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Safeguarding policy

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Introduction

St Martins Youth Arts Centre is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children, young adults, vulnerable people, and people at risk. We have zero tolerance for any form of physical and /or sexual abuse.

Everyone working at St Martins is responsible for the care and protection of children, young adults, vulnerable people and people at risk and reporting information about any form of physical and /or sexual abuse.

All children and vulnerable people, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse, harm, and discrimination. St Martins recognises the increased vulnerabilities of children and vulnerable people who are First Nations, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, living with a disability, LGBTIQ+, and who are living in care or homeless. St Martins acknowledges the extra barriers that are faced by children and vulnerable people who may be from these backgrounds. St Martins is a culturally safe place for all children and vulnerable people where cultural identities are acknowledged and respected.

St Martins recognises the unique identities and experiences of First Nations people and actively creates opportunities for expression of culture, understanding that this supports the wellbeing of First Nations children and young people. St Martins acknowledges the strength and history of First Nations culture verbally within our programs and commits to learning about the First Nations history of our site.

St Martins has a zero tolerance for racism and discrimination based on difference. Everyone (employees, contractors, associates, and family members) at St Martins commits to actively

preventing racism and discrimination and addressing it should it occur.

Any online activities that occur with young people will maintain St Martins Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.

St Martins supports and respects all children, staff and volunteers. We actively seek children's views on what we do and act upon any concerns raised.

Policy Statement

1. All people, regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
2. St Martins commits to promoting and protecting the welfare and human rights of people that interact with, or are affected by, our work - particularly those that may be at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
3. St Martins has no tolerance for abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
4. All staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties of St Martins share responsibility for protecting everyone from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
5. St Martins has a process for managing incidents that must be followed when one arises.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is:

1. For St Martins to have an organisational culture of child and vulnerable persons safety and wellbeing.
2. To proactively prevent child and vulnerable persons abuse and discrimination within St Martins.
3. To support a positive and effective culture towards Safeguarding.
4. To set out and develop the way St Martins manages Safeguarding risks.
5. To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for physical and /or sexual abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing such abuse and/or detecting such abuse when it occurs.
6. To provide guidance to staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties as to action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation and provide assurance that all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.
7. To provide a clear statement to staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties forbidding

any such abuse.

8. To provide a clear statement to staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties about upholding cultural safety and acting against racism and discrimination.
9. To provide assurance that all suspected abuse will be reported to the relevant authorities as outlined in Victoria's Child Safety Standards.

Scope

This Policy applies to:

1. All staff of St Martins, volunteers, board members and any other person associated or working under contract with St Martins; and
2. All St Martins visitors, partners, and contractors.

Failure to comply with the policy and related procedures may result in disciplinary action.

Safeguarding Definitions

Abuse covers all forms of physical and mental abuse, exploitation, coercion, or ill-treatment. This might include, for example:

- physical abuse,
- emotional abuse,
- threats of, or actual violence, verbal, emotional or social abuse,
- sexual harassment, bullying or abuse,
- sexual criminal offences,
- cultural or identity abuse, such as racial, sexual or gender-based discrimination or hate crime,
- coercion and exploitation,
- abuse of power,
- neglect.

Child or young person means a person below the age of 18 years.

Child abuse and harm, a specific concern of St Martins due to our work with children and vulnerable people, means all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial (e.g., for financial gain) or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child. Harm is often used to describe an event that is seen as possibly less detrimental than 'abuse' but is clearly not in the child's best interest or promoting their safety.

Child sexual assault, a specific concern of St Martins due to our work with children and vulnerable people, is any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. It includes grooming.

Child protection means any responsibility, measurement or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.

Child Safe Organisation is an organisation that consciously and systematically:

- creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children,
- creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting of harm,
- responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.

Core Staff means someone on payroll (as of October 2026 this includes Artistic Director, Executive Director, General Manager/Development, Artistic Associate, Venue and Operations Manager, Workshops and Marketing Coordinator, Presenter Services Coordinator, Finance Officer, and casual positions that include Front of House, Duty Manager and Performance Staff - Tech), as opposed to a Workshop/Teaching Artist or other regular contractor.

Cultural Safety is an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, or challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and experience, of learning, living, and working together with dignity and truly listening.

Grooming refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of lowering the inhibitions of a child or vulnerable person in preparation for sexual activity with the child or vulnerable person. It is a form of sexual abuse.

Person at risk is a person aged 18-years and over who has care and support needs; is being abused or neglected or are at risk of abuse or neglect; and is unable to protect themselves from abuse or neglect because of their care and support needs.

Reasonable grounds for belief are formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- the person needs protection,
- the person has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm because of physical injury,
- the parents or guardians are unable or unwilling to protect the person.

Such a belief come from a situation where a person has information that leads them to believe that abuse, neglect, or exploitation has taken place, is taking place, or may take place. The belief is formed when all known considerations or relevant facts to the formation are considered and objectively assessed.
A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed if:

- A child states that they have been physically or sexually abused,
- A child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves),
- Someone who knows a child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused,
- Professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused or is likely to be abused,
- Signs of abuse lead to a belief that the child has been physically or sexually abused. A comprehensive list of signs of child abuse can be found at https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/identify-child-abuse.

Reportable conduct includes:

Sexual offence, such as:

- sexual touching of a person without consent,
- a child grooming offence,
- production, dissemination, or possession of child abuse material.

Sexual misconduct, such as:

- descriptions of sexual acts without a legitimate reason to provide the descriptions,
- sexual comments, conversations, or communications,
- comments to a child, young person or vulnerable person that express a desire to act in a sexual manner towards that person or another person.

Ill-treatment of a child, young person or vulnerable person, such as:

- making excessive or degrading demands of a child, young person, or vulnerable person,
- a pattern of hostile or degrading comments or behaviour towards a child, young

person, or vulnerable person; or
- using inappropriate forms of behaviour management towards a child, young person, or vulnerable person.

An ***assault against a child, young person or vulnerable person***, such as:

- hitting, striking, kicking, punching, or dragging a child, young person, or vulnerable person,
- threatening to physically harm a child, young person, or vulnerable person.

Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child, young person, or vulnerable person such as:

- displaying behaviour patterns that are out of character,
- regressive behaviour,
- anxiety or self-harm.

Safeguarding is protecting the welfare and human rights of people that are, in some way, connected with your organisation its work – particularly people that may be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Vulnerable people are children or individuals aged 18-years and above who are or may be unable to take care of themselves or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason.

A **whistle-blower** is anyone who makes or attempts to make a report of Reportable Conduct under this Policy, and is, or has previously been, an employee, volunteer, contractor, third party, child, young person, or vulnerable person in the care of St Martins or is a relative or dependent of such persons.

Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities

The **Board** of St Martins has ultimate responsibility for protecting all people who interact with, or are affected by, St Martins Youth Arts Centre. The Board are responsible for:

- The detection and prevention of abuse to child, young person, or vulnerable persons.
- Ensuring appropriate Safeguarding governance, policies and procedures are in place.
- Ensuring appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place.
- Ensuring appropriate policies and procedures and a Safeguarding Code of Conduct are

in place.
- Ensuring St Martins observes all relevant laws and regulations relating to Safeguarding.

The **Executive (CEO)** of St Martins is responsible for:

- Dealing with and investigating reports of abuse,
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and the organisation's Safeguarding Code of Conduct,
- Ensuring that all adults within the St Martins community are aware of their obligation to report suspected sexual abuse of a child or vulnerable person in accordance with these policies and procedures,
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of their obligation to observe the Staff Code of Conduct (particularly as it relates to child and vulnerable persons safety),
- Ensuring St Martins has effective and appropriate ways to manage Safeguarding and legal compliance.
- Ensuring reports to external parties are made where required.
- Providing support for staff, contractors, and volunteers in undertaking their child and vulnerable person protection responsibilities,
- Provide families and young people with accessible material that communicates our safeguarding policy and organisational procedures so that both adults and young people understand their rights.
- Providing staff and contractors with adequate training to ensure child and vulnerable person safety while online.

All **Managers** are responsible for:

- Promoting a culture of safety for children, young persons, and vulnerable people.
- Implementing this policy in their area of responsibility.
- Assessing the risk of abuse to children, young persons and vulnerable people within their area and ensure controls are in place to prevent, detect and respond to incidents.
- Facilitating the reporting of any suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- Ensuring there is appropriate Safeguarding training in place for staff.

All **Staff, Volunteers and Contractors** (creative, administrative, production and workshop artists) must ensure that they:

- Always promote child and vulnerable persons safety.
- Assess the risk of child and vulnerable persons abuse within their area of control and eradicate/minimise any risk to the extent possible.

- Report inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities.
- Take the reporting or abuse or discrimination seriously and act accordingly.
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children, young persons, and vulnerable people emotional and physical safety.
- Familiarise themselves with St Martins' policy, procedures, Code of Conduct, and relevant laws in relation to Safeguarding protection.
- Report any reasonable belief or incident that a child, young person or vulnerable person safety or welfare is at risk to responsible persons in the organisation. or authorities (such as the police and/or the child protection service).
- Fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters.

Everyone shares in the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child and vulnerable person abuse and the upholding of safeguarding standards and must:

- Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the Code of Conduct, and St Martins' policy and procedures in relation to child and vulnerable persons protection, and comply with all requirements,
- Report any reasonable belief that a child's or vulnerable person's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and / or the state-based child protection service). Under Victorian law, failing to protect a child under the age of 16 from a risk of sexual abuses is a criminal offence,
- Report any suspicion that a child's or vulnerable person's safety may be at risk to their supervisor (or, if their supervisor is involved in the suspicion, to a responsible person in the organisation),
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's and vulnerable people's emotional, physical, and cultural safety.

Safe Recruitment and Employment of New Personnel

St Martins is committed to safe employment and recruitment practices, that reduce the risk of harm to children, young adults, and vulnerable people from people unsuitable to work with them or have contact with them.

St Martins requires all employees, volunteers, and contractors to go through the organisation's recruitment screening processes prior to commencing their engagement with St Martins, which aims to:

- Promote and protect the safety of all children and vulnerable people under the care of the organisation,
- Identify the safest and most suitable people who share St Martins' values and commitment to protect children and vulnerable people,

- Prevent a person from working at St Martins if they pose a risk to children or vulnerable people.

St Martins will require applicants to provide a Victorian Working With Children Check (WWCC) and Proof of any Safeguarding training undertaken before commencing with the organisation and at regular intervals during employment. No employees will be legally able to do child-related work until they have applied for a Check. A copy of the Working With Children card is kept on file.

St Martins will undertake thorough reference checking prior to commencement including at least two (2) previous managers with to determine the applicants Safeguarding experience.

Training and Awareness

St Martins will ensure an appropriate level of Safeguarding training is available to its employees, volunteers, contractors, and any relevant persons linked to the organisation who requires it.

All staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties must undertake mandatory Safeguarding training as part of their induction, which includes training to understand and implement the St Martins Safeguarding Policy. Training will be refreshed every two years.

For all employees who are working or volunteering with children, young persons, or vulnerable persons, this requires as a minimum to have awareness that enables them to:

- Understand what Safeguarding is and their role in Safeguarding children, young person, or vulnerable persons.
- Be aware of the warning signs and be open to noticing them to recognise a child, young person, or vulnerable person potentially in need of Safeguarding and take action.
- Understand the organisational safeguarding protocols and procedures, know them, and use them so that they know when and how to report an incident, a potential incident or if a child, young person or vulnerable person safety or welfare is at risk.
- Provide mutual support between staff members. Work to create a safe environment for all children, young people, and vulnerable people.

Risk Management

St Martins will ensure that safety of children, young people and vulnerable people is a part of its overall risk management approach.

St Martin's Finance, Audit and Risk Board committee is committed to identifying and managing risks at St Martins. Risk and compliance committee members will receive regular training in relation to safeguarding.

High Risk situations such as one-on-one rehearsals, projects with sensitive subject matter, online activities or overnight stays will be individually assessed by the Executive and raised with the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee of the Board ahead of being undertaken. Protocols will be documented and agreed with participants and their families ahead of time.

St Martins will manage the risk of Safeguarding by:

- Having an action plan that sets out how it will manage Safeguarding.
- Having up-to-date and documented risk assessments.
- Maintaining a register of St Martins legal obligations for Safeguarding and workplace health and safety in all jurisdictions in which it operates.
- Implementing policies, procedures and systems that introduce controls to reduce the likelihood and consequence of incidents.
- Maintaining two reporting processes: the confidential reporting process, and the overt reporting process.
- Having an incident response plan.
- Undertaking audits of staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties to ensure adherence to St Martins' Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of its Safeguarding program.

Reporting

Any staff, volunteers, contractors or third parties who have grounds to suspect abusive activity must immediately notify St Martins management and where necessary appropriate authorities including the police. Reporting may be directed through:

- Any Manager or Supervisor (see https://stmartinsyouth.com.au/our-team/)
- The Executive Director (see https://stmartinsyouth.com.au/our-team/)
- The Chief Executive Officer (see https://stmartinsyouth.com.au/our-team/)
- Any director or board member (see https://stmartinsyouth.com.au/board/)
- St Martins' anonymous online reporting form at https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/eDcNy4z6FZ

In situations where the supervisor is suspected of involvement in the activity, or if the person

having the suspicion does not believe that the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with, the matter should be reported to the next highest level of supervision.

Any incidents, near misses, concerns, complaints or disclosures of abusive behaviour or misconduct must be reported to a member of the Executive Team and Board.

Parents and families will be encouraged to contact St Martins staff immediately should they believe any inappropriate activities have taken place or they suspect abuse. Information will be provided on St Martins' website with guidance to this effect.

Young people and families will be made aware of the guidelines so that young people know who to report to or raise concerns.

Investigating

All incidents or suspected incidents will be investigated by St Martins executive management and reported to the appropriate child protection service or the police.

If appropriate authorities or the police decide to investigate a reported incident, all employees, volunteers, and contractors must co-operate fully.

Whether or not the authorities decide to investigate, St Martins management will consult with the authorities to determine whether an internal investigation is appropriate. If it is decided that such an investigation will not conflict with any proceeding of the authorities, St Martins management may decide to conduct such an investigation. All employees, contractors and volunteers must co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any such investigation will be conducted in a fair and reasonable manner. St Martins executive management will make every effort to keep any such investigation confidential when possible.

After an initial review and a determination that the suspected abuse warrants additional investigation, St Martins executive management shall coordinate the investigation with the appropriate investigators and / or law enforcement officials. Internal or external legal representatives will be involved in the process, as deemed appropriate.
Any investigations and the outcomes of those investigations will be reported to St Martins' insurance broker and insurer by management staff.

Disciplinary Action

While an investigation is conducted, St Martins reserves the right to:

- Report the matter to relevant authorities including the police
- Stand the staff, volunteer, or contractor down (with pay, where applicable).

At the conclusion of any investigation and a breach of the organisation's policies or Code of Conduct is identified St Martins reserves the right to:

- Take disciplinary action against those it believes are responsible, which may include dismissal
- Dismiss or cease involvement with St Martins
- Take legal action.

Privacy and Information Sharing

St Martins expects all employees, volunteers, and contractors to maintain confidentiality.

All personal information identified or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. St Martins has policies and procedures to ensure any personal information is protected.

However, information should be shared with relevant authorities (including police) if a child, young person, or vulnerable person is deemed to be at risk of harm, in immediate danger, or a crime has been committed.

Whistleblower Protection

It is important that people within St Martins have the confidence to come forward to speak or act if they have any concerns or incidents of behaviour that contradicts any behaviour outlined in the Code of Conduct.

Refer to St Martins' Whistleblower Policy, available online

Reviewing

Every two years, and following every reportable incident, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the organisation's safeguarding policies or procedures require modification to better protect the children, young people, and vulnerable people under the organisation's

care.

Related Policies, Procedures and Documents

This policy must be read in conjunction with:

- Code of Conduct
- Whistleblower Policy

This policy is developed and revised in accordance with St Martins' enterprise risk management framework.

All current St Martins policies are available online

Resources

- Child safety and wellbeing links and resources
- Practical tools for implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- Governance Toolkit: Safeguarding vulnerable people
- Victoria Commission for Children and Young People
- Victoria Reportable Conduct Scheme
- Victoria Working with Children Check
- Whistleblower rights and protections