



CHILD SAFETY POLICY

"I CAN is a very enabling place... you want to feel like you can just be yourself in a place that feels safe and you're not judged." Chris, CEO.

Date of Board Approval	3 June 2024
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POLICY AND COMMITMENT

Safety is Paramount

The importance of safety is emphasized as crucial for the I CAN Network. Ensuring a safe environment stands as the cornerstone for I CAN participants, especially within group mentoring programs. It's seen as fundamental for achieving the desired outcomes in I CAN's program logics. Safety is the basis for fostering self-acceptance, pride, belonging, and confidence among young Autistic and Neurodivergent individuals.

"When you feel that sense of safety and support in the group, you feel accepted..." - Chris, CEO.

THE NATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD SAFETY



Image: National Principles for Child Safety

Part of the purpose of this policy is to strive towards championing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. It aims to provide clear expectations to the I CAN community, when safeguarding children and young people. The *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), gives responsibility to state and territory governments for statutory child protection. Additionally, the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) states that services provided to children and young people online must provide safe content and a safe environment. Therefore, as per the legislations governing the jurisdictions of all States and Territories within Australia, cyber safety, child protection and, reporting information about actual or suspected child abuse or harm, is a shared responsibility between I CAN and members of the I CAN community. The National Principles for Child Safety act as our guide to not only meet our obligations but excel as leaders in child safety for Autistic and Neurodivergent children and young people.

"A sense of safety is particularly important for I CAN Network participants because it's central to group mentoring and the outcomes that we're pursuing." Chris, CEO.

CLARITY FOR I CAN STAFF

"Sometimes we can interpret things differently... sometimes this can make us a bit naive to things..." Chris, CEO.

As a leading employer of Autistic and Neurodivergent people, I CAN recognises that various factors such as social communication hurdles, differing interpretations, and the weight of anxiety, can render Autistic and Neurodivergent people more susceptible to vulnerabilities with the law. Therefore, this policy is intended to inform and protect the wellbeing of supervising adults from allegations or misunderstandings. We aim to ensure this policy is accessible, clear and understood by all. Various parts of the policy require managers and staff to exercise discretion and the policies are not intended to be applied in a procedural manner. This policy accompanies I CAN's procedures and our unique staff child safety training.

We have included definitions and examples at the end of this policy. If you have a concern make sure you tell a responsible person in I CAN Network (e.g., the CEO, a member of Senior Leadership, a Customer Service Manager, etc). If further explanation of any of the instructions provided here is required, it should be sought from the CEO or the Child Safeguarding Officer.

If any person believes a child is in immediate risk of abuse, they should call 000.

I CAN'S UNIQUE DUTY

"I CAN Network's unique responsibility to Autistic and Neurodivergent young people's safety is that we are Australia's largest provider of Autistic-led mentoring programmes..." Chris, CEO.

I CAN Network recognizes its unparalleled duty to safeguard Autistic and Neurodivergent children within its programs. Being a leading provider of such, it shoulders the responsibility of championing and setting high safety standards.

- All I CAN people are committed to creating an environment where children and young people are safe to be themselves.
- We promote and protect the best interests of Autistic and Neurodivergent children and young people involved in our programs by giving them a voice.
- We inform our I CAN community about how to stay safe in accessible ways and listen to their concerns, providing help and support in the context of our group mentoring session delivery.
- I CAN recognises that the sensory, social and communication barriers Autistic children face make them more vulnerable and seek to break those barriers down.
- I CAN stand by all children and young people having the right to be treated with dignity and respect, free from emotional and psychological harm, physical danger, abuse and neglect.
- We further acknowledge that particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, children and young people in out of home care, young people with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ young people are at increased risk and actively seek to include them.

Finally, we acknowledge that reading through and discussing the content of this policy may be distressing for some people. If you need support please reach out to your supervisor.

AUTHORISATION



Mr Christopher Rex Varney - Founder & CEO I CAN Network Ltd.
Date: 4 June 2024

CHILD SAFEGUARDING

"We have an incredible responsibility to champion the standard of practice so these young people feel safe in both school settings and online..." Chris, CEO.

CHILD SAFETY IS EMBEDDED IN THE I CAN NETWORK'S FOUNDATIONS

Safety and protection underpin the I CAN ethos. The wellbeing of I CAN young people fits into an I CAN attitude right from the start. Our leadership, governance and culture models child safety every step of the way. Our actionable values strongly reflect this:

- We **ENABLE**: We are committed to actively accommodating individual needs, embracing diversity and difference, and removing barriers to encourage participation.
- We are **OPEN**: We listen and learn from each other. We are flexible and adapt to different circumstances.
- We are **GUTSY**: We are courageous and push ourselves to grow. We are wholeheartedly invested in everything that we do.
- We are **POSITIVE**: We focus on our strengths.
- We value **INTEGRITY**: We are honest, transparent, and trustworthy.
- We build **NETWORKS**: We work at a grassroots level to build effective and supportive local communities.

I CAN'S APPROACH ENABLES OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

"I CAN Network's difference to child safety and protection is our lived experience..." Chris, CEO.

The I CAN Network ensures that all its systems and processes align with a child safe environment. This is a shared responsibility for all staff at every level of the organisation.

- I CAN's **Code of Conduct** ensure that all children and young people feel safe enough to participate to their fullest potential and be themselves.
- Our **I CAN Online Safety Procedures** help us to identify vulnerable young people, potential risks and keep I CAN Online participants and their data safe.

- I CAN Network's Board of Directors, Sub-Committees, CEO, Deputy CEO & Child Safety Officer, Management and the **Child Safety Team** carry out regular risk assessments and promote a culture of safety for all participants.
- The **Privacy and Health Information Policy** gives clear guidance on record keeping and information sharing to protect children.
- Our innovative reporting mechanisms that uphold our **Complaints Policy** are accessible, visually communicated and easy to follow for our wonderful neurodivergent staff and young people.
- Our **Equal Opportunity Policy (or equivalent)** ensures that I CAN actively seek to include vulnerable and diverse members of the community and take extra measures to make them feel safe.
- Our **Recruitment Policy** enables us to identify the right staff to make all our participants not only feel safe and welcome but comfortable to express their unique selves.

CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION ENABLES INTEGRITY

"I CAN aims to work with all Autistic and Neurodivergent young people, particularly those who may be vulnerable due to masking or feeling marginalized in educational settings." Chris, CEO.

I CAN value, listen to and respect the voices of our young people. Youth participation in the development of our approach to child safety is essential. We take every step possible to inform, engage and consult with our young staff members and our program participants. We do this in a number of innovative ways that are accessible to the unique I CAN Network community.

- Co-creation with young people on the conceptualisation of what it means to feel safe and be safe at I CAN.
- Targeted staff surveys to include the voices of our youth staff needs when it comes to feeling safe in their knowledge and training on child safety.
- Identification of vulnerable young people in our community to reach out to include in conversations about child safety and feeling safe.
- Every mentoring sessions, whether in schools or online, provides friendly reminders to young people of how they can feel safe and be safe at I CAN
- Weekly - monthly debriefing and check-ins on any safety concerns in our programs at all levels, from participants to governance so safety is at the forefront.

"Feeling safe has numerous positive impacts on autistic and neurodivergent children... fostering self-acceptance, pride, belonging, optimism, and confidence." Chris, CEO.

I CAN NETWORKS ARE SAFEGUARDING

I CAN Network's strengths lie in its positive atmosphere, empowering ethos, and focus on fostering supportive networks. An I CAN Network is the family, friends, mentors, leaders and community that supports Autistic and Neurodivergent children and young people to thrive and have an 'I CAN' attitude. Feeling safe and secure is integral to the I CAN Network and I CAN attitude. The positive impacts of this are I CAN children and young people are able to be surrounded by safe people. An I CAN Network gauges participant safety through observable behaviours, like freely sharing interests, active engagement and participation, and displaying ease and openness in the program environment. Most importantly, it is feeling confident to ask for help and support and knowing how to seek it. That is why equitable access is so important to us.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY ENABLE US TO BE OPEN

"I CAN is a very enabling place... you want to feel like you can just be yourself in a place that feels safe and you're not judged." Chris, CEO.

At I CAN we create an environment where our participants, staff and communities' diverse circumstances and needs are recognised, respected and supported. Our aim is to ensure all people feel safe, welcome and included. Being open means we listen and consider the needs of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- People with disability
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- Children and young people who are unable to live at home
- LGBTIQ+ people

We do this through the development and continuous review of our policies and procedures to reflect best practice and include vulnerable groups in their design. Our wonderful diverse staff who mostly

consist of Autistic and Neurodivergent people champion the rights and celebrate the unique children and young people at I CAN. It goes beyond training and policies though.

Our lived experience is what makes us understand and strive to empower minority groups. We welcome feedback, complaints and reports and aim to provide child and culturally accessible means to do so.

"I CAN aims to work with all Autistic and Neurodivergent young people, particularly those who may be vulnerable due to masking or feeling marginalized in educational settings." Chris, CEO.

OUR PEOPLE ENABLE US TO BE POSITIVE AND GUTSY

Our staff strive to create a sanctuary where individuals can embrace their true selves without judgment. We undertake a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all prospective staff, contractors and volunteers to:

- Promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of I CAN Network Ltd
- Identify the safest and most suitable people who share our values and commitment to protect children
- Prevent a person from working with us if they pose a risk to children

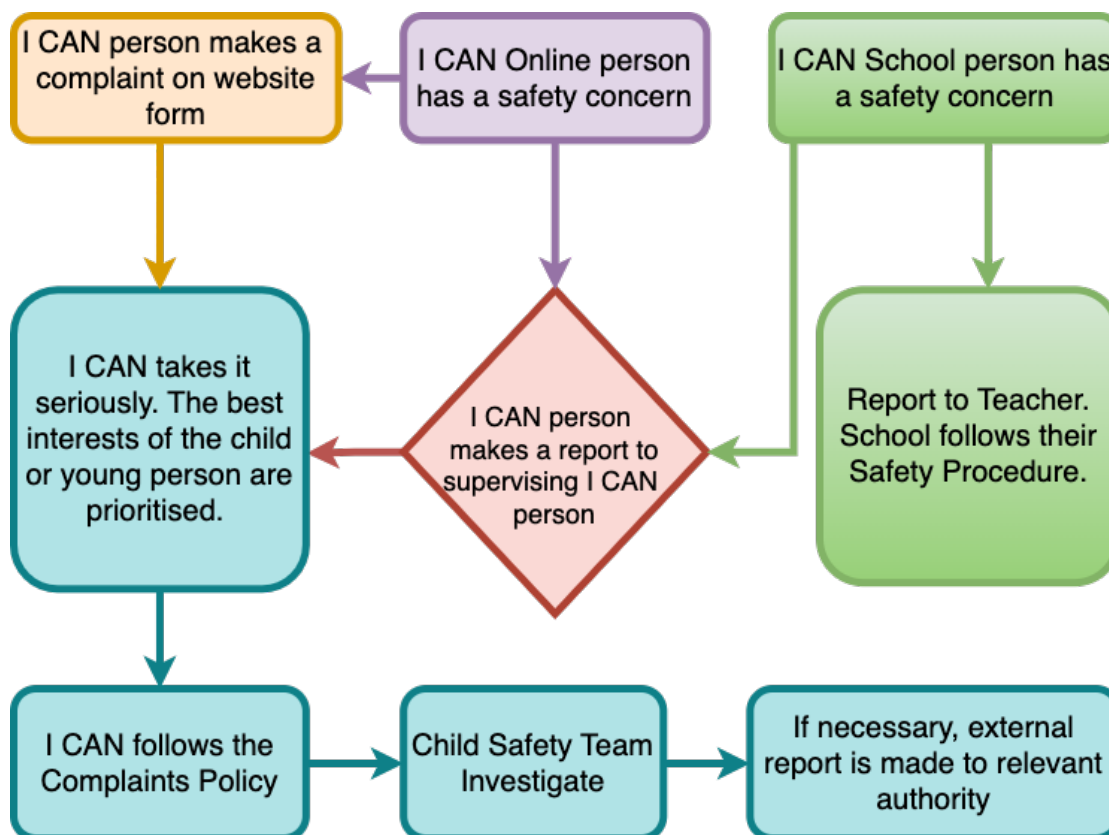
Our recruitment policy and procedures ensure that all our staff have appropriate working with children checks, background checks, undergo thorough selection and induction processes and child safety training.

"Safety is fundamental from start to finish. By offering a sanctuary, young people find their voice."
Chris, CEO.

OUR OPENNESS AND INTEGRITY ENABLE EASY REPORTING

Any I CAN person who is worried about a child or young person or feels unsafe can easily report their concerns through our accessible and child-friendly complaints system. I CAN people can be supported and seek advice from our Child Safety Team or they can give feedback, report something or make a complaint on our contact us page on the website. This process is strictly private and confidential and we make sure all information is stored safely. The best interests of the child or young person are a priority and we respect and inform them of their right to feel safe, to express their views and be protected from harm and abuse.

Visual Flowchart of Reporting Mechanism



WE ARE POSITIVE AND GUTSY WITH OUR CHILD SAFETY TRAINING AND AWARENESS

I CAN is committed to the ongoing development and delivery of in-house I CAN child safety training that considers the accessibility needs of our staff and community. This includes understanding our unique responsibilities, our child safe code of conduct, what reportable conduct is and who is a mandatory reporter. Our managers lead our child safe culture through ongoing staff supervision, support, performance management and individual coaching. We take child safety and wellbeing seriously.

"We know that I CAN Network's programmes are a protective factor of young people's mental wellbeing..." Chris, CEO.

ONLINE SAFETY

I CAN Online takes child safety and cyber safety and security very seriously. We want young people to feel that the I CAN Online space is a safe haven for them to participate in social interactions and special interests in a way that works for them. It is crucial for I CAN to take all possible measures to enable young people to be safe and provide the resources and information to parents, carers and participants to do their part. Our commitment to being safe online is outlined in our Child Safety Online Procedures manual. We provide further information for our I CAN community in the intake process, during sessions and on our website.

REVIEWING, AUDITING & NEXT STEPS

Every two years, and/or following every reportable incident or update in legislation, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the organisation's child safety policies, procedures, or codes of conduct require modification to better safeguard the children under the care of I CAN Network Ltd.

DEFINITIONS

Child Safety

Child safety includes matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the action that a responsible organisation or group takes to promote the welfare of children who spend time, participate in or are impacted by their organisation or group - and protect them from harm.

Child/ren or Young Person/People

A person under the age of 18 years.

I CAN People

Refers to staff, volunteers, participants, schools, teachers, families, contractors and anyone involved with I CAN.

DEFINITIONS continued:

Harm

The deliberate act of inflicting physical or psychological injury, abuse or neglect.

Child Abuse (Emotional, Physical, Sexual)

- **Emotional** child abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, or frightened by threats. It also includes hostility, derogatory name-calling and put-downs, and persistent coldness from a person to the extent that the child suffers, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm to their physical or developmental health.
- **Physical** child abuse is any non-accidental infliction of physical violence on a child by any person. It can be inflicted in many ways, including beating, shaking or burning and assault with implements and female genital mutilation.
- **Sexual** child abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in sexual activity. It can include a wide range of sexual activity. Sexual offences are governed by the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.)

Neglect

Neglect includes a failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision. The law differentiates between three different levels of neglect:

- 'Minor' neglect is low-level neglect that is trivial or temporary.
- 'Significant' neglect is medium-level neglect that causes harm to a child that is more than trivial or temporary.
- 'Serious' neglect is the highest level of neglect. It involves the continued failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life and can also occur if an adult fails to adequately ensure the safety of a child exposed to extremely dangerous or life-threatening situations.

Psychological Harm

Psychological harm means harm that causes mental or emotional trauma or that causes behavioral change or physical symptoms that require psychological or psychiatric care.

Emotional Harm

A highly unpleasant emotional reaction (as anguish, humiliation, or fury) which results from another's conduct causing mental distress, mental disturbance or mental suffering.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement for certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

DEFINITIONS continued:

Reportable Conduct

Reportable conduct is defined differently in the states and territories. In Victoria Reportable Conduct is defined as:

- a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child, or misconduct involving any of the above.

Wellbeing

A positive state experienced by individuals and groups. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Accessible

“Accessible” means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally and independently as a person without a disability.”

Best Interests

The need to protect the child from physical or psychological harm from being subjected to, or exposed to, abuse, neglect or violence.

Equity

The recognition that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances.

Risk

The probability of circumstances, conditions or events to increase the chance of harm.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION & STANDARDS - Legislations

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006/015>

Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023 (Tas) <https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/asmade/act-2023-006>

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/child-wellbeing-and-safety-act-2005/043>

Child Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/children-youth-and-families-act-2005/137>

Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/children-legislation-amendment-reportable-conduct-act-2017>

Children and Young People Act 2017 (SA) [https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz?path=%2FC%2FA%2FCHILDREN%20AND%20YOUNG%20PEOPLE%20\(SAFETY\)%20ACT%202017](https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz?path=%2FC%2FA%2FCHILDREN%20AND%20YOUNG%20PEOPLE%20(SAFETY)%20ACT%202017)

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/crimes-act-1958/304>

Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A00275/2019-03-10/text>

Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/information-privacy-act-2000>

Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW) (Reportable Conduct) <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1974-068>

Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth) <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2021A00076/latest/text>

Parliamentary Commissioners Act 1971 https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_674_homepage.html

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A03712/2019-08-13/text>

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-133>

POLICIES AND STANDARDS

ACT Child Safe Standards <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/child-safe-environments>

Basic Online Safety Expectations and Regulatory Schemes <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/regulatory-schemes#basic-online-safety-expectations>

Commission for Children and Young People Victoria
<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1715926248596325&usg=AOvVaw0U7Ye7UB-Ype32Pa82x17P>

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/what-we-do/lead-national-principles-child-safe-organisations>

NSW Child Safe Standards <https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/>

Principles to Counter Online Child Exploitation and Abuse
<https://www.weprotect.org/library/voluntary-principles-to-counter-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Childhood Sexual Abuse
<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

South Australian Child Safe Environments Program <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/child-safe-environments>

State and Territory Regulations of Privacy <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/for-your-information-australian-privacy-law-and-practice-alrc-report-108/2-privacy-regulation-in-australia/state-and-territory-regulation-of-privacy/>

State and Territory Mandatory Reporting Legislations <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/resource-sheets/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>

Tasmanian Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework & Reportable Conduct Scheme
<https://www.justice.tas.gov.au/carcru/child-and-youth-safe-organisations-framework>

Victorian Child Safe Standards <https://www.vic.gov.au/about-child-safe-standards>

Western Australia Reportable Conduct Scheme
<https://manuals.communities.wa.gov.au/CPM/SitePages/Procedure.aspx?ProcedureId=347#:~:text=From%201%20January%202024%20the,psychological%20harm%20to%20a%20child.>

Working With Children Check State and Territory Legislations
<https://www.childsafety.gov.au/what-we-do/working-children-check-reform>

AUTHORISATION



Mr Christopher Rex Varney
Founder & CEO I CAN Network Ltd.

STAFF AGREEMENT

I have read and understood the Child Safety Policy and agree to uphold it in my employment with I CAN Network Ltd.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____