

Occupational Health & Safety

This policy is to be read and adapted in line with the following Act and Regulations:

The Act

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* is the cornerstone of legislative and administrative measures to improve occupational health and safety in Victoria.

The Act sets out the key principles, duties and rights in relation to occupational health and safety. The general nature of the duties imposed by the Act means that they cover a very wide variety of circumstances, do not readily date and provide considerable flexibility for a duty holder to determine what needs to be done to comply.

The Regulations

The *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007* are made under the Act. They specify the ways duties imposed by the Act must be performed, or prescribe procedural or administrative matters to support the Act, such as requiring licenses for specific activities, keeping records, or notifying certain matters.

Prahran Community Learning Centre Inc (PCLC) is committed to ensuring that the work and service environments here are safe and without risk to health. Everyone associated with this organisation has a responsibility for maintaining health and safety, and for minimising the risk of harm.

Paid workers and volunteers will have access to training in and information about health and safety practices and procedures, and about issues such as stress management. PCLC recognises, however, that training and education are not a substitute for having accurate, well-communicated health and safety procedures that are adhered to by everyone.

All workplaces of this organisation will meet occupational health and safety regulations, and be regularly maintained.

PCLC recognises the right of all workers to say 'no' when feeling unsafe, and their right to receive support and debriefing from other professionals are required.

Procedures

Copies of this policy will be accessible via the PCLC website or via request from the PEO or Education Manager.

The Committee of Management will ensure that the office layout is safe, and that all workers are provided with adequate seating, lighting, heating, ventilation toilet and kitchen areas, and space free from chemical and noise pollution.

There must be a least two people on duty at PCLC at any time and, should there be a specific need for only one worker to be on the premises, the building must be secured in such a way to prevent access by members of the public or unauthorised persons.

Workers and committee members will establish warning systems for the office, including verbal codes to alert others.

The Committee of Management and a PCLC representative (Occupational Health & Safety Officer) of PCLC will ensure that there well-maintained first aid kits (as approved by an organisation such as Australian Red Cross) at all worksites.

The local fire authority will be consulted by the Centre Coordinator and the PCLC Health & safety Officer as necessary about fire safety measures – including extinguishers and fire blankets, and instructions for their use.

Workers and management will ensure the safe use, handling and storage of any chemicals or cleaning products used by the organisation.

The PCLC Health & Safety Officer will document any workplace accident/incidents, first aid treatments, and health/safety and/or management.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

PCLC considers sexual harassment to be an unacceptable form of behaviour that will not be tolerated. We believe that all people have the right to an environment that is free of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment means that someone is making unwelcome comments or advances of a sexual nature, or requesting unwanted sexual activity – and you believe that to refuse will lead you to being unfairly treated. It has nothing to do with mutual attraction or private consenting friendships, whether sexual or otherwise. Examples of sexual harassment include:

- Persistent unwelcome demands or even subtle pressures for sexual favours.
- Leering, patting, pinching, touching or unnecessary familiarity.
- Jokes, messages or telephone calls of an offensive sexual nature.
- Distribution or display of material which is offensive to another.
- Sexual assault (also criminal offence).

Procedures

The Management Committee & PEO will ensure there is written information about sexual harassment and avenues for complaint / or legal redress available to everyone attending the PCLC.

The Management group will ensure that all workers and PCLC users are treated fairly and equitably, that they are not subject to harassment, and that anyone who makes a complaint about sexual harassment is not victimised.

All reports of sexual harassment will be taken seriously, treated with empathy, and investigated thoroughly and confidentially.

Disciplinary and/or legal action will be taken against any person found to be guilty of sexually harassing a PCLC user, paid staff/committee member, volunteer or anyone else involved in programs and activities conducted by PCLC.

SMOKING

PCLC aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for all committee members, paid staff, volunteers, tutors, PCLC users and others to minimise risks; we will also abide by relevant legislation and insurance policies.

Therefore, all rooms and buildings used by PCLC are designated smoke-free areas.

In addition, anyone directly involved in our playgroup & Occasional Childcare operations will not smoke during the official hours of individual childcare sessions.

Stonnington Council buildings are smoke free.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

PCLC believes that the best way to prevent and deal with stress is to acknowledge the potential sources of stress in the total work environment and take action to stop those becoming actual causes of stress.

Some ingredients of a stress-free environment are:

- Agreeable working conditions
- Effective support systems
- Adequate professional supervision
- Clearly defined roles, positions, responsibilities and accountability structures
- Realistic work plans, workloads and timelines
- Seeking early professional intervention if difficulties arise and are ongoing

This organisation is therefore committed to providing the above stress reducing conditions as well as any others that may be required to prevent and / or manage stress.

Procedures

The Management Committee & PEO will make available adequate information about a range of stress causes and preventative behaviours/structures to all workers, together with information about appropriate health and support services.

Workers and management group members will be encouraged to attend training on health-related issues, including stress reduction, whenever possible.

UNACCEPTABLE (RISK / VIOLENT) BEHAVIOUR

*We all have the right to feel safe all of the time –
This means not being insulted, threatened or assaulted.*

The Management Committee, paid workers and volunteers at PCLC believe that every person has the right to feel safe at all times.

This policy aims to:

- Restrict the escalation of violence or aggressive behaviour, with the objective of defusing the situation
- Protect the right of PCLC users, paid workers, volunteers and management to feel safe at all times
- Provide support to people involved in a violent or potentially violent situation
- Encourage more acceptable behaviour
- Provide a consistent response to unacceptable behaviour in the workplace and wider community

Unacceptable behaviour is all behaviour – inside the work site, in close proximity, by telephone or other technology – that is threatening or discriminatory in any way, and includes any threats, abuse or violence by PCLC users or others (including management group member, paid workers and volunteers).

Unacceptable behaviour includes physical violence/assault, threats of physical violence/assault, and any behaviour that leads other people to feel unsafe (eg shouting, racist or sexist insults, attempts at self-harm, harassment, refusal to leave).

Procedures

The environment at PCLC will reflect standards expected by law within the general community and not become a legal 'asylum'. Offences of any nature that harm only the offending individual will be treated with the same flexibility and understanding that would be expected in the home or community environment.

Paid employees, volunteers and others working here are encouraged to attend specific professional development and training in how to handle unacceptable (risk/violent) behaviour.

The physical environment will be organised in such a way as to minimise frustrations and eliminate dangers. Services will be delivered with maximum efficiency and matched with PCLC users' needs. Dangerous objects and instruments will be kept in locations that prevent impulsive use of such items.

Violent behaviours will be dealt with in ways that focus on the management of the behaviour. Persistent behaviour of an unacceptable nature may result in temporary withdrawal of our service/s to the offending individual.

In situations of physical violence, the offending person will be asked to leave immediately or the worker/s should leave the situation as soon as possible. Other workers must be alerted, either by use of a verbal or other code. If the offending person refuses to leave, he/she will be informed that the police will be called. If the worker believes the situation is serious, then the police must be called immediately.

In situations where there are threats of violence, the person will be asked to stop the threats, or to leave and come back when this unacceptable behaviour has stopped. If he/she refuses to leave, the worker should leave the room or building if possible, or tell the person that the police may be called. Another worker must be informed as soon as possible.

In cases of other behaviour that leads people to feel unsafe, the person should be informed that conversation or service provision will not continue until the behaviour has stopped. The person may be asked to leave. If he/she refuses to do so, the worker should leave the situation as soon as possible.

The Management Committee & PEO will ensure that workers and others exposed to any such incident have access to professional debriefing within 24 hours of its occurrence. Follow-up discussions and support will also take place both for workers' well-being and to make necessary preventive changes at PCLC, ie things that may need discussion include who was involved, what actually happened and why, options open to the worker/s, what has taken place since and what more can be done, and what can be learnt from a particular incident. Workers will also have the option of counselling and other assistance if they require this.

EXCURSIONS

All excursions are planned and implemented according to the guidelines / regulations of PCLC / DEECD / CPCS. The Principal Executive Officer must ensure that adequate pre-excursion planning and preparation, including the preparation of students, takes place.

Prior to any student attending an excursion, parents/guardians (if under 17) must have provided to PCLC a signed permission form. Only students who have displayed sensible, reliable behaviour during their course will be invited to participate in school excursions. Parents (if under 17) will be notified if a student is in danger of losing their invitation to participate in an excursion due to poor behaviour in class. The decision to exclude a student will be made by the Principal Executive Officer, in consultation with the classroom teacher and the Education Manager.

All students will be given sufficient time to make payments for excursions (if applicable). Parents will be sent notices before the excursion date reminding them of the need to finalise payment.

Provision for emergencies to be anticipated, e.g. first aid kit. PCLC Staff in the event of an illness or accident will obtain necessary medical treatment as deemed appropriate by the teacher in charge.

In planning excursions, it is beneficial to ensure a range of experiences whilst considering costs to students.

Excursions need to be co-ordinated with the Principal Executive Officer & Education Manager.

All students are to be aware of the specific expectations of themselves and of the excursion.

SUMMARY

1. The offending person will be asked to stop the unacceptable behaviour.
2. Workers will use communication skills to ascertain the reasons for the behaviour.
3. If the unacceptable behaviour continues, the offending person will be asked to leave.
4. Emergency services (police, ambulance, etc) will be called as necessary.
5. An Incident Form will be completed and submitted by the worker/s, and responded to promptly by the Principal Executive Officer & Management Committee as appropriate.
6. Persistent unacceptable behaviour by an individual who is unresponsive to the above strategies may result in the temporary withdrawal of service/s for that person by this organisation.

VCAL Workplace Health and Safety

Young people need to be taught about workplace health and safety before, or at least while, they start work in order to develop the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours that lead to responsible behaviour in the workplace.

School-to-work transition programs aim to:

- enhance students' understanding of the work environment;
- provide opportunities to develop work-related skills and increase self-understanding,
- maturity, independence and self confidence, especially in the workplace
- strengthen the connections between school studies and workplace activities.

Young and inexperienced workers make up a significant proportion of people killed or injured at work. Increasing numbers of young people are embarking upon part-time or casual paid employment while still at school, or doing work placements as a part of work experience programs, VET courses or structured workplace learning programs. Significant numbers of young people are also working in family businesses. With such a variety of pathways between school and work there is a need for a workplace health and safety education in schools – ideally an education that can also be applied in outside contexts and create long-term behavioural change. Schools and VCAL providers have an important role in workplace health and safety education for at least two reasons:

- They can reach young people on a large scale;
- They are increasingly incorporated work-related learning experiences and programs into their curriculum.

It is not realistic to expect that teaching workplace health and safety prior to work experience will in itself be sufficient to develop knowledge, understanding and the ability to transfer learning. An integrated, incremental, on-going approach that incorporates a range of strategies is likely to be more effective. Some teachers may benefit from professional development to help them to recognise and integrate workplace health and safety issues into their teaching programs.

Suggested Approaches

- promoting a safe learning environment that encourages health and safety awareness amongst students and staff;
- encouraging students to take responsibility for their actions;
- encouraging participation by, or consultation with, teachers, students, parents/carers, employers of students and the wider community.
- Identify the teaching of workplace health and safety as an integral part of mainstream curriculum.
- Encourage students to identify and discuss issues related to workplace health and safety within the community and to promote conditions supportive of workplace health and safety.
- Work with a range of teachers in developing programs to ensure the approach is valued and implemented.
- Collaborate with a workplace health and safety conscious workplace to heighten the awareness of both the Centre and the workplace.
- Don't just have 'workplace health and safety lessons', but incorporate workplace health and safety learning activities and examples into a range of teaching contexts. For example, an oral communication activity in an English or WRS class might use a workplace consultation as a scenario. A role-play in a drama class might explore issues such as bullying and the impact of work-related injuries on family and friends.

GOOD PRACTICE IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY FOR LEARNING CENTRES

Purpose

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is one of those areas that tend to be treated with extreme caution. The fear is that once the act is looked at closely, it might prove to demand more than a community based organisation could responsibly cope with. It is admittedly, formidable at first glance, but like a lot of well-established legislation it is based on what is really common sense.

Two points are fundamental:

- Employees have a **right** to a safe and healthy place of work
- Employers are only asked to do what is **practicable**:

That is changes in practice will take into consideration all of the following:

- The severity of the risk or hazard
- The state of knowledge of risk and of the ways of removing the risk or hazard
- Availability of suitable ways of removing or mitigating the risk or hazard
- Cost of removing or mitigating the risk or hazard

(Example: a flammable cleaning fluid, which has been clearly labelled, is left on a low shelf where anyone could access it or knock it over. However few people come into this part of the building. An employer would have to consider the chances of this being a danger, whether there was a practical alternative and whether it is within their financial ability to make the change.

In this case although the risk is not great, there would probably be several easily achieved alternatives such as putting it in a higher shelf, which it might be advisable to take)

Hopefully this document will make things a little clearer. It sets out:

- Good practice principles which organisations can adopt according to their needs,
- An all purpose model policy to which relevant codes of practice can be attached,
- Model Critical Incident Procedures

Philosophy

- Employers (Committees of Management) have **legal** responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Any responsible organisation has a **moral** obligation to protect the health and safety of its workers and its participants
- Failure to provide a safe and healthy environment makes bad **business sense**, in that it can prove costly in terms of staffing, money, time, damage to community goodwill

Authority

This document is based on the provisions of the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and associated Occupational Health and Safety Codes of Practice

General Good Practice

Occupational Health and Safety practices need to be considered by both Committees of Management and staff working together

Committee of Management Good Practice

- Reading and having available a copy of the Health and Safety Act
- Ensuring that all staff have access to Health and Safety advice
- Establishing a committee representing staff and Committee of Management whose responsibility it is
 - To assess areas in which staff may be exposed to risk
 - To develop Occupational Health and Safety policies and procedures to remove or mitigate risk in line (where applicable) with Occupational Health and Safety Codes of Practice
- Providing staff with Occupational Health and Safety information
- Ensuring that staff are safe as they arrive and leave work
- Providing staff training in Occupational Health and Safety measures where necessary

Staff Good Practice

- Taking reasonable care of own health and of colleagues
- Cooperating with Committee of Management e.g. attending training, adhering to agreed procedures

Occupational Health and Safety Good Practice Workplaces

Many neighbourhood houses & Learning Centres have not been purpose built and therefore their design often makes health and safety more difficult to comply with. Nevertheless staff are still entitled to work in a safe environment and where practicable every effort should be made to ensure that they do.

Hygiene

- Toilets – where there are more than six (6) staff and the number of the minority sex is greater than two, having separate toilets for use by males and females

NB. However it is also good practice for the toilet for people with disabilities **not** to be gender specific

- Hand washing facilities – having one water (hot and cold) outlet for every 15 employees and either paper towels, laundered continuous roll or hot air dryers plus soap
- Drinking water – having one drinking point for every 40 employees and separate from hand washing facilities
- Eating and drinking utensils being carefully washed up in hot soapy water, or a dishwasher used

Environment

- Temperature range – in cold weather having a safe means of heating up to a minimum of 18 C where non-active employment is taking place. In hot weather having a method of cooling or work practices introduced to control excessive heating e.g. *employees taking regular drinks breaks*
- Lighting – having sufficient lighting free from glare
- Cleanliness – having a clean environment. Dirt and waste being removed, windows and skylights kept clean

Workstations

- Space – each employee having a clear space in which to work
- Seating – where employees work from a sitting position they have appropriate seating and work in an ergonomically sound work position with ergonomically designed furniture
- Screen based workstations – where employees are working at a small screen they take appropriate rest breaks to avoid eye strain and fatigue. Also appropriate workstation furniture (correct chair, footrest, desk, document holder) being used. Staff being trained in the correct use of workstations and the need for frequent rest.

Chemicals and Solvents

- Cleaning liquids, photocopying chemicals etc being stored and used in areas which are well ventilated.
- All chemicals and solvents being clearly labelled
- Employees using chemicals or solvents being informed of the correct usage

- Recording all chemicals and solvents on safety data sheets (obtainable from suppliers)

Photocopiers

- Photocopiers being placed in a room separate to workstations which is well and independently ventilated
- Covers being kept down when in use to prevent eye damage from ultra violet light
- Employees changing toner should wearing disposable plastic gloves and protective clothing.

Manual Handling

- Manual handling occurs where any thing, animal, person or object is lifted, pushed, pulled, carried or restrained. In community centres this can be applied lifting tables, stacks of chairs, office furniture, moving whiteboards and lifting of people with disabilities in and out of wheelchairs
- Assessing all manual handling jobs that may risk health and safety taking into account such factors as duration, frequency, weight, force, plus age, skill and experience of employee concerned.
- As far as is practicable equipment and processes being designed and constructed so that they are free from manual handling injury risks (*e.g. no less than two people should carry a table and no more than 3 stacked chairs should be carried at one time*)
- If redesign is not possible mechanical aids being used and staff trained in their use
- If mechanical aids are out of the question training being given to control risk (*e.g. the correct way to lift someone from a wheelchair*)

Occupational Health and Safety Good Practice First Aid

Neighbourhood houses who have childcare will already have comprehensive first aid kits. There are however other considerations which houses should bear in mind especially if they have people with disabilities attending, or people who have medical conditions e.g. epilepsy or asthma. As always it is up to individual houses to assess risks and what is needed to minimise those risks.

First Aid Training

- Where there are especial risks e.g. people likely to have epilepsy or asthma etc, having someone with appropriate first aid training available
- Where access to appropriate medical services is restricted e.g. in remote or rural areas, having one first aider for up to 10 employees
- Where there are more than 20 employees having at least one first aider available
- Where there is a first aider, he/she keeps a record of first aid treatment given

Accessibility of First Aid

- Employees being provided with regular up to date information regarding:
 - Nature of first aid facilities
 - Location of first aid kit/s
 - Names of trained first aiders
 - Procedure to follow if first aid is needed
- One first aid kit per every 50 employees being provided
- Maximum distance between employee's workplace and nearest kit being 100 metres
- In places of special hazard there being immediate access to a kit
- First aid kits being located so as to be clearly visible and accessible
- Kits being regularly maintained

Minimum contents of a First Aid Kit

- Emergency service phone numbers and addresses
- Name, phone number and location of nearest first aider
- Basic first aid notes
- Individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings 1 packet
- Sterile eye pads 4
- Sterile coverings for serious wounds 4
- Triangular bandages 4
- Safety pins 12

- Small sterile wound dressings (Band-aids) 8
- Medium sterile wound dressings (Band-aids) 4
- Large sterile wound dressing 4
- Adhesive tape 1.25cm wide 1 roll
- Crepe bandage 1
- Scissors 1
- Disposable gloves 1

NB Kits should **not** contain aspirin or paracetamol as some people can only use these under medical supervision

Occupational Health and Safety Good Practice

Critical Incident Stress

In particular these practices refer to employees who are considered at risk from either the threat of violence, actual violence or fear of violence from participants.

There are three main stages that need to be considered:

- Risk minimisation
- Critical incident procedure
- Counselling and debriefing

Risk minimisation

Each Committee of Management will need to assess the risks of their employees and to develop appropriate risk minimisation policies and procedures. The following points are good practice

- Keeping view from outside unobstructed from the road or public access
- Allowing only one point of entry into the building and locking all other doors, especially if staff work alone
- Staff working alone at night keeping doors locked and arranging for a colleague to phone check
- Ensuring the car park is well lit
- If appropriate having someone else present if staff feel unsafe
- Staff asking for help or leaving the building if they feel unsafe
- If possible, minimising participant waiting time
- Staff being accompanied if transporting participants
- Cash kept on the premises for minimal amount of time
- Training staff in critical incident procedures
- Keeping a confidential record of critical incidents
- Training staff in negotiation/communication procedures
- Training staff to recognise causes of potential aggression in order to defuse it
- Staff wearing as little grabble jewellery as possible
- Ensuring that non discriminatory participation procedures are accessible to all participants
- Knowing where critical incident counsellors can be reached for immediate consultation should the need arise

Critical Incident Procedure

Staff need to know what to do in an emergency if they or one of their colleagues either feel frightened, are threatened or if they are assaulted.

A model procedure is attached but the following points are good practice:

- Letting staff trust their instincts and if they are frightened they should act according to procedure
- Remembering that personal safety is more important than property
- Remembering that negotiation is better than self defence
- Staff knowing the legal position on use of force
- Staff making sure they are not blocked from a line of exit
- Ensuring the appropriate authorities are able to be contacted (e.g. the police, mental health support)
- Keeping calm
- Recording the incident

After a Critical Incident

Post traumatic stress is a real risk after an incident even when the person concerned thinks that they are all right.

Good practice is:

- Providing stress debriefing that is professional, confidential and separate

- Having details of counsellors available before an incident arises so that referral can be made as soon as possible after the event

Occupational Health and Safety Good Practice

Stress

Stress is a factor in the working life of most neighbourhood house employees and is a major occupational hazard which at worst can lead to burn out, and physical and mental illness. The risks can be minimised using good practice:

- Roles and responsibilities being clearly defined
- Job descriptions realistically matching the time component being paid for
- Having staff support systems:
 - Regular staff meetings
 - Effective supervision
 - Affirmation of work well done
- Having good working conditions
 - Flexible hours
 - Pleasant environment
- Ensuring that time in lieu is taken
- Seeking early professional intervention if difficulties are on going

MODEL CRITICAL INCIDENT PROCEDURE

This procedure is for use if an employee fears an attack, is threatened or is assaulted. Staff are advised to be aware of these procedures whether or not they think they might be in danger.

NB All staff who have been frightened or who are threatened or assaulted will receive immediate trauma counselling

Procedure if frightened.

- Trust your instincts. If you are afraid of an attack:
 - Keep calm
 - If appropriate lock all doors but in any case lock all doors except main entrance
 - If you are alone, ring a committee member and ask them to ring you back periodically
 - If appropriate leave the building, contact
 - a) The police
 - b) A committee member
- Record the incident in the Incident Book

Procedure if threatened

- Keep calm
- Try to negotiate fist BUT
- If this is not appropriate
 - If at all possible telephone the police
 - Make sure you have a clear line of exit and if possible try to leave the room locking the offender in
 - If this is not possible and you think attack is imminent scream as long and as loud as possible
- Contact the police immediately
- If appropriate telephone referring mental health agency
- Record the incident in the Incident Book
- Report to Committee

Procedure if assaulted

- Keep calm
- If you have been trained to do so, use self defence but be aware that use of excessive force may be illegal
- Scream as long and as loud as possible
- Call police immediately
- Record in Incident Book
- Report to Committee

MODEL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

Philosophy

This organisation believes that the Committee of Management has a **legal** responsibility under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and a **moral** obligation to protect the health and safety of its workers and participants

Procedure

To this end the **Committee of Management** will wherever practicable:

- Make available a copy of the Health and Safety Act to all employees
- Ensure that all staff have access to Health and Safety advice by appointing a member of the committee responsible for Health and Safety issues and if necessary providing training for that committee member
- Establish a committee representing staff and Committee of Management whose responsibility it is
 - To assess areas in which staff may be exposed to risk
 - To develop Occupational Health and Safety codes and practices to remove or mitigate risk in line (where applicable) with Occupational Health and Safety Codes of Practice
- Provide staff with Occupational Health and Safety information
- Ensure that staff are safe as they arrive at and leave work
- Provide staff training in Occupational Health and Safety measures where necessary

Staff members will

- Take reasonable care of their own health and that of colleagues
- Cooperate with Committee of Management e.g. attending training, adhering to agreed procedures