



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Introduction

Melbourne String Ensemble acknowledges the Wurundjeri, Woi-Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, upon whose Country we are based and recognises their continuing connections to community, culture and country. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was first developed by MSE on 2 October 2022. MSE is committed to implementing the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and to training our employees, contractors and Volunteers in its content and application. This Policy can be accessed via the MSE website.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

MELBOURNE STRING ENSEMBLES INCORPORATED is committed to the Safety and wellbeing of Children at all times. We want Children to feel safe, happy and empowered while learning music and ensemble skills. We support and respect all Children, as well as our Staff and parent Volunteers.

MSE is committed to preventing Child Abuse by identifying risks early and has a zero-tolerance approach to Child Abuse. Our organisation has robust recruitment practices for all Staff and Volunteers and is committed to training and educating our Staff and Volunteers on Child Abuse risks.

*MSE's public commitment to Child Safety can be found on our website:
<https://mse.org.au/about-us/>*

Purpose

This Policy outlines how Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated prioritises the Safety and wellbeing of Children and its implementation.

Scope

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to all employees, Volunteers, contractors and visitors within MSE or engaged by MSE.

Responsibilities

The Executive Committee is responsible for ensuring that Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated prioritises Children's Safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about Children's Safety.

The Executive Committee will model a Child safe culture at Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a Child Safety concern. The Executive Committee will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated has a role in identifying and managing risks of Child Abuse and harm. The Executive Committee will make sure that Staff and Volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this Policy. They will also ensure that appropriate Child Safety training for Staff and Volunteers is identified and completed.

The Executive Committee will conduct an annual review of how effectively Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated is delivering Child Safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with Melbourne String Ensembles Incorporated will be sought as part of this review.

Definitions

Abuse: can consist of one or more of, but is not restricted to the following:

Physical Abuse, any non-accidental physical injury resulting from practices such as: hitting, punching, kicking (marks from belt buckles, fingers), shaking, burning (irons, cigarettes), biting, pulling out hair, alcohol and/or other drug administration.

Sexual Abuse: any assault or Abuse of a sexual nature, sexual molestation, indecent exposure, sexual harassment or intimidation.

Emotional Abuse: the chronic attitude or behaviour of one Person which is directed at another Person, or the creation of an emotional environment which erodes a Person's self-esteem and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include insulting, bullying, devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising or other extreme acts in the vulnerable Person's presence

Reasonable Suspicion: means fair and practical reason to believe an incident involving Abuse has occurred, based on either verbal communication, hearsay, rumour or observation of behaviour

Neglect: characterised by the failure to provide for basic needs. Any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a Person's health or development

Child/Children: any Person/s under the age of 18

Child Safety Officer/Person: Person responsible for receiving reports and acting on these reports. The principal Child Safety Officer/Person for the MSE is the MSE Secretary. Ensemble Managers are also Child Safety Persons, and responsible for the Safety of Children in their groups.

Ensemble Manager: refers to the parent Volunteer appointed by the Committee to supervise each ensemble group.

Executive Committee: refers to the President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Management Committee: refers to Executive Committee and ordinary committee members

Supervisor: any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the supervision and Safety of Members placed in their care whilst holding a formal position at MSE. A Supervisor could include but is not limited to: Staff, Contractors, Volunteers, Committee Member

Member: any Person (adult or Child), who attends or participates in MSE's activities, objectives or strategic plan.

Volunteer: any unpaid Person over the age of 16 who is invited to assist in helping.

Children's empowerment and participation

MSE is a Child-centred organisation. We actively seek to include Children's views and ideas in our organisational planning and delivery of services including rehearsals and performances, and management of facilities.

We want Children to develop new friends through MSE and encourage Children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between Children and take action if this occurs.

MSE values the voices of Children and will act on Safety concerns raised by Children or their families. We respect the rights of Children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at MSE. We actively seek to understand what makes Children feel safe in our organisation. We will regularly communicate with Children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

MSE actively supports Children's participation and aims to build confidence and a feeling of security by seeking and listening to the Children's opinions in all MSE settings. During rehearsal Children are regularly consulted on choice of repertoire, recordings, practice and learning ideas; Children's opinions are sought when developing camp/intensive days (games, food etc.) Children are always provided with constructive and positive feedback on their suggestions by music directors, managers and Volunteers.

Families and communities

MSE recognises the important role of families and communities and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their Child. Parents, families and communities are encouraged to ask questions, provide feedback or raise concerns with music directors or managers by phone or email. Parent teacher interviews are held annually to address any individual concerns or questions.

MSE provides information to families and community about our Child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website
- including information about our Child Safety approach, our operations and Management Committee and management structure, in the MSE General information for Families Handbook.
- including reminders about our policies and procedures in regular email correspondence.

Child Safety Persons

MSE has nominated the Secretary of the organisation to be the Child Safety Officer with responsibility for responding to and reporting any Child Safety related complaints or concerns.

Each Ensemble Manager is appointed the role of Child Safety Person. Children know the Ensemble Managers and understand how to contact them. The role of the Child Safety Person is communicated to Children and families on their orientation day and in the General information for Families Handbook.

Creating culturally safe environments for all First Nations Children and their families

MSE is committed to creating environments where First Nations culture is celebrated and First Nations Children, families and community Members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural Safety for First Nations Children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all performances
- consulting with families and Members of the First Nations community to identify opportunities to promote First Nations culture and practices in the MSE programs
- providing opportunities for Children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including through performance and during MSE community activities
- supporting Children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant First Nations organisations
- providing training for Staff and Volunteers on the strengths of First Nations culture and its importance to the wellbeing and Safety of First Nations Children

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all Children. To achieve this, we will:

- provide training for all Management Committee Members, Staff and Volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural Safety
- welcome and support participation of all Children, including neurodiverse Children, Children with disability, Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ+ Children and First Nations Children and their families

- offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs
- have zero-tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures
- strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our Staff and Management Committee Members – we are committed to having representatives of relevant culturally diverse backgrounds on our Management Committee. The MSE demographic is not static and we commit to changing in line with the backgrounds and cultures of our Members
- have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of Children of all abilities

Code of Conduct

MSE has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, Volunteers and the Management Committee must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a Person's involvement with the organisation.

All Staff, Volunteers and contractors must sign an agreement to comply with the Code and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, prior to delivering any services engaging with Children.

Recruiting Staff and Volunteers

MSE puts Child Safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for Staff and Volunteers, including the Management committee. We require a Working with Children Check or VIT registration and referee checks for all Staff and Volunteers 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 will check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

Training and Supporting Staff and Volunteers

MSE is committed to ensuring that all contractors, Staff and Volunteers receive training in line with current legislation to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to Child Safety and to support their engagement with Children. MSE assists its Staff and Volunteers to consider Child Safety when making decisions and to promote a safe environment where Children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Staff and Volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with Children and for compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with Children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

General Risk Management

MSE has an emergency management plan for general rehearsals and each concert.

MSE uses the Operoo Child Safety management system to collect and store all emergency, medical information and parent permissions for each Child. This information is accessible to authorised Supervisors at all times.

A trained First Aider is on site at all times for all activities at MSE.

Activities such as camps, tours and excursions will be communicated to parents via Operoo. Parents will be informed of all potential risks and will be required to sign a permission form.

All Children's social, emotional and physical needs, including dietary requirements, will be taken into account when engaged in the context of activities that are outside of regular rehearsal and performance times. Children will be consulted when making decisions about their wellbeing in these contexts.

Additional risk information specific to tours, camps and excursions will be collected by Operoo and made available to Supervisors.

Children's safety will be paramount at all times during extra-curricular activity. An appropriate adult to Child ratio will be adhered to; food and accommodation will be healthy and sanitary; children will be accommodated in groups of at least two or three when traveling overnight.

All transport companies used for excursions and travel will be reputable and have an excellent safety record.

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.

An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet is included in the General Information for Families Handbook with information about the complaint process and the support available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of Child Abuse or harm Staff and Volunteers at MSE must report it.

Reporting Procedure

Reasonable Suspicion, or allegations of harm or Abuse must be reported immediately.

Reasonable Suspicion means fair and practical reason to believe an incident involving Abuse has occurred, based on either verbal communication, hearsay, rumour or observation of behaviour.

The details of those reporting Abuse will be kept private and confidential.

A documented reporting process with escalating procedures has been established by MSE for handling allegations of Abuse. The process is as follows:

Children and Families

- Children are encouraged to raise concerns with the nominated Child Safety Persons for each ensemble group or the Child Safety Officer

Staff and Volunteers

- For all Reasonable Suspicions, the Staff Member or Volunteer must immediately contact the MSE Child Safety Officer or MSE President.
- Verbally provide details of the alleged suspicion, including MSE location, Child's name, description/details of allegation
- The MSE Child Safety Officer will document the details and refer them to the police.

Escalation

- Automatic suspension from all work or other duties at MSE of any Person while under investigation by MSE, or by the police
- Automatic termination of their employment, contract or involvement with MSE if found guilty of committing Abuse, either by internal investigation or by a court. If there is Reasonable Suspicion that a Member has been or is suffering Abuse, the Police and MSE's insurer will be contacted immediately.

The phone number for Kew Police Station is: (03) 8851 1111.

The Police will also be notified if a Member discloses an incident of Abuse that has occurred somewhere other than at the location of an MSE rehearsal/performance.

Pastoral Care

If a disclosure of Abuse is made, the Person who receives the disclosure will provide appropriate pastoral care to the Person making the disclosure. This will include:

- treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or downplay or minimise the allegation's impact on the alleged victim
- not pushing the Member to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation

- assuring the Member that they are understood and that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault; and that they are correct in disclosing the incident
- reporting the Abuse to the police and MSE's insurer
- not contacting the alleged perpetrator. If the Staff Member or Volunteer is already providing counsel to the alleged perpetrator, it may be advisable for another Person to assume this responsibility for the duration of any investigation
- if the alleged Assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the Member should be, if reasonably practical, retained and handed to the police for forensic examination

Maintaining confidentiality

Any disclosures by a Member, reports of suspected Abuse and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.

Record keeping

MSE is committed to documenting 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.

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.

Records will be stored securely and kept by MSE in line with current legislation.

Information sharing

MSE may share relevant information to promote the Safety and wellbeing of Children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. MSE will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise Child Safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise Safety.

Providing a safe physical and online environment

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of Child harm and Abuse in the physical and online environments operated by MSE.

MSE has an emergency plan for physical risks such as accident and injury.

MSE has also identified the following risks for our organisation: verbal and Physical Abuse; accidents resulting in physical harm; not being heard or having feelings ignored; bullying and teasing. Other behaviours harmful to Children have also been identified, such as:

- inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature and coarse language
- suggestive gestures or remarks and jokes of a sexual nature
- recording, photographing or filming without prior consent of MSE

MSE will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times. Each Member of MSE has the right to:

- full and effective use of his or her Personal, civil, legal and consumer rights
- be treated with dignity and respect and to receive services without exploitation, Abuse or Neglect
- receive services without discrimination or victimisation
- personal privacy
- be treated and accepted as an individual and to have his or her individual preferences considered and treated with respect
- continue his or her cultural religious practices without discrimination
- freedom of speech
- complain and to act to resolve disputes
- have access to advocates and to other avenues of redress
- be free from reprisals, or a well-founded fear of reprisal, in any form for acting to enforce his or her rights.

We continually manage the risk of Child Abuse and harm in consultation with our Staff, Volunteers, parent representatives and Children. We ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in MSE activities.

Staff and Volunteers will work with groups of two or more students. From time to time a Staff Member or Volunteer will work one on one with a student (for instance auditions). This is only done with the approval of the Music Director and Ensemble Manager. Rehearsal room doors are open where practical and Supervisors remain in the vicinity at all times.

Any contractors or other providers of services are always supervised by a Member of Staff while working with MSE.

In addition to music Staff, two parent Supervisors are present to support each music group. One of the Supervisors must be a group manager (Child Safety Person). All Supervisors have a current WWCC. Parents who are not on supervision duty are not permitted to attend rehearsals unless they are the parent of a new Member or due to reasonable circumstances and with the permission and under the supervision of the Persons on duty. Anyone who does not have a valid reason to be present during an MSE rehearsal is required to leave. Police may be contacted if such Persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

Disciplining Children

It is not the responsibility of MSE or its Staff or Volunteers to discipline a Child. If a Child does not abide by the rules set down by MSE or becomes an obstruction to the care of other Children and may cause harm, the parents or guardian of the Child will be contacted and asked to remove the Child. At no time will a Staff Member or Volunteer enforce any form of physical or emotional discipline.

Challenging and disruptive behaviour and Tutors

Tutors are not expected to manage challenging behaviours. If a student is uncooperative, disruptive, or appears to be unwell, upset or angry, The Tutor must immediately seek support from their group manager or parent Volunteer on duty.

Non-compliance with this Policy and the Code of Conduct

MSE will enforce this Policy, the Code of Conduct and any other Child Safety and wellbeing policies (see list below). Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action.

Supporting legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for Child Abuse)

Related Organisational Policies

- MSE Code of conduct
- Volunteer Roles and Responsibilities
- General Information for Families Handbook

Policy Review

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy will be reviewed annually by the Executive Committee. Any recommended changes should be submitted in writing for consideration no less than one week before the annual review date. Any proposed changes will be submitted to the Committee for approval before being implemented.

Date: Last reviewed: September 2023

Next review date: September 2024

Responsible officer: Secretary

Declaration

I confirm that I (*FULL NAME*) _____ have read and agree to all policies detailed in this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and will adhere to the reporting procedures outlined above in the event of any incidents.

Signed: _____

Date: _____