

Connect.Ed Child Safe Environment Policy

Purpose

The Connect.Ed Child Safe Environment policy has been created to advocate for children's fundamental rights of safety and protection. The policy informs all who work with and for Connect.Ed of their roles and responsibilities to ensure they take the preventative and proactive measures needed to meet the safety and wellbeing of all children.

Statement of commitment to the safety and protection of children and young people

Connect.Ed places children's safety and wellbeing at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to creating an environment that is inclusive, informed, and safe for all children and young people. We celebrate diversity, ensuring all abilities, sexual preferences, cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds are embraced and treated with equity. We value the opinions, feedback and participation of children and young people and actively seek all children to be seen and heard. We believe in and work towards the guiding principle that all children and young people are given the opportunity to thrive.

It is the duty of all employees, independent contractors and university students working with Connect.Ed to safeguard children and young people. As an organisation we take responsibility to maintain a child safe environment which complies with the requirements of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. We ensure all Connect.Ed employees have and maintain mandatory clearances and meet the required legal and professional obligations to work with children and young people. We ensure all independent contractors and university students working with Connect.Ed understand the importance of and have current mandatory clearances and meet the required legal and professional obligations prior to beginning work with children and young people through Connect.Ed.

We commit to regular professional development for all Connect.Ed employees to maintain awareness of safety and wellbeing for children and young people, to both prevent and support those at risk of harm or who have experienced harm. The management of Connect.Ed treat all allegations and safety concerns as serious, following up promptly and thoroughly, adhering to guiding laws, policies, and procedures.

Scope

The Child Safe Environment policy guides and applies to all who work with and for Connect.Ed, namely employees, independent contractors, and university students on placement, who are located within South Australia and across other state of Australia.

All employees, independent contractors and university students must agree to and comply with the Connect.Ed Child Safe Environment policy and Code of Conduct. The Code of

Conduct specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children and young people.

This complies with Connect.Ed obligations under the **Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016**, including:

- Part 4 – Restrictions on working with children
 - o Division 2 – Steps employers must take in relation to employing person, and the maintenance of the working with children check (section 17)
- Part 5 – Working with children checks
 - o Division 2 – Working with children checks
 - o Division 5 – Information sharing

It complies with Connect.Ed obligations under the **Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017**, including:

- Chapter 2, Part 1
 - o Section 5 – Duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people
- Chapter 2, Part 2
 - o Section 7 – Safety of children and young people paramount
 - o Section 8 – Other needs of children and young people
- Chapter 5 – Children and young people at risk
 - o Part 1 – Reporting of suspicion that child or young person may be at risk
- Chapter 8 – Providing safe environments for children and young people
 - o Section 114 – Certain organisations to ensure environment is safe for children and young people
 - o Section 115 – Policies and procedures to be reviewed

Code of Conduct

The Connect.Ed Code of Conduct guides all employees, independent contractors and university students on placement, on the expected standards of behaviour with children and young people when representing Connect.Ed.

Prior to beginning work with or for Connect.Ed, all employees, independent contractors, and university students must agree to abide by our Code of Conduct. All employees, independent contractors and university students, are provided opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the Connect.Ed Code of Conduct. The Connect.Ed Code of

Conduct is accessible publicly via the website www.connectededucation.info

Any breaches or suspected breaches of the Connect.Ed Code of Conduct are to be reported to the Director.

The Director will investigate all reported breaches which may result in disciplinary action, including possible dismissal. Breaches may also lead to criminal proceedings.

Children and Young People's Participation

Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students respect the opinions, feelings and feedback of all children and young people we work alongside. We encourage, listen and respond to the views of all children and young people. We are committed to the following practice: -

- Listen to and respond thoroughly to any concern's children, young people or their families raise.
- Understand that children and young people express themselves through behaviour. We will acknowledge and respond to all feedback children and young people express, verbally and non-verbally.
- Value diversity and equity and ensure all practice demonstrates this.
- Proactively ensure children and young people are shown and taught their rights (using age and developmentally appropriate language).
- Share information, support, and encourage children, young people and families when they need access to the complaints process or are feeling unsafe.

Recruitment of Employees

Connect.Ed recognises the importance in employing proficient and committed professionals to provide the best possible support to children and young people. Connect.Ed takes all reasonable steps to ensure suitable candidates are selected through an equitable recruitment process. This process assesses candidate suitability for the role and individual competence in achieving child safety and wellbeing expectations.

The process includes:

- Providing a clear position description that demonstrates the Connect.Ed commitment to child safety and wellbeing.
- Holding face-to-face interviews with selected candidates, which include behavioural questions relative to child safety and wellbeing.
- Strict screening processes to evaluate individual suitability. This includes verification of qualifications, Working with Children Check and other required clearances (including NDIS and/or National Police Clearance) prior to commencement, ensuring Working with Children Check is current and status

is 'Not Prohibited'

- Verify employment and performance history from provided professional referees.
- Undertake On-job observation prior to employment or during probation period.
- Discussion of further professional development interests and opportunities.

Connect.Ed commits to safeguarding children and young people by ensuring all employees have and maintain the legal requirements:

- DHS Working With Children Check, in accordance with the *Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016* (the Act).

Connect.Ed also requires staff to complete the following screening:

- National Police Check
- Vulnerable Person-related Employment Check

Connect.Ed follow the practice for the conduct of Working with Children Checks for all potential staff before employment, as set out in Part 4, Division 2, Section 17 of the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act, 2016. This action is also in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 1, Section 5 – Duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people; Chapter 2, Part 2, Section 7 – Safety of children and young people paramount; and Chapter 8 – Providing safe environments for children and young people, of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017.

All new employees participate in a three-month probation, which assists in ensuring the most suitable professionals are engaged by Connect.Ed.

Recruitment of Independent Contractors and University Student Placement

Connect.Ed recognises the importance of connecting with proficient and committed professionals to provide the best possible support to children and young people. Connect.Ed takes all reasonable steps to ensure independent contractors and university students are engaged through an equitable process. This process assesses individual suitability for the engaged role and competence in achieving child safety and wellbeing expectations.

The process includes:

- Providing a clear role description that demonstrates the Connect.Ed commitment to child safety and wellbeing.
- Holding face-to-face interviews with independent contractors and university students, which include behavioural questions relative to child safety and wellbeing, prior to their engagement with Connect.Ed.
- Strict screening processes to evaluate individual suitability. This includes verification

of qualifications, DHS valid, Not Prohibited Working with Children Check (or other state-based child safety clearance), and other required clearances (including Vulnerable Person and/or National Police Clearance) as per role undertaken.

- Verify professional referees for independent contractors and verify placement requirements for university students.
- Always ensure complete supervision for university students, and on-job observation of independent contractors as required.

All independent contractors work under individual contracts which can be terminated where the terms of the contract are not being met. This assists in ensuring the most suitable professionals are engaged by Connect.Ed.

All new university students on placement are provided with regular and constructive feedback, both to the student and their university supervisor, to enable their professional development.

Working with Children Checks

Connect.Ed ensure that the outcome of each Working with Children Check for employees, Independent Contractors and Students is handled confidentially, in accordance with Part 4 – Restrictions on working with children, and Part 5 Working with children checks, of the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act, 2016 is Not Prohibited.

Connect.Ed will verify the accuracy of Working With Children Check via the Organisational Portal of the DHS Screening Unit prior to engaging staff to work with children and young people.

Connect.Ed will continue to verify existing employees, independent contractors and students, Working With Children Check every five years and ensure the status remains as 'Not Prohibited.' Verification will be completed online through the Organisational Portal accessed via the DHS Screening Unit.

Connect.Ed will advise the Screening Unit when the organisation becomes aware of certain information regarding any person involved with the organisation, including any serious criminal offence, child protection information, or disciplinary or misconduct information.

Ongoing Supervision, Training, Professional Development and Support for Employees

Connect.Ed commits to child safety and wellbeing by ensuring all employees continue to review and develop the knowledge, skills and practice required to best support and protect children and young people. This includes ongoing supervision and professional development to ensure knowledge and skill are embedded into employees' professional practice.

Connect.Ed employees participate in continuing professional development and support to ensure they maintain child safety and wellbeing, as follows:

Supervision and Support

- Regular on-job supervision sessions for all employees, including a focus on child safety and wellbeing.
- All employees complete an induction, including review of the Child Safe Environment Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Annual (minimum) performance appraisals for all employees.
- Appointment of a child safety officer, to deliver advice and awareness of developing and maintaining a child safe environment for all employees.

Training / Professional Development

- All employees engaging with education and care sites are to complete the Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse & Neglect in Education and Care (RRHAN-EC) Fundamentals bridging course, as a requirement to enter such sites and expected to refresh this training once every 3 years.
- All employees will engage in professional development and information exchange opportunities relating to child safety and wellbeing.

Connect.Ed will provide professional development opportunities for employees to build their knowledge and skills regarding the wellbeing and development of children and young people.

Reporting and Responding to General Complaints or Feedback

Connect.Ed is committed to create a safe space for all employees, independent contractors, and university students to enable professional growth. Connect.Ed is also committed to creating a safe space for all children, young people, and families to share feedback of their interactions with Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors, and students on university placement. Feedback and complaints can be provided via the online complaints and feedback link on the 'contact us' page of the website or can be provided verbally via phone call to the relevant person or Director (if escalation is required).

Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students observe children and young people's behaviours and responses to interactions as important feedback and respond in an age and developmentally appropriate manner which respects the expressed needs of each individual.

Connect.Ed management listen to and act upon all feedback and complaints to ensure all who work with and for Connect.Ed continue to perform at high standard of practice.

The management of Connect.Ed act upon feedback or complaints in the following manner:

- Listen, investigate, and record all complaints or feedback received.
- Communicate openly with all parties throughout the process, including providing regular updates, finding agreeable solutions and making changes to services if needed.
- Ensure the complainant is aware of the outcome.
- Clearly document the process and outcome achieved in response to complaints and feedback received.
- Ensure fairness in handling complaints by communicating and respecting pre-established rules of procedure, conducting adequate investigations, gathering the views of various contributors, and taking steps to remove any possible bias.

Communication

Connect.Ed ensures the Child Safe Environment Policy and Code of Conduct are publicly available on the Connect.Ed website.

All children, young people and carers/families are made aware of the policy and code of conduct during their initial engagement with Connect.Ed and are informed on how to access them. Printed copies of the Child Safe Environment policy are made available upon request. All Connect.Ed employees provide an Introduction document to the services where they are engaged, explaining the purpose of their work and links to the Child Safe Environment policy and code of conduct.

All Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students are provided with a copy of the Child Safe Environment policy and Code of Conduct at induction. They are required to sign that they have read, understood, and will abide by the Child Safe Environment Policy and Code of Conduct prior to beginning employment or their engagement with Connect.Ed. The management of Connect.Ed are responsible for ensuring these signed documents are obtained and safely stored for all employees, independent contractors and university students.

Harassment/Bullying

Connect.Ed opposes all forms of harassment, discrimination and bullying. We take this issue seriously and encourage anyone who believes that they, or another person, has been harassed, discriminated against, or bullied to raise this issue with management.

At Connect.Ed we enforce the practice of treating everyone (including all employees, independent contractors, university students, children, young people, parents and carers) with respect and honesty. This ensures equity is upheld by all associated with Connect.Ed,

regardless of individual race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes and religious beliefs.

Risk Management

All Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students understand the importance of preventing and protecting children from risks and harm including physical risks, occupational health and safety risks and risks of harm, and harm to all children and young people we work with.

Environmental Risk

The management of Connect.Ed take a proactive approach to risk management ensuring we have strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise risk.

Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students ensure that our premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and in good condition at all times. All workers are vigilant and proactive in addressing and reporting any concerns around maintenance.

Prior to accessing or using new experiences, procedures, environments, a full risk assessment is conducted by the associated Connect.Ed employee or independent contractor. Where the new experiences, procedures, environments involves a university student on placement, they will be provided the opportunity to participate in the risk assessment process, as part of their learning experience.

All risk assessments are reviewed regularly to ensure currency of situation, and to ensure updated legislation is addressed. A new risk assessment is conducted when a concern emerges regarding a situation.

Concerns Relating to Employee Action

Connect.Ed has a responsibility in dealing with reports or concerns relating to the actions of an employee, independent contractor or university student associated with our organisation.

These concerns may include, but are not limited to:

- Taking images of children
- Complaints procedures
- Physical contact
- Employee Responsibilities
- Protecting privacy and confidentiality

Evaluation of these strategies and the development of additional strategies to minimise and control risks to children and young people occur as part of the Connect.Ed ongoing risk management process.

In addition to making a report to the Child Abuse Report Line, all employees, independent contractors and university students must report to management if reasonable suspicion is formed that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed by another person associated with Connect.Ed.

In response to any report Connect.Ed management will take any necessary disciplinary action to protect children, young people and families from harm. These disciplinary actions may include the employee, independent contractor or university student being stood down from their position with Connect.Ed, until a decision or resolution has been determined. This can include the termination of employment or engagement, if required.

Reporting and Responding to a Child or Young Person who may have experienced Harm or be at risk of Harm

Connect.Ed will not tolerate harm or risk of harm to a child or young person. It is the responsibility of all Connect. Ed employees, independent contractors and university students to identify, report and respond to children and young people at risk of harm or suspected harm. The person who identifies the harm is the person to make the report to CARL/SA Police There are serious penalties under the Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 that came in to effect on 1.6.2022 - section 64A failure to report child sexual abuse (maximum penalty of 3 years imprisonment) and section 65 failure to protect a child from sexual abuse (maximum of 15 years imprisonment).

Contacts for reporting:

Emergency Services – 000

Where a child or young person is at immediate risk.

Child Abuse Report Line – DCP 13 14 78

To report a reasonable suspicion that a child or young person is at risk of harm or has been abused, harmed or neglected.

Note: Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students on placement who are not located in South Australia will report to their relevant state-based authority.

Kids Helpline - 1800 551 800

Free, private, and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Where Connect.Ed employees engage with education and care sites, the Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse & Neglect in Education and Care (RRHAN-EC) Fundamentals bridging course is required.

As per Chapter 5, Part 1, Section 30 (3) (h) of the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 establishes an employee, or volunteer is a mandatory reporter, in an organisation that provides services directly to children or young people or holds a management position in the organisation.

Mandated reporters must understand their obligations to report as soon as practical if they have a suspicion on reasonable grounds that a child and young person has or is being harmed or is at risk of harm, in accordance with the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. Reports are made to Department for Child Protection's Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 131478 or if at immediate risk, report to South Australia Police (SAPOL) on 000. In cases involving Aboriginal children and young people, support is provided by Yaitya Tirramangkotti - an Aboriginal team, via CARL on 131478.

Connect.Ed will be guided by CARL or SA Police whether an internal investigation is appropriate.

Note: Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors and university students on placement who are not located in South Australia, will report to their relevant state-based authority.

Failure by any Connect.Ed employee, independent contractor or university student to report a reasonable suspicion that a child has or is being harmed or is at risk of harm is an offence under the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. Failure by mandated notifiers to report is also in breach of the Child Safe Environments Policy. This will result in disciplinary action being initiated against the individual.

Notifying harm or suspected risk of harm helps safeguard children and young people from ongoing experiences of neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and harm.

Connect.Ed ensure that all employees, independent contractors and university students have access to relevant information resources such as:

- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations to promote the safety and wellbeing of children in Australia: [DHS - National Principles for child safe organisations](#)
- South Australian Child Protection initiatives: [Child protection initiatives | Department for Child Protection](#)

- For those engaging with education and care sites: Dept. for Education Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people: Guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education and care settings 2017 (2nd Edition, revised 2019): [Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education or care settings](#)

Connect.Ed offers follow up support to employees, independent contractors and university students after making a notification. This may include providing access to appropriate counselling and support services for the individual, as well as identifying appropriate services for the child, young person and/or family to access while we continue to monitor their circumstances. Connect.Ed acknowledges this as an important part of supporting employees, independent contractors and university students, while also advocating for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Related Policies and Procedures

- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Process
- Media and Marketing policy
- Staffing and Employment policy

Policy review

All Connect.Ed employees, independent contractors, and university students, together with the children and their families, are invited to collaborate, contribute and offer feedback in the development of our Children's Safe Environments Policy. We highly value collaboration from all parties, to create ownership and sense of responsibility contributing to safe and thriving child safe environment.

Connect.Ed commits to reviewing our Child Safe Environments policy and procedures once every 5 years or following changes in circumstances, as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*. A child safe environments compliance statement will be lodged with Department of Human Services at the time of submitting the report and/or any updates.

Circumstances where the policy will be reviewed and resubmitted prior to 5 years, include:

- New or added risks are identified for children or young people, which may require a change in the policy or procedures.
- A critical incident where a child or young person has experienced harm through involvement in the organisation
- Concerns are raised about child safety or wellbeing and Connect.Ed involvement.

- Changes to legislation and requirements.
- Connect.Ed will ensure that staff, families and children have the opportunity to contribute to each review of the policy

Definitions

Employees - working for Connect.Ed include child development practitioners, administrative support staff and Connect.Ed Director

Independent Contractors - working with Connect.Ed include psychologists and other relevant disciplines.

University Student Placements - undertaken with Connect.Ed include Social Work, Psychology, Occupational Therapy, and other relevant disciplines.

Policy reviewed: 13/07/2023

Next review date: 13/07/2028

APPENDIX 1

Conducting Working with Children Checks

All employees, independent contractors and university students on placement, working with or for Connect.Ed who occupy a prescribed position (as set out under Part 4 – Restrictions on working with children, and Part 5 – Working with children checks, of the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act, 2016) are required to undergo a Working with Children Check (or other state-based child safety clearance) before commencing employment, beginning a contract or placement, and at least every five years hereafter.

This requirement applies to all employees, independent contractors and university students including those who regularly work with or around children or have access to prescribed records relating to children.

Procedure for conducting Working with Children Checks

A current Not Prohibited Working with children check is a precondition of working in a prescribed position with Connect.Ed.

Prior to appointment, and thereafter at five yearly intervals, Connect.Ed will direct the employee, independent contractor or university student to obtain a Working with Children Check (WWCC) from the Department of Human Services Screening Unit <https://screening.sa.gov.au/applications> (or other state-based child safety clearance). The cost of obtaining a WWCC will be met by the individual.

Where an individual receives a Prohibited WWCC result, Connect.Ed assesses this information in accordance with Part 4, Division 1, Section 15 – Persons who cannot work with children, as per the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016. The individual will be advised of this result and informed their employment with Connect.Ed will be terminated immediately.

Each assessment is conducted on its individual merits and with consideration to the inherent requirements of the position. Principles of procedural fairness and natural justice are applied throughout the decision-making process and the individual is provided an opportunity to confirm or dispute the information contained within the report and to provide contextual information for consideration during the assessment process.

The Working with Children Check will not be retained once a decision has been made regarding the person's suitability to work with children. The Working with Children Check will not be retained beyond three months in any circumstances.

In accordance with its legal requirements, Connect.Ed will retain the following information regarding its decision:

- That a Working with Children Check was obtained
- Statutory declarations (where applicable)

Connect.Ed will verify the status and accuracy of all employee's current, Not Prohibited WWCC in the Department of Human Services Screening Unit Portal at any time that Connect.Ed management believe it necessary or desirable for the purpose of maintaining a child safe environment.

As per the Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016, Section 19 (1), Connect.Ed will advise the DHS Screening Unit as soon as practicable, that the assessable situation of a person employed by Connect.Ed, or an independent contractor or university student engaged with Connect.Ed, has become compromised. This includes any serious criminal offence, child protection information, or disciplinary or misconduct information. In this situation, the individual will be immediately stood down from their role with Connect.Ed