

MRLC

Working with Young or Vulnerable People

MOUNT ROLAND LAND CARE INC encourages the participation of young people (people under 18 years of age) in its activities, and upholds their need to feel and be safe. Young people involved in or present during MRLC activities should, as for any participant, be acknowledged and listened to, especially on matters that directly affect them and regardless of any physical, cultural or social differences. The same is equally true for people of any age who might, for whatever reason, be considered vulnerable.

The **PURPOSE** of this policy is to draw attention to the need for all members to actively support the creation of safe environments for young or vulnerable people.

CONTEXT: MRLC recognises that there are key risks relating to the safety of young or vulnerable people, namely physical and sexual abuse, grooming, inappropriate physical or verbal contact (whether child-to-child, adult-to-child or adult-to-adult), and the circulation of sexually explicit material. Abuse of a child or vulnerable person is a crime and all situations of concern should be reported appropriately.

EXPECTATIONS:

DO

- support open, safe, and respectful physical and online environments for young or vulnerable people participating in or present during MRLC activities;
- involve young or vulnerable people in decisions that affect them;
- identify and take all reasonable steps to protect young or vulnerable people from harm or abuse, including immediately reporting any safety concerns (see below);
- have a current Registration to Work with Vulnerable People if required to do so (ie, if you have or may have more than incidental contact with non-family members under 18 years of age or with people over that age who would be considered vulnerable or dependent); MRLC will reimburse the cost of registration for individual members;
- recognise young or vulnerable people as individuals with diverse and changeable needs, abilities, and outlooks, regardless of their cultural and physical backgrounds;
- act transparently and keep members openly informed of all MRLC activities; and
- ensure young people not accompanied by family members work with either more than one adult or with children of a similar age (unless visibly part of a larger group);

DON'T

- ignore or disregard any concerns, suspicions or disclosures of abuse or harm;
- initiate or encourage unnecessary physical contact;

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DON'T (continued)

- ignore foreseeable risks associated with activities involving young or vulnerable people (including inappropriate circulation of images of young people);
- use language or behaviour that is demeaning or abusive;
- develop a 'special' relationship with a young or vulnerable person that could be perceived as grooming (including the exchange of personal contact details);

WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED: any disclosure or allegation from a child or adult relating to actual or potential abuse or exploitation of a young or vulnerable person.

WHO SHOULD REPORT: anyone with relevant information.

WHO TO REPORT TO:

- a member of the MRLC's executive committee and/or
- the Tasmanian Government's *Strong Families Safe Kids* advice and referral line, **1800 000 123** (or online, <https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/>),
- the *National Disability, Abuse and Neglect Hotline*, **1800 880 052**, and/or
- the police, 131 444.

MRLC is committed to treating all concerns seriously and fairly, and to handling reports confidentially and expediently. Any initial response by MRLC's executive with the aim of clarifying a suspected situation will be carried out sensitively and with advice, as required, from *Strong Families Safe Kids*, the *National Disability, Abuse and Neglect Hotline*, and/or the police.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE BY A CHILD: If a young or vulnerable person discloses abuse, in whatever form, they must be taken seriously. Listen carefully, remain calm and reassure the person that something will be done to keep them safe.

You will not be helping the young or vulnerable person if you:

- make promises you cannot keep, such as promising that you will not tell anyone;
- push the person into giving details of the abuse – your role is to listen, not to conduct an investigation, and leading questions should be avoided as they may prejudice any subsequent investigation;
- imply disbelief, such as by repeating the same questions;
- indiscriminately or unnecessarily discuss the circumstances of the person with others.

OTHER ACTIONS TO TAKE:

Protect the young or vulnerable person from further potential abuse or victimisation. The person may require medical assistance or counselling support. If there is a possibility of immediate danger you should make arrangements for the person to go to a safe place.

Distance the alleged perpetrator – the best interests of the young or vulnerable person may

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warrant the removal of a member or volunteer from some or all levels of participation.

Confidentiality – information should only be released on a “need to know” basis or when required for reports to police or child protection authorities.

Review – improvements to MRLC’s internal operations may need to be made to ensure improved levels of safety.

GENERAL CONDUCT: MRLC embraces standards of behaviour that ask members to:

- be responsible for establishing and maintaining clear relational boundaries that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings and from the development of situations not conducive to ongoing safety – members should not place themselves in positions where there is a risk of serious allegations being made;
- reject behaviours intended to shame, humiliate, belittle, harass, degrade or exploit another being.

AGREEMENT: This Policy has been adopted by the MRLC governing committee and affects all members. A review following each AGM is to ensure all committee members have read and understood the Policy in its current or revised form. All members are expected to familiarise themselves with any changes. Each MRLC member should realise that a serious breach of this Policy will likely involve relevant authorities and that their role is to support that involvement. The governing committee has resolved that disregard for the content of this Policy, by any MRLC member, is a sufficient basis for a warning or suspension of membership. The Policy is to be made available to all members and an indication that it has been read and agreed to is required for membership.

LAST DATE OF AGREEMENT: December 5th, 2022.