

BENALLA THEATRE COMPANY

CHILD SAFE POLICY

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

1. Benalla Theatre Company is committed to child safety.
2. We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our members and volunteers.
3. We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.
4. 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.
5. We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
6. Benalla Theatre Company is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.
7. Benalla Theatre Company has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all those in leadership positions and volunteers.
8. Benalla Theatre Company is committed to regularly training and educating our leaders and volunteers on child abuse risks.
9. We support and respect all children, as well as our leadership team and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.
10. We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team and volunteers to achieve these commitments.
11. If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

OUR CHILDREN

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in Benalla Theatre Company. 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 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 children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

OUR LEADERS AND VOLUNTEERS

This policy guides Benalla Theatre Company leadership and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our leadership team and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All leadership 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 Benalla Theatre Company understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisation's culture aims for all leaders and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our leadership team and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our leaders 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 children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

Those new in leadership positions 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 Benalla Theatre Company Code of Conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

RECRUITMENT

We take all reasonable steps to engage 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. Benalla Theatre Company understands that when engaging people, we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We 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 a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the Working with Children Check website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information.

We carry out reference checks to ensure that we are appointing the right people. We do retain our own records 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 everyone. 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 children 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 leadership, volunteers, parents 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.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Benalla Theatre Company takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 18 have an obligation to report that information 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.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Benalla Theatre Company is 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 have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments.

REGULAR REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children 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

Benalla Theatre Company takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our leadership and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, leaders 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:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the 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.

BASIS FOR DISCRETION

The basis of discretion lies within the committee as an operational matter.

Date implemented October 2016

Reviewed and Amended Version One:

Date of ratification by Benalla Theatre Company November 2016

Recommended date for review November 2018