

## Information for parents about Safeguarding Children & Young People

### MALLEE DISTRICT ABORIGINAL SERVICES (MDAS)

#### Our Commitment

At MDAS we consider the health, safety and wellbeing of all children and young people to be our highest priority. We strive to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, in particular, through our Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy / Commitment Statement.

Our Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy / Commitment Statement has been adopted approved and endorsed MDAS. It underpins a set of policies and procedures in relation to the protection of children and young people which guide:

- the screening and recruitment of our personnel
- the behaviour of our personnel towards children and young people
- the induction and training of our personnel about safeguarding children and young people
- our open and effective communication with children and young people and their parents
- our responses to the abuse and neglect of children if it occurs and
- our maintenance of a safeguarding culture in the organisation.

All personnel must ensure that their approach and interactions with children and young people are sensitive, respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds and abilities. We promote equity and respect diversity by:

- actively anticipating children's diverse circumstances and responding effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities
- by giving all children access to information, support and complaints processes, and
- paying particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with a disability and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Our personnel are required to:
  - undergo an extensive screening process including a Working with Children Check and/or a National Criminal Records Check
  - behave professionally and with care towards children and young people including not acting outside the boundaries of their duties or using their position with the organisation to solicit work with or initiate contact with children and young people who are clients/members of our organisation
  - understand the important responsibility they have to protect children and young people from all forms of abuse, bullying and exploitation either by our personnel or that occurs outside the scope of our operations and services; and
  - create and maintain a child safe culture.

We expect all within our organisation, regardless of their role or level of responsibility, to act to safeguard children from such harm by:

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- adopting the practices and behaviour we have set as our standard when carrying out their roles, and
- reporting any abuse or neglect of which they become aware to our management and/or to external authorities responsible for child protection or to police, regardless of whether that abuse is being perpetrated by personnel within our organisation, or by those outside our organisation including those from the child's family, extended family, their family's extended network or strangers.

We are dedicated to protecting the children and young people in our community and have successfully achieved Accreditation with the Australian Childhood Foundation's Safeguarding Children Program.

### Responding to Child Abuse Reports and Allegations

We consider any form of child abuse including emotional, physical and sexual abuse, family violence, grooming or neglect as intolerable under any circumstances.

We have a legal, moral and mission driven responsibility to protect children and young people from harm and to ensure that any incident of suspected child abuse is promptly and appropriately dealt with. Our personnel are required to report suspected child abuse to their direct supervisor/manager and the child protection authorities or the police. MDAS will co-operate with the child protection authorities and police and other agencies as required by law.

### Practice & Behaviour Guidelines (Safeguarding Code of Conduct)

MDAS our staff and volunteers are required to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct towards children and young people. We have developed Practice & Behaviour Guidelines to identify and prevent behaviour that may be harmful to the children and young people in our care. The following is a summary to those Guidelines.

#### **Supervision**

Our personnel are required to avoid one-to-one unsupervised situations with children and young people to whom we provide services, and (where possible) to conduct all activities and/or discussions with service recipients in view of other personnel.

#### **Transport**

Children and young people are to be transported only with prior authorisation from a parent/guardian and a MDAS Business Unit manager. Our personnel are NEVER to give children or young people casual lifts. To gain approval from a MDAS Business Unit manager, our personnel are required to submit details about the proposed journey including the form of transport, the reason and details of who will be present.

#### **Overnight Stays**

Overnight stays are only to occur with the authorisation of a parent/guardian and MDAS Business Unit Manager. Standards of our personnel conduct during an overnight stay must be consistent with the practices and behaviour expected during delivery of our programs and services at other times. Standards of conduct that must be observed include:

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- Providing children and young people with privacy when bathing and dressing
- Not leaving children or young people under the supervision or protection of an unauthorised person such as hotel our personnel
- The right of children or young people to contact their parents, or others, if they feel unsafe, uncomfortable or distressed during the stay

### ***Physical Contact with Children and Young People***

Any physical contact with children and young people must be appropriate to the delivery of the programs and services and based on the needs of the child or young person (such as to assist or comfort a distressed young person) rather than on the needs of our personnel.

### ***Positive Guidance***

We aim to make children and young people aware of the acceptable limits of their behaviour. Children are encouraged to feel safe and be safe. There are times when our personnel may be required to use appropriate behaviour management strategies to ensure an effective and positive environment and the safety and/or wellbeing of children, young people or personnel participating on our programs and services. Any behaviour management strategy used must be fair, respectful and appropriate to the developmental stage of the children or young people involved.

The child or young person is to be provided with clear directions and given an opportunity to redirect their misbehaviour in a positive way. Under no circumstances are our personnel to take disciplinary action involving physical punishment or any form of treatment that could reasonably be considered as degrading, cruel, frightening or humiliating.

### ***Use of language and tone of voice***

Language and tone of voice used in the presence of children and young people should not be harmful to children and should provide clear direction, boost their confidence, encourage or affirm them.

### ***Uniform***

Our personnel are to wear their MDAS uniforms only while involved in delivering service, representing MDAS at events, or when travelling to and from work.

### ***Professional role boundaries***

Our personnel are not to act outside the confines of their duties, as specified in their position description, when helping to deliver our programs and services. MDAS actively discourages program/service our personnel and volunteers to engage with children who participate in MDAS programs, in activities such as baby-sitting and weekend trips. Such activities may only occur with prior written approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

### ***Photographs of children and young people***

Children and young people are to be photographed by our personnel while involved in our programs and services only if:

- Prior written parental/guardian authorisation is obtained (with the exception of special events such as concerts, fairs, performances, open days and competitions)

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- The context is directly related to participation in our programs and services
- The child is appropriately dressed and posed

***Use of electronic and online communication***

Wherever possible, email and text messages sent to a child or young person is to be copied to their parent or guardian. Any communication is to be restricted to issues directly associated with delivering our programs and services, such as advising that a scheduled event is cancelled.

Communication with young people on social networking sites is only allowed through official MDAS sites and by designated MDAS Social Media Administrators.

***Use, possession or supply of alcohol or drugs***

While on duty, personnel must not:

- be under the influence of alcohol and /or an illegal drug
- be incapacitated by any other legal drug such as prescription or over-the-counter drugs
- supply alcohol or drugs (including tobacco) to children and young people participating in our programs

***Giving Gifts***

Giving of gifts by our service delivery personnel to children and young people to whom we provide service is subject to obtaining prior authorisation from the CEO and the parents.

***Promoting equity and diversity***

All personnel must ensure that their approach and interactions with children and young people are sensitive, respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds and abilities. Where our organisation has involvement with children who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds or who have a disability, our personnel will promote their safety (including cultural safety), participation and empowerment.

**Further Information**

If you have concerns regarding the safety of a child or young person or would like to discuss any of the information further, please contact MDAS.

For more information about child safety MDAS and to view our full Safeguarding Children Policies visit our website [www.mdas.org.au](http://www.mdas.org.au).

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