints or allegations about Pathfinders **Employees, Authorised Carers** or other persons engaged by Pathfinders, are investigated promptly and the complaints or allegations are reported to external authorities where required.

Reportable Conduct Scheme

- Pathfinders are committed to uphold the Office of the Children's Guardians (OCG) Reportable Conduct scheme outlined in the [Children's Guardian Act 2019](#) and in line with the Pathfinders Reportable Conduct Framework
- Instances raised regarding the safety and wellbeing of Children or Young People where an Employee, Authorised Carer or another person in the authorisation of this policy, has been implicated as a potential person causing harm, the matter will be assessed by the National Director of Child Youth and Family and the Pathfinders Reportable Conduct Unit
- If the matter falls under one of the following categories the matter will be investigated according to the [OCG Reportable Conduct Scheme](#) and the Pathfinders Reportable Conduct Framework

The Children's Guardian Act 2019 defines [reportable conduct](#) as:

- Sexual offence
- Sexual misconduct
- Ill-treatment of a child
- Neglect of a child
- An assault against a child
- An offence under s 43B (failure to protect) or s 316A (failure to report) of the Crimes Act 1900;
- Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.
- If the matter falls outside of one of the above categories, and has impacted on a Child or Young Persons safety or wellbeing the matter will be investigated as a Human Resources or Code of Conduct matter
- Complaints and allegations will be assessed and potentially investigated in a timely manner and reported to external authorities where required.

Restrictive and Prohibited Practice

- In the context of OOHC in NSW, a **Prohibited Practice** is an action that interferes with a Child or Young Persons Basic human rights and is unethical or potentially unlawful. Actions such as, but not limited to, any kind of Physical Punishment, Restraint or Seclusion to manage a behaviour, and is never permitted
- **Prohibited Practices** are against the law and must not be used as a form of behaviour management. These strategies are prohibited from use because they involve abuse, assault or control
- All Pathfinders Employees and Authorised Carers or other persons engaged by Pathfinders must always uphold their duty of care to Children and Young People.
- **Duty of Care** is a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to avoid causing foreseeable harm to another person, ensuring their safety and wellbeing.
- In the context of OOHC in NSW, a **Restrictive Practice** is any intervention or action that restricts a Child's rights or freedom of movement, primarily to protect the Child or others from harm.
- When a **Restrictive Practice** is required it should only be employed as part of a formal behaviour intervention as set out in an approved PRIP or BSP.
- A PRIP or BSP that contains the use of Psychotropic medication or a **Restrictive Practice** must be approved by the Principal Officer.
- Pathfinders expects the least restrictive intervention be implemented for Children and Young People when challenging behaviours present.
- Pathfinders acknowledges at times when implementing [Behaviour Support](#) restrictive practice may be required.

ITC and other staffed model Placements

Pathfinders have a commitment to Child Safety. Pathfinders are also commitment to the safety and wellbeing of the staff. In all ITC and staffed model placements we have a duty to minimise risk to everyone within the placement, this

includes the Children and Young People along with Youth workers, House Managers and Leaders and anyone else who may visit the placement. The following will be adhered to, ensuring the safety of everyone and is not considered a Restrictive Practice.

- All Pathfinders Houses will have a staff office.
- All Staff offices will have a safe to store any item that is considered dangerous or may pose a risk to anyone in the placement items not to limited to the following
- All sharps, including but not limited to These items must be stored correctly
 - Knives for cooking
 - Scissors
 - Nail clippers
 - Razors
 - Household tools for eg screw drivers
 - Any other item with a blade, that could be used as a weapon or any item that could be used to harm

All Medication, Prescription or Non-prescription These items must be stored correctly

- Medication prescribed to any child or Young Person within the placement
- Medication that is not prescribed and for the purpose of the child or Young Persons health including but not limited to, Paracetamol, Ibuprofen, Cough mixture

Room Searches

At Pathfinders, the safety and wellbeing of Children and Young People are our highest priorities. Pathfinders acknowledge that the Children and Young People residing in OOHC Residential programs are often vulnerable and have complex histories of trauma. Due to the brains fight, flight and freeze responses these Young Person may present with a range of behaviours, including but not limited to, risk taking behaviour and heightened agitation and may feel they need to have weapons for a variety of reasons including to protect themselves from potential harm. This may also include self-medicating by engaging in Alcohol and Other Drug use and abuse to help them numb emotional pain.

It is essential to engage with Young People therapeutically to support them to feel safe, while maintaining our duty of care to mitigate any foreseeable risk. As part of our Child Safety practices, room searches are conducted to ensure a secure environment and to prevent harm from prohibited items such as drugs, weapons, or other items that could threaten their safety or the staff's safety.

Room searches should be carried out with respect, sensitivity, and in accordance with the child's rights. Typically, children and young people should be provided with reasonable notice prior to a search, unless there are urgent safety concerns that necessitate immediate action. In such cases, searches may be conducted without prior notice to respond swiftly to potential risks.

The primary reasons for conducting a room search include concerns related to safety, the presence of prohibited items, suspicion of risk-taking behaviour or harmful behaviours or items that may be used to self-harm. All searches are carried out following established procedures, that respect the privacy and dignity of the Young Person and are thoroughly documented to ensure transparency and accountability.

Regular scheduled room searches are a restrictive practice and the appropriate approval to use restrictive practice should be given if regular room searches are required.

This policy reflects our commitment to fostering a safe, therapeutic, respectful, and supportive environment for every young person in Pathfinders residential placements, balancing safety with respect for their rights and dignity.

Prohibited items may include, but not limited to, weapons, illicit substances or paraphernalia, razors or sharps any other items that may cause harm.

If the young person has an item for a specific purpose eg a fishing knife or pocketknife. This may be stored in the safe in line with the above sharp's storage. If the item is not used regularly it may be taken to the Pathfinders office and kept for the Young Person until they turn 18 years old or transition out of Pathfinders OOHC programs

Strict Screening and Training

- Pathfinders strives to employ the most suitable people to work and care for vulnerable Children and Young People
- Thorough background checks are completed prior to employment or authorisation. This includes a National Criminal Record Check, Working With Children's Check, and personal or professional references
- Training is offered to all Employees and Authorised Carers to develop skills and improve knowledge of things like Reportable Conduct and Trauma Informed Practice
- A variety of training packages have been developed to continue to support employees and Authorised Carers prior to and throughout the time they are working with Pathfinders

Child-Centred Approach

At the heart of Pathfinders Child Protection and Child Safe Policy is the **Child-Centred Approach**, which emphasises the fundamental right of every Child and Young Person to be protected from harm and to have their voice heard. We recognise that Children and Young People are experts in their own lives and experiences, and it is essential that their perspectives guide the decisions made about their care, safety, and well-being.

- **Prioritising the Voice of the Child:** We actively listen to children and young people, ensuring their views, feelings, and preferences are taken seriously. They are supported to express themselves in ways that are comfortable and meaningful to them, including through verbal communication, writing, art, and other forms of expression.
- **Involving Children in Decision-Making:** We recognise that children and young people should be active participants in decisions that affect their lives. Whether it's about their care arrangements, safety planning, or the services they receive, we ensure that children are not only informed but also involved in the decision-making process. This allows them to have a sense of control over their lives.
- **Respecting Rights and Dignity:** We are committed to upholding the rights and dignity of every child. This includes protecting them from any form of harm, neglect, or exploitation, and ensuring they have access to the care and support they need. We also ensure that their cultural, social, and individual needs are respected.
- **Creating Safe and Supportive Environments:** Our approach fosters environments where children feel safe, valued, and respected. This includes both physical and emotional safety, where children can express themselves without fear of judgment or harm. Staff and carers are trained to create and maintain spaces

that are conducive to the well-being of Children and Young People.

- **Encouraging Empowerment:** We work to empower children and young people by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities to make informed decisions about their lives. By supporting their autonomy and decision-making skills, we help build their confidence, resilience, and sense of self-worth.
- **Ongoing Engagement and Feedback:** We regularly engage with children and young people, ensuring that their experiences and feedback are considered when reviewing and improving our practices. Their voices are not just heard once but are continually sought to ensure that our services remain responsive to their evolving needs.

In adopting a Child-Centred Approach, we are fully committed to ensuring that Children and Young People are at the centre of all decision-making processes, where their safety, dignity, and well-being are paramount. This approach is fundamental to building trust, ensuring positive outcomes, and creating environments where children feel heard, respected, and protected from harm.

Social media and Online safety

Pathfinders are committed to Keeping children safe while using online forums, weather that be social media or online gaming platforms.

Pathfinders acknowledges that online platforms and forums are an interest for a lot of Children and Young People. Managing internet use and supporting children and young people to access the internet safety can be challenging.

Pathfinders recommends the following

- [Working within the Online Safety Amendment Act 2024](#) age restrictions for social media will come into effect in December 2025.
- Working therapeutically with Children and Young People under the age of 16 to not create or delete their social media accounts and limit screen time in line with the national recommendations
- It is recommended for Employees and Authorised carers to be aware of the dangers of social media and online gaming
- Support Children and Young People to understand the dangers of online forums and sharing personal information and their location.
- The Australian government recommends the following screen time for each age group
 - no screen time for children younger than two years
 - no more than one hour per day for children aged 2–5 years
 - no more than two hours of sedentary recreational screen time per day for children and young people aged 5–17 years (not including schoolwork)

Roles & Responsibilities:



POLICY

The **Senior OOHC Manager** has a responsibility to oversee and ensure that all **Children and Young People** as far as possible are protected from harm.

Everyone at Pathfinders has an obligation to work to keep children protected from harm.

Associated Documents:

- [Procedure-OOHC-Child Protection and Child Safety](#)
- [Procedure-OOHC Providing a Positive Care Environment](#)
- Pathfinders Authorised Carers Code of Conduct
- Pathfinders Code of Ethical Conduct
- Pathfinders Reportable Conduct Framework
- [Children's Guardian Act 2019](#)
- [OCG Reportable Conduct Scheme](#)
- [Reportable Conduct](#)
- [Procedure-OOHC-Child Rights](#)
- [Procedure-OOHC-Behaviour Support](#)
- [Online Safety Amendment act 2024](#)

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