

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to explain how Affinity Education Group (Affinity) supports safe, respectful and positive interactions with children during everyday education and care. It outlines Affinity's approach to building warm and trusting relationships, guiding behaviour positively, and supporting respectful relationships, with a strong focus on children's safety, dignity, emotional wellbeing and best interests.

This policy and procedure supports Affinity's responsibilities under the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations, ensuring all interactions with children protect their rights, support emotional safety, and place children's wellbeing first.

2. Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all staff, students, volunteers, contractors, families and visitors across Affinity services, programs and business operations when engaging in interactions with children and families.

This policy and procedure must be read together with the following documents, which apply in specific circumstances:

- [POL3-P1 Providing a Child Safe Environment Policy and Procedure](#) – when managing risks, supervision and child-safe environments that support safe interactions;
- [POL6-P1 Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure](#) – when establishing early relationships, expectations and information-sharing with children and families; and
- [POL5-P2 Supporting Behaviours Procedure](#) - when a child requires ongoing, targeted or planned behaviour support beyond everyday responsive interactions.

3. Definitions

The following definitions support consistent understanding of the terms used in this policy and procedure.

Term	Definition
Child-safe	Practices and behaviours that protect children from harm and support their safety, wellbeing, dignity and rights.
Behaviour guidance	Positive, supportive strategies used to help children understand expectations and manage emotions without punishment or harm.
Inappropriate conduct	Behaviour that is unprofessional, crosses boundaries or may place a child at risk, even if intended to be caring.
Prohibited discipline practices	Discipline practices that are harmful, unsafe or unreasonable and must never be used, including physical, emotional, verbal, isolation or withholding practices.
Professional boundaries	Clear limits that ensure relationships between adults and children remain respectful, appropriate and child-safe.
Disclosure	Information shared by a child or another person about a concern, incident or unsafe interaction.

4. Guiding principles

At Affinity, we believe that child safety is everyone's responsibility. We are committed to upholding the safety, rights and wellbeing of all children and promote a culture of child safety with a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm.

Affinity ensures the Paramountcy Principle is applied in all aspects of our work. All decisions and actions related to the operation and delivery of education and care services must prioritise children's safety, rights and best interests above all other considerations.

The following principles guide how Affinity approaches safe, respectful and positive interactions with children across all services:

- **Children's safety and wellbeing come first** – Every interaction with a child must protect their physical and emotional safety, wellbeing and best interests. Educators act in ways that help children feel safe, supported and secure at all times.
- **Respectful and responsive relationships** – Educators build warm, trusting and consistent relationships with children. By responding calmly and attentively to children's cues, educators support children to feel valued, understood and respected.
- **Children as active participants** – Children are active participants in relationships and everyday experiences. Educators listen to and respond to children's verbal and non-verbal communication, and support children to express their views, preferences and concerns in meaningful, age-appropriate ways.
- **Upholding dignity, rights and individuality** – Interactions treat every child with fairness, respect and dignity. Educators recognise and respect each child's identity, culture, background and abilities, and promote inclusive and culturally safe practice.
- **Emotional safety and positive guidance** – Educators support children's emotional wellbeing through calm, respectful and positive guidance. Children are supported to understand and express emotions, develop self-regulation skills and interact safely with others.
- **Professional and child-safe practice** – All interactions with children are professional, appropriate and child-safe. Educators maintain clear professional boundaries, model respectful behaviour, and take action if a child's safety, dignity or wellbeing may be at risk.

These principles underpin all actions described in this policy and procedure and guide professional judgement when decisions are required.

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Primary caregiving and relationship-based practice

This policy and procedure is informed by a primary caregiving and relationship-based approach, which guides how the guiding principles are applied in everyday practice. This approach recognises the importance of stable, consistent relationships in supporting children's emotional safety, wellbeing and development.

Through warm, predictable and responsive relationships, Educators build trust with children and families, understand each child's cues and communication styles, and support routines, transitions and emotional regulation. These relationships provide a secure base from which children can explore, learn and engage with confidence.

Positive interaction practices

This policy and procedure is also informed by positive interaction practices, which emphasise children's agency, dignity, cultural identity and emotional safety. Educators use respectful, encouraging and strengths-based language, listen actively to children, and respond sensitively to individual needs and contexts.

In practice, Educators adapt interactions to support inclusion, participation and positive relationships, helping children feel safe, valued and connected within the education and care environment.

5. Procedures

These procedures describe the requirements that support safe, consistent and child-safe practice when interacting with children. They explain what must occur and who is responsible. Detailed steps are maintained in ProMapp.

5.1. Supporting Safe and Respectful Interactions

Ensure all children experience interactions that are safe, kind and respectful at all times.

Educators interact with children calmly and positively throughout the day, including during play, routines and transitions. Educators pay attention to what children say and do, including behaviour and emotions, and respond in ways that help children feel safe, valued and supported. Children should feel comfortable expressing their needs, feelings or concerns.

Educators provide reassurance and comfort when children are distressed and adjust interactions, routines or environments where needed. These practices align with [Promapp process 3.6.08 – Establish Relationships with Children](#).

Key expectations

Key expectations describe the standard that must be met and what good practice looks like in everyday work:

- interactions with children are calm, kind and respectful;
- children's verbal, non-verbal and emotional cues are responded to promptly;
- communication is age-appropriate, respectful and fair; and
- emotional distress is not ignored, dismissed or responded to with punishment.

Key actions

The key actions below outline the practical steps that must be followed:

- Educators must:
 - engage with children at their level using a calm tone and positive body language;
 - respond sensitively to children's emotions, behaviour and needs;
 - provide comfort and reassurance when children are distressed; and
 - adjust their approach to help children feel safe and settled.

Escalation and support

When educators are unsure how to respond, or a child's distress is ongoing or escalating, guidance must be sought from the **Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor**. When an Educator needs extra help or coaching to improve interaction practices, this is supported in line with [ProMapp process 3.6.22 Support Educators' Response to Behaviour Guidance](#).

When more targeted support is required, this must be managed in line with the [POL5-P2 Supporting Behaviours Procedure](#).

5.2. Supporting children's voice agency and participation

Ensure children's voice, agency and participation are respected in everyday interactions.

Educators listen to children and respond respectfully to their ideas, feelings and preferences. Children are supported to make age-appropriate choices and participate in decisions that affect them. Interactions are adapted to reflect each child's age, development, communication style, background and abilities.

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These practices support inclusive, child-centred practice and align with the [POL QA5 Relationships with Children Policy](#) and [POL1-P1 Pedagogy and Practice Procedure](#).

Key expectations

Key expectations describe the standard that must be met and what good practice looks like in everyday work:

- children are encouraged to express ideas, feelings and preferences;
- educators respond respectfully to verbal and non-verbal communication;
- children participate in age-appropriate decision-making; and
- interactions promote inclusion, fairness and respect for each child's rights and identity.

Key actions

The key actions below outline the practical steps that must be followed:

- Educators must:
 - engage children in conversations that value their views;
 - offer meaningful choices suitable to age and development;
 - support expression through play, behaviour or communication aids; and
 - adapt interactions for children with diverse needs.

Escalation and support

When educators are unsure how to support a child's voice, participation or inclusion in a respectful and developmentally appropriate way, the matter must be discussed with the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor.

When concerns about a child's participation, voice or disclosures raise safety or wellbeing concerns, this must be managed in line with the [POL2-P5 Child Safety and Protection Procedure](#).

5.3. Maintaining professional, child-safe interactions

Ensure interactions with children are professional, appropriate, child-safe and free from inappropriate or prohibited practices.

Educators must maintain clear professional boundaries and interact with children in ways that protect their safety, dignity and wellbeing at all times. Educators must be alert to behaviour that may be inappropriate, concerning or could reasonably be misunderstood, even if well-intended, and take action when concerns arise.

Inappropriate conduct

The following table provides examples to support understanding of what may be considered inappropriate conduct. These examples are not exhaustive and are provided to help educators identify behaviour that may cross professional boundaries.

Type of conduct	What this may include	Why this is not appropriate
Physical contact what crosses professional boundaries	• kissing a child (Eg, forehead, cheek, hand, or else any other part of a child) • holding or hugging a child for longer than needed • encouraging a child to sit on an educator's lap when not required for comfort or safety	Blurs professional boundaries and may cause discomfort or be misunderstood
Favouritism or special treatment	• giving one child extra attention, privileges or gifts • allowing a child to break rules others must follow • referring to a child as a "favourite"	Creates unfairness, power imbalance and increased risk
Secrecy or lack of transparency	• asking a child to keep secrets from educators or families • spending time alone with a child in hidden or private spaces without a clear reason	Child-safe practice requires openness and visibility
Boundary-crossing language or behaviour	• sharing personal adult problems with a child • using overly intimate or emotional language • treating a child like a peer or emotional support	Blurs adult-child roles and places responsibility on the child
Ignoring or minimising discomfort	• continuing contact when a child pulls away or says no • dismissing signs of discomfort or distress	Children have the right to feel safe and be listened to
Conduct that could be misunderstood	• behaviour that may appear inappropriate to families or others, even if intended as caring	Professional practice must be safe, respectful and clearly appropriate

Appropriate interactions are brief, necessary, child-led, visible to others, and focused on safety, care or comfort.

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Prohibited discipline practices

The following table provides examples to support understanding of prohibited discipline practices. These practices must never be used by educators, students or volunteers, regardless of a child's behaviour.

Type of prohibited practice	What this may include	Why this is prohibited
Physical discipline	• hitting, pushing, slapping, pinching, shaking or biting a child • any form of physical punishment or rough handling • dragging a child • unreasonable restraint, including the use of furniture or equipment (unless required to prevent immediate harm)	Causes physical harm or fear and breaches children's right to safety
Emotional or verbal discipline	• yelling, shaming, belittling or humiliating a child • threatening, intimidating or frightening language • criticising, blaming or negatively labelling a child or their family • sarcasm, ridicule or mocking behaviour • excessive negative commands as the main guidance strategy	Causes emotional harm and undermines dignity and wellbeing
Isolation or exclusion	• isolating or separating a child as punishment • confining or locking a child in any space • repeatedly removing a child to another room or office as a consequence • excluding a child from activities, experiences or events as punishment	Increases distress and does not support learning or emotional safety
Withholding basic needs or care	• withholding food, drink or rest • withholding comfort, affection or reassurance • delaying or denying basic care needs	Breaches children's rights to care, safety and wellbeing

Behaviour guidance must always be positive, strengths-based and developmentally appropriate, and focused on supporting children to feel safe, understood and supported.

Key expectations

Key expectations describe the standard that must be met and what good practice looks like in everyday work:

- interactions with children are professional, respectful and appropriate at all times;
- inappropriate conduct and prohibited discipline practices are never used;
- professional boundaries are maintained in all interactions with children; and
- concerns about interactions that may place a child's safety, dignity or wellbeing at risk are acted on immediately.

Key actions

Key actions describe the high-level activities that must be undertaken to meet these expectations.

- Educators must:
 - interact with children in ways that are respectful, appropriate and transparent;
 - maintain clear professional boundaries during play, routines, care moments and conversations;
 - intervene immediately if inappropriate or prohibited practices are observed or suspected; and
 - seek guidance if unsure whether an interaction is appropriate.

When making decisions about interactions, educators must consider:

- whether the interaction is necessary and child-focused;
- how the interaction may be experienced by the child; and
- how the interaction may be perceived by families or others.

Escalation and support

When an Educator is unsure about the appropriateness of an interaction, or becomes aware of behaviour that may be inappropriate or concerning, the matter must be discussed **immediately** with the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor.

When concerns relate to a potential risk to a child's safety, dignity or wellbeing, the matter must be managed in line with **Sections 5.4 and 5.5** and the [POL2-P5 Child Safety and Protection Procedure](#).

Support, guidance and coaching are provided to Educators to strengthen professional practice and maintain child-safe interactions.

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5.4. Responding to concerns, incidents or disclosures

Ensure concerns, incidents or disclosures relating to children's safety, wellbeing or interactions are responded to promptly and in a child-safe way.

All concerns, incidents and disclosures must be taken seriously. Educators respond calmly and respectfully, prioritising the immediate safety and wellbeing of the child. Responses must be supportive and appropriate to the child's age, development and circumstances.

Key expectations

Key expectations describe the standard that must be met and what good practice looks like in everyday work:

- concerns, incidents and disclosures are listened to and taken seriously;
- children are responded to in a calm, respectful and supportive manner;
- immediate action is taken where a child's safety or wellbeing may be at risk; and
- concerns are escalated without delay.

Key actions

Key actions describe the high-level activities that must be undertaken to meet these expectations.

- Educators must:
 - remain calm and supportive when a concern or disclosure arises;
 - listen to the child without judgement, pressure or leading questions;
 - reassure the child that they have been heard and supported;
 - not promise confidentiality; and
 - report the concern immediately to the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor.

Educators must not investigate, question further or ask a child to repeat information unnecessarily.

Escalation and support

When concerns involve potential harm, inappropriate conduct or increased risk, the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor must be notified immediately and is responsible for ensuring appropriate next steps are taken.

Support and guidance are provided to educators throughout the response process to ensure children's safety, dignity and wellbeing are protected.

5.5. Recording, reporting and escalation

Ensure concerns, incidents and disclosures are accurately recorded, reported and escalated in line with Affinity and regulatory requirements.

Timely and accurate recording and reporting supports transparency, accountability and child-safe decision-making. Records must be factual, objective and handled confidentially at all times.

Key expectations

Key expectations describe the standard that must be met and what good practice looks like in everyday work:

- concerns, incidents and disclosures are documented accurately and promptly;
- reporting meets Affinity, mandatory and regulatory requirements;
- records are handled confidentially and professionally; and
- escalation occurs where required to protect children and meet obligations.

Key actions

Key actions describe the high level activities that must be undertaken to meet these expectations.

- Educators must:
 - report concerns, incidents or disclosures to the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor as soon as practicable; and
 - provide clear, factual information about what was observed, disclosed or reported.
- Centre Managers / Nominated Supervisors must:
 - ensure concerns or incidents are recorded in the Compliance, Risk and Safety Portal (ServiceNow) as soon as possible;
 - manage reporting in line with [ProMapp process 3.3.12 – Report Incidents by Centre](#);
 - determine whether reportable conduct obligations apply and act in line with [ProMapp process 8.6.16 – Comply with Reportable Conduct Scheme \(VIC / NSW / ACT / WA\)](#); and
 - seek guidance and support from the Incident Support Team where required.

Escalation and support

When serious risk, alleged harm or reportable conduct is identified, escalation must occur immediately in line with Affinity processes and regulatory requirements.

The child's safety and wellbeing must remain the priority at all times.

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6. Role and responsibilities summary

The following table provides a summary of role responsibilities that align with the Promapp processes and procedural activities referenced in this procedure.

Role	Responsibilities
Approved Provider	• Ensure policies and procedures for interactions with children are in place, current and accessible. • Ensure systems, training and resources support child-safe and respectful interactions. • Take reasonable steps to ensure policies and procedures are implemented and followed. • Ensure compliance with the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations.
Centre Manager / Nominated Supervisor	• Lead and model safe, respectful and child-safe interaction practices. • Support and guide educators in implementing this policy and procedures. • Respond promptly to concerns, incidents or disclosures relating to interactions with children. • Ensure concerns and incidents are recorded, reported and escalated in line with Affinity and regulatory requirements. • Provide supervision, coaching and support to strengthen interaction practice.
Educators	• Interact with children in safe, respectful, professional and child-centred ways at all times. • Support children's wellbeing, voice, agency and participation in everyday interactions. • Maintain clear professional boundaries and avoid inappropriate or prohibited practices. • Respond appropriately to concerns, incidents or disclosures and report them promptly. • Follow all procedures and seek guidance when unsure.
Students and Volunteers	• Follow this policy and procedure under the direction and supervision of educators and leaders. • Interact with children in respectful, appropriate and child-safe ways. • Maintain professional boundaries with children. • Raise concerns immediately with an educator or Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor.
Families and Visitors	• Treat children with respect and support safe, positive interactions when on site. • Follow service expectations, instructions and child-safe requirements. • Raise concerns about interactions with the Centre Manager/Nominated Supervisor where appropriate.
Incident Support Team / Relevant Central Support Roles	• Provide advice and guidance on managing concerns, incidents and reportable conduct. • Support compliance with reporting, escalation and regulatory obligations. • Assist services to respond appropriately while prioritising child safety and wellbeing.

7. Related legislation and internal documents

The following legislation, regulations and internal documents inform and support this procedure, ensuring compliance with legal requirements and consistent implementation across Affinity services.

Legislation	Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 Education and Care Services National Regulations WA 2012 Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
Policy/ procedures, process	POL QA5 Relationships with Children Policy POL1-P1 Pedagogy and Practice Procedure POL2-P5 Child Safety and Protection Procedure POL3-P1 Providing a Child Safe Environment Policy and Procedure POL5-P2 Supporting Behaviours Procedure POL6-P1 Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure	ProMapp process 3.3.12 – Report Incidents by Centre Promapp process 3.6.08 – Establish Relationships with Children ProMapp process 3.6.22 Support Educators' Response to Behaviour Guidance ProMapp process 8.6.16 – Comply with Reportable Conduct Scheme (VIC / NSW / ACT / WA)
Forms		
Educational artifacts		

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8. Version history

Version Control	Date	Author	Description of Change
1	Oct 2013	AEG	Update ECSNR
1.2	Jan 2015	AEG	Update
V4.16	Apr 2016	AEG	Revision, merge
V7.17	July 2017	AEG	Revision
V2.18	Feb 2018	AEG	NQS update
V2.19	Feb 2019	AEG	Scheduled review
V2.20	Feb 2020	AEG	Scheduled review
V3.21	Mar 2021	AEG	Scheduled review
V3.22	Mar 2022	AEG	Scheduled review
V7.23	July 2023	AEG	Added reference to child safe standards
V12.23	Dec 2023	AEG	Added RACI table and reference
V5.24	May 2024	AEG	Changed policy name to align with Regulation language. Listed and gave examples for Reg 155. Added more examples to inappropriate discipline types
V11.24	Nov 2024	AEG	Added reporting obligations, ACECQA link, Child Safe Standard links
V6.1	Nov 2025	AEG	Scheduled review
V13	May 2026	AEG	Scheduled review Update to content to align with ACECQA guidance – removal of content related to orientation (moved to Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure) Update to refreshed policy/procedure structure.
V13.1	May 2026	AEG	Additional clarification added to the Inappropriate Conduct table.

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