

Purpose

At Abacus Learning, the safety, wellbeing, and empowerment of every child is our highest priority. We are committed to creating a child-safe culture where children feel respected, heard, and protected across all care and therapy environments.

Some children may require additional safeguards, including those with trauma histories or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Abacus prioritises child safety above all. We have ceased routine physical reinforcement (hugs, tickling, lifting) per NDIS and Victorian standards, favouring verbal, visual, and sensory supports."

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees, contractors, students, and volunteers
- All Abacus sites and community programs
- All interactions with children, young people, and families

Alignment

This policy follows:

- NDIS Practice Standards (including Positive Behaviour Support)
- Victorian Child Safe Standards (2022)
- NDIS Code of Conduct
- Trauma-informed care principles

Policy Statement

Abacus has zero tolerance for child abuse. We are committed to:

- Protecting every child's right, dignity, and wellbeing
- Ensuring children's voices are heard and respected
- Partnering with families in decision-making
- Recruiting, training, and supporting staff to uphold child safety
- Using trauma-informed, culturally safe, and child-centred practices
- Delivering evidence-based, safe, and meaningful supports

Principles of Child Safety

- Children have the right to be safe, respected, and included
- Supports are individualised, based on strengths, preferences, and goals
- Families are partners in planning and reviewing supports
- Physical and online environments are designed to minimise risk
- Practices are trauma-informed, culturally safe, and evidence-based
- Children's feedback is actively sought and acted upon

Checklist before physical contact:

1. Is there an immediate safety risk?
2. Have non-physical alternatives been attempted?
3. Is guardian consent in place if required?
4. Is this the least intrusive option?
5. Can another adult observe the contact?

If any answer is no, physical contact must not occur

CHILD SAFE POLICY

Safe Physical Contact

- Physical contact is rare, purposeful, minimal, and only when necessary
- Physical prompts are only used when clinically approved, documented in a BSP or therapy plan, and consented to by parents/guardians
- Staff always use non-physical strategies first: verbal prompts, visual supports, gestures, or environmental adjustments
- Children's trauma history and cultural preferences are always considered

Physical Contact

Staff must avoid full-body contact (including lifting, carrying, hugging, or wrapping arms around a child) except in the following circumstances:

- Immediate safety risk – where contact is necessary to prevent harm to the child or others.
- Clinically required and documented – where physical support forms part of an approved Behaviour Support Plan (BSP), Occupational Therapy recommendation, or other therapeutic plan.
- Parent/guardian consent – where planned therapeutic support has been discussed, approved, and documented.
- Staff must never use physical motivation, for entertainment, behaviour management, or staff convenience.

Non-Physical Motivators

Strategy	Examples
Verbal	Praise, choices, descriptive feedback
Visual	Schedules, token boards, social stories
Gestural	Pointing, modelling, proximity
Sensory	Fidget tools, quiet spaces, weighted items

Where physical contact is required, it must be:

- Brief, purposeful, and task-specific
- The least restrictive option available
- Observed by another staff member where possible
- Documented in accordance with organisational procedures

Expectations

All staff are expected to:

- Explain actions and seek consent from the child where developmentally appropriate
- Prioritise non-physical strategies and alternatives before considering physical support
- Maintain the child's dignity, privacy, and safety always
- Use trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches
- Document any clinically indicated physical contact clearly and promptly

Device and Online Safety

- Personal devices must not compromise supervision or privacy
- Only approved devices and platforms are used for work communication
- Staff must never contact children privately online

Incident Reporting and Documentation

- Report any suspicion, allegation, or disclosure of harm immediately
- All incidents must be documented using approved electronic incident forms (no paper forms)
- Abacus must notify authorities as required (NDIS Commission, Child Protection, Police)
- Always maintain confidentiality

Recruitment, Training, and Supervision

CHILD SAFE POLICY

- All staff must complete mandatory child safe training
- Child safe responsibilities are included in job descriptions, recruitment, and induction
- Ongoing supervision, reflective practice, and professional development maintain safe, effective practice
- Staff not meeting standards receive prompt coaching, mentoring, and targeted training
- Training and supervision records are maintained electronically and reviewed regularly

Record Keeping and Privacy

- All records are stored securely in approved electronic systems
- Access restricted to authorised personnel only
- Documentation must be accurate, timely, and complete
- No paper records are maintained

Continuous Improvement

- Regular monitoring of supports with children and families
- Annual child safety audits and incident reviews
- Staff practice is reviewed; additional training provided if required
- Feedback from children, families, and staff informs updates
- Policy updates communicated to all staff

Related Policies

- Incident Management Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Support and Restrictive Practices Policy
- Recruitment and Induction Policy
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Legislation & Standards

- NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators
- NDIS Incident Management and Reportable Incidents Rules 2018
- Victorian Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
- Working With Children Act 2005
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Review:

Annually or sooner if legislative changes, significant incidents, or audit findings require updates

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