

YFU Australia and New Zealand – Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and Child Safety Policy

YFU Australia and New Zealand is committed to child safety. Within YFU the word ‘child’ refers to all our exchange students and host families’ children under 18 years of age.

We want our exchange students to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all our students, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all our exchange students

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures. When we use the phrase ‘child abuse’ we encompass all aspects of abuse from bullying to sexual harassment and inappropriate comments and gestures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about an exchange student’s safety, and we follow these rigorously.

YFU is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks to the best of our ability.

YFU has robust human resources, training and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.

YFU is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all our exchange students, children in our host families as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of our exchange students from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our board members, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe an exchange student is at immediate risk of abuse contact YFU on the Emergency Telephone – Australia 0438 821066 or in NZ 027 455 9807.

Our Exchange Students

This policy is intended to empower our exchange students and other children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. Children and young people are integral to our organisation either as part of host families, as inbound exchange students or as outbound exchange students. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say. We also ensure that all host families, natural parents and all inbound and outbound exchange students receive Child Protection Information sheets developed by the Council of Australian Student Exchange Organisations.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome.

In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of our exchange students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that any of our exchange students with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Our board, staff and volunteers

This policy guides our board, staff and volunteers on how to behave with our exchange students or other children in our organisation.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with all children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to exchange students, parents/carers and children in host families) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of any form of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of our exchange students from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of exchange students and other children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further).

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the relevant State, Federal or National Agencies and police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold the relevant Working with children Check for their State or Territory and provide proof of this to YFU. In most States this is referred to as a Working with Children Check. In Queensland it is a Blue Card, in the Northern Territory it is an Ochre Card and in New Zealand Police Vetting Checks are undertaken.

We carry out reference checks on all our host families, staff and volunteers and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete. We do retain our own records (but not the actual criminal record) if an applicant's criminal history affected our decision making process.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to our exchange students, overseas partner organisations and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents, exchange students or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it in accordance with our privacy policy.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults involved with YFU who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against an exchange student have an obligation to report that information to the YFU National Office who will report it to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

Risk management

Organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We minimise physical risks to all children involved in the service by visiting the home that they will live in and ensuring that it meets our standards. For our outbound students this is delegated to our YFU partner. For online environments we advise our students on safe practices in the use of social media, use of chatrooms and mobile messaging as part of our orientation processes.

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families, exchange students and children in host families have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all exchange students, families and their children, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- An exchange student or child in a host family states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the exchange student or child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.