

Soka Gakkai International Australia Child Safe Policy

"The welfare of people must always be the starting point and final goal of every human endeavour. As such, it is unacceptable for religion, government or any ideological system to treat people as a means to an end." - Daisaku Ikeda

This document must be read with the Appendix and Attachments taken into consideration in order to gain a full understanding of the obligations you and Soka Gakkai have in caring for children. For access to the attachments please email admin@sgiaust.org.au

1.0 Commitment

Soka Gakkai International Australia (**SGIA**) recognises the significance of human rights both as a foundation for our organisational goals and activities and also as a legal responsibility. We recognise the responsibility to the children who are involved in our activities as a matter of unquestionable seriousness and reflect this in the SGIA Child Safe Policy. We understand this to be a consistently 'working' document, reviewed and modified on a regular basis and as needed. The rights of the child are of paramount importance both to our organisation and the humanity's future. SGIA is fully committed to preventing any accident or abuse that may befall a child within its activities and locations.

SGIA is committed to:

- Respecting the dignity and rights of all children
- The prevention of all possibilities of child abuse or accidents within its ability
- Fulfilling all our social, legal and moral responsibilities regarding child safety, abuse or neglect
- Ensuring a safe environment for children in all the activities of SGIA
- Providing appropriate professional access, support, non-judgemental engagement and guidance for any child victimised by abuse or neglect
- Informing all leaders, members and parents of the significance of child safety practices
- Ensuring appropriate checks, training and attitudes of those leaders with children in their care
- Ensuring inclusion of children from indigenous, culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities

1.1 SGIA Child Activity Description

The activities involving children or teenagers in SGIA can broadly be defined as uniform with some minor differences nationally. Our organisation has active members in all states, the ACT, Christmas Island and the Northern Territory. Children's and teenager's activities are held in Queensland, NSW, ACT, Victoria, South Australia and West Australia.

Predominantly activities are provided for the children and teenagers during our monthly meetings held at 10am in each State and NT on one Sunday each month although some states hold the children's meeting on a different day. These include religious prayers, games and reading.

The organisation provides two groups for these activities where the age groups require it. High School Group and Future Group (Ages from infants to year 6 primary students). These monthly activities are run by volunteers, usually young adults for the High School Group and more mature people for the Future Group.

Parents and guardians are welcome to attend though usually they are attending the monthly Buddhist meeting while the children are having their own activities. Any other activities are usually picnic or party style activities in which the children's parents or guardians are in attendance.

Numbers for each state vary from a handful to occasionally 20 or more children involved across the two groups. There is no cost and the children usually arrive and depart with their parents or guardians.

2.0 Standards of Behaviour and Practices for Child Safety in SGI Australia

Child safety is a priority within the leadership, staff and membership of SGIA. In accord with the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin and the guidances of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, the SGIA commits to protecting children in every aspect and further commits to constantly reviewing and updating our Child Safe Policy in accord with and where possible surpassing the relevant government standards across Australia.

2.1 Application of Policy

This Policy applies to all staff (including employees and independent contractors) and all volunteers involved in SGIA activities involving children.

2.2 Standards

All adults have responsibility to care for children, promote their welfare and protect them from any kind of abuse or neglect. Those volunteers and staff afforded the responsibility of caring for or conducting activities for children within

our SGIA activities must be people of the utmost character and commitment to child safety and well being. SGIA considers the appointment of these persons a matter of great importance and seriousness. The process of appointment must be made in accord with SGIA practices and in addition training and a Working with Children Check (or equivalent check required by local legislation) (**WWC Check**) must be undertaken prior to their assuming the responsibility.

The behaviour of those appointed to the responsibility of care and activities for children in SGIA must reflect the best practices of Buddhist humanism and be appropriate as examples to the children in their care. Neglect, inappropriate behaviour, manipulation, intolerance or abuse of any kind, and health and safety issues will be promptly investigated and may result in SGIA terminating its relationship with a person or removing the person appointed from their position or from the organisation. Further action may also be taken, including action by the relevant authorities.

Diligence must be observed in relation to any signs that the child may be in distress, show aspects of abuse or neglect in any way in accordance with the standards set out in this document and its attachments. Such signs must be reported or acted on appropriately. If you are unsure how to respond, you must seek advice and guidance from a senior leader as to the appropriate response. Failure to do so is a dereliction of the duty of care for the child and a breach of your obligations to SGIA.

While the duty of care is paramount, those responsible for children must avoid imparting fear or tension on the children unnecessarily. An atmosphere of safety, security and good humour must always be the aim of the activities.

SGIA commits to sharing information with parents, guardians, members and leaders regarding education in the need for awareness and action in response to the abuse or neglect of children.

When no volunteers are available the High School Group (**HSG**) and Future Group (**FG**) who have a current WWC Check, activities are to be either postponed until volunteers with a current WWC Check are available, or cancelled.

SGIA volunteers and staff are not child minders – we do not compare our practices with other countries but tailor our policies and activities to the needs and legal requirements of Australia and our resources. Our HSG and FG activities are for the benefit of the children in acquiring the attitudes and education of Buddhist Humanism in an environment of support and friendship.

This policy aims to avoid over-protectiveness or perception of over-protectiveness by the SGIA and emphasise concerns for the well being of the individual as the priority.

The inclusion of secular parties and organisations is paramount in order to ensure support of any victim of abuse or neglect and to ensure compliance with our legal obligations. In addition, SGIA will provide, when welcome, the support of the SGIA leaders and members.

2.3 Failure to disclose offence and failure to protect offence

In Victoria, it is a criminal offence to fail to disclose a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child (see: Attachment 1- Failure to Disclose).

In addition to such obligations, SGIA requires all people covered by this Policy to report any reasonable belief that child abuse or neglect has occurred. SGIA may terminate its relationship with or remove from their position and from the organisation any person found to be negligent in reporting abuse or neglect of any child involved in SGIA activities.

It is the policy of SGIA that any person to whom this Policy applies who becomes aware of an incident where child abuse or neglect has not been reported must report the abuse or neglect in accordance with the reporting procedure set out at section 6 below at the earliest possible time without consideration for the person who failed to report the incident.

In Victoria, a criminal offence may be committed where a person fails to protect a child from sexual abuse (see: Attachment 2- Failure to Protect).

In addition to any action taken by the relevant authorities, action may be taken by SGIA against a person to whom this Policy applies, including termination of its relationship with a person or removing them from their position and from the organisation, in relation to any failure to carry out inspections and other preventative matters associated with this Child Safe Policy where it is reasonable to believe that that child abuse or neglect may be occurring.

2.4 Code of conduct breaches

All people to whom this Policy applies must sign the SGIA Child Safe Code of Conduct.

Failure to comply with the SGIA Child Safe Code of Conduct may lead to SGIA terminating its relationship with the person or removing them from their position and from the SGIA and/or reporting to the relevant authorities.

(Attachment 3- SGIA Child Safe Code of Conduct)

2.5 Practices

As set out at section 6 of this Policy, HSG leaders and FG leaders, and any other person to whom this Policy applies must report to a senior leader any information disclosed to them that suggests that a child has been abused physically or sexually or has been neglected.

Any senior leader, having received such information, must notify the relevant authorities or seek advice from those authorities as to what action should be taken.

These disclosures include a child sharing their own circumstances or fears, the parent guardian relative or friend sharing information regarding abuse or neglect, your own observations or any physical signs. If the response of the senior leader is not sufficiently appropriate to the seriousness of the issue in your opinion you may contact the relevant authorities directly with your concerns.

FG and HSG leaders and any other person to whom this Policy applies must report any interactions they have been involved with, including speech, that may have caused concern or misunderstanding that the interaction was of a sort potentially covered by this Policy.

Privacy is paramount, so only those to whom the disclosure has been made and the persons involved in seeking support from authorities or others should be informed.

The person about whom any allegation of wrongdoing is made may also be informed of that allegation and permitted to respond at an appropriate time as determined by senior leaders and/or the relevant authorities. No discussion regarding the abuse or neglect reports outside of these persons should be engaged with.

3.0 Reported or Suspected Abuse or Neglect

3.1 How to respond to reported abuse or neglect

Any disclosure of abuse or neglect must be treated openly but neutrally: disclosures are not be doubted or denied, but also should not be endorsed or confirmed without proper investigation.

It is difficult for a victim of abuse or neglect to share their experience. Therefore your initial response is of great importance. Do not show fear or negative emotions, stay as reassuring and confident as possible while remaining neutral about the accuracy of the allegations made. Do not ask confronting questions. If you receive such disclosure you should behave in the following manner:

- Ask if you can include someone else they trust in this dialogue
- If you need to find someone to assist do NOT leave the child alone, take them with you or have them choose someone else THEY trust to stay with them while you find someone to share this disclosure with (this is for the sake of the child and yourself)
- Listen without judgement or intervention
- Express and reinforce that their experience is not their fault
- Let them know them that procedures are in place and will be followed to investigate and respond to their situation, share the procedures with them if necessary
- Do not at this initial stage probe more deeply than the child voluntarily discloses; no direct questions or requests for more details
- Try to make the child feel safe; using a calm voice in responding to their needs, do not encroach physically in any way on their person.
- Do not frighten the child or heighten their anxiety; ensure they know that you are not doubting them (while remaining neutral about any allegations made), do not panic, do not express anger, do not make harsh physical movement, do not touch the child, make no demands, do not interrogate, allow pauses in the dialogue for them to gather or reflect on their thoughts and language, make suggestions calmly regarding sharing the information as per SGIA procedure
- Younger children (pre school) need your understanding in that:
 - they sometimes have limited language to convey their feelings and situation
 - may need extended time to respond or explain an answer to your questions
 - may be unaware that their interpretation of their experience is not the same as the way they have a right to be treated
 - cannot comprehend things in a adult like manner
- School age children need your understanding in that:
 - they may have difficulty with abstract ideas or complex questions
 - may not understand adult language
- When possible write down the child's report after the encounter (not during) in order to have a clear record of what was said using Attachment 4- Child Safe Report Form
- Follow the reporting practices at section 6 of this Policy as soon as practicable

3.2 How to respond to suspected abuse or neglect

In the circumstance when through your own observation or information you suspect abuse or neglect, the following is suggested in response.

- Record your concerns and where appropriate your observations and conversations using Attachment 4- SGIA Child Safe Report Form
- Regarding abuse or neglect, include any physical/emotional signs alerted you to the suspect abuse or neglect in the Child Safe Report Form
- Follow the reporting practices in section 6 of this Policy as soon as practicable
- In the case of abuse or neglect offer them your availability to listen should they wish to talk to someone
- If abuse is suspected, do not frighten the child or heighten their anxiety; ensure they know that you are not doubting them (while remaining neutral about any allegations made), do not panic, do not express anger, do not make harsh physical movement, do not touch the child, make no demands, do not interrogate, make suggestions calmly regarding sharing the information as per SGIA procedure

4.0 FG and HSG Appointment and Activities

Appointments of the HSG leaders and FG leaders must follow the same policy as the appointment of all other leaders in SGIA with the addition of:

- specific training in child safety and child safety best practices
- WWC Checks
- familiarisation with this SGIA Child Safe policy

Proposals for appointments to HSG and FG leadership are to be made at the highest level of leadership within the given State. The final decision in appointing those leaders is given by the Nationwide Executive leadership.

All activities conducted by the SGIA for HSG and FG must have in attendance two appropriately trained and appointed leaders. When such leaders are not available the activity must be postponed or cancelled until Leaders are available.

HSG and FG participants must not be left alone or allowed to wander away from the designated area for the activity without supervision and/or permission. A HSG or FG participant must never be left alone with only one adult while involved with the SGIA activity.

At regular intervals (not less than three monthly), leaders must inquire with the children in their care as to whether they are comfortable within the activities, whether they feel safe and are experiencing a sense of wellbeing during the activities. Leaders will liaise with each other to ensure that such inquiries are being made at the relevant intervals.

4.1 The HSG and FG leadership must follow this protocol when visiting the HSG and FG participants:

- They must have the permission of the parent or guardian before contacting the FG or HSG member by phone, text, facebook, instagram or any other medium
- They must meet at a place agreed to by the parent or guardian
- There must be two HSG or FG leaders present at any visit
- The parent or guardian must have free access during the visit
- Appropriate behaviour of respect and maturity must be observed if contacting the FG or HSG members by any medium after the parent or guardian gives permission for such contact
- FG and HSG leaders must refrain from overzealous or too frequent contact with the HSG or FG members
- Any photography or video recording must have the signed permission of the parent or guardian prior to using the photography or video in the SGIA publications; use Attachment 5- SGIA Image Use Permission Form
- Phones should not be used except for essential communication during the FG and HSG meetings to ensure a safe and private environment for children

4.2 Training

Training sessions on child safety will be conducted with a senior leader for all current and future HSG and FG leaders. (Also see: Attachment 6- Responding to Children)

In addition all HSG leaders and FG must undertake the Bravehearts training program (SGIA will cover the cost of such training).

5.0 Risk assessment method

SGIA requires the checking and reporting of potential areas of risk in our centres and activities using the following procedure:

- Monthly inspection and review of the centre furnishings, building sites, activities held during that month and any reports of incidents during that month (or, if serious, as soon as the report is communicated). This inspection will be undertaken by the leaders on duty for the monthly Commemorative meeting or HSG/FG meetings and if any risk is identified that risk will be sent in written form to the State leadership team for addressing in a timely fashion.
- Leaders must follow risk management strategies and conduct checks prior to activities conducted for children (See: Attachment 7- SGIA Child Safe Risk Management Strategies).

5.1 Risk mitigation (see: Attachment 8- SGIA Child Safe Risk Assessment SGIA)

SGIA has identified areas that present possible risks to children in various ways. The following are policies that are to be implemented and monitored as an ongoing process of mitigating risk, determining better ways to address such risks and ensure that training is provided to appropriate persons.

- Awareness of physical dangers, checking and removing/modifying:
 - Sharp furnishings, unstable chairs or tables, secure or remove sharp objects in the room
 - Doors to unsafe areas secured
 - Doors open for access of parents and other responsible persons
 - Knowledge of fire danger response
- Awareness of abuse/neglect:
 - Monitoring of children's behaviours and interactions
 - Children not left alone with only one adult
 - Confirm training for appropriate leaders in correct identification and response to apparent and suspected abuse or neglect (see sections 2.1/2.2 of this Policy)
 - Escalate concerns to senior leaders as soon as practicable

6.0 SGIA response to injury or reported or suspected abuse or neglect

6.1 Responding to injuries

In the case of injury where the responsible leader does not have the ability to assess the seriousness of the injury or are uncertain about how much damage might have been done they need to contact either a delegated first aid person or a person they know to have first aid training or in the event no such person is in the vicinity contact the parent/guardian for advice or the ambulance service depending on the severity.

6.2 Responding to reported or suspected abuse or neglect

If a child is identified as having possibly experienced, or being at risk of, abuse or neglect in any form (see sections 3.1 & 3.2 of this Policy), then the person who identifies this issue should escalate the issue to a senior leader.

The senior leader will, where appropriate, contact child services or the police and report the matter and follow the instruction of those services. In very urgent situations, it may be appropriate for the person who first identifies the issue to themselves contact child services or the police.

The SGIA leaders must offer support for the child and those affected in accordance with this Policy and the advice and instruction of the professional services empowered to deal with such matters.

6.3 Internal procedure for reporting reported or suspected abuse or neglect

The following procedure covers the internal reporting requirements of SGIA and should be followed together with the steps set out at 6.2 above.

- A report must be made in the first instance to a senior leader, except where the urgency of the situation does not allow this
- Where there is a time gap between the observation of the issue and being able to report to the senior leader, an account of the issue and concerns should be prepared using Attachment 4- SGIA Child Safe Report Form
- Then pursue the conversation at the earliest possible time with the senior leader
- The senior leader must make a record of the report and send it in email form to the General Director of SGIA as well as discussing the necessary response in accord with the seriousness of the behaviour with the General Director at the earliest possible opportunity

6.4 SGIA policy regarding protecting abuse or neglect victims

SGIA shall cooperate with each authority at a federal or state level that has jurisdiction for child safety. The primary responsibility of SGIA and its appointed responsible person, without regard for the organisation's protection, must be the protection of the child in any abuse or neglect matters. As referred to at section 8 of this Policy, SGIA will also ensure that it acts in a manner which is fair to its staff and volunteers.

Working in cooperation with the victim and the authorities SGIA must, within the boundaries of its capabilities, provide whatever services or support deemed necessary and fair in regards the particular event or incident.

6.5 Training of child safe standards

SGIA commits to training the following standards at the leadership levels and as part of the raising of its response to any incidents of child abuse or neglect generally within the membership:

1. An open and aware culture
2. Understanding child abuse and neglect
3. Managing risk to minimise abuse and neglect
4. Child protection policies and procedures
5. Clear boundaries
6. Recruitment and selection

7. Screening of leaders
8. Support and supervision
9. Empowering children and young people
10. Training and education
11. Complaints and disclosures
12. Legal responsibilities¹

7. 0 Trauma Indicators

SGIA applies the following standards in training those charged with care for children within our activities (See: Attachment 9- Speak Up Booklet):

Age Group	Indicators
0-12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased tension, irritability ○ Increased startle response ○ Lack of eye contact ○ Sleep and eating disruption ○ Loss of acquired skills ○ Back arching ○ Aggression ○ Touch avoidance
12 months-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of eye contact ○ Inability to be soothed ○ Increased tension, irritability, reactivity and inability to relax ○ Loss of eating skills ○ Alarmed by trauma related reminders ○ Uncharacteristic aggression ○ Touch avoidance ○ Sexualised play with toys
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regression to younger behaviour ○ Bodily aches, pains and illness complaints with no explanation ○ Loss of skills (toileting, eating, self care) ○ Lack of eye contact ○ Sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors

¹ Source: Child Wise Standards

http://childwise.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Speak_Up_booklet.pdf

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Withdrawal and quietening ○ General fearfulness ○ Separation anxiety ○ Sexualised drawings and demonstrated sexual knowledge
5-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of eye contact ○ Spacey, distractible or hyperactive ○ Increased tension, irritability, reactivity and inability to relax ○ Accident prone ○ Absconding/truanting from school ○ Hurting animals, fire lighting ○ Toileting accidents/smearing of faeces
7-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Frightened by intensity of own feelings ○ Distant and withdrawn ○ Feelings of guilt, humiliation and shame ○ Spacey, distractible, blanking out, loss of ability to concentrate ○ Increased tension, irritability, hyperactivity, reactivity and inability to relax ○ Lowered school performance ○ Bodily aches and pains with no reason ○ Hurting animals, fire lighting ○ Retelling of traumatic events
9-12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feelings of shame, humiliation and guilt ○ Spacey, distractible, blanking out, loss of ability to concentrate ○ Reduced capacity to feel emotions – may appear numb or apathetic, distant and withdrawn ○ Depressed ○ Vulnerable to anniversary reactions caused by seasonal events, holidays ○ Lowered school performance ○ Retelling of traumatic event ○ Sexualised drawings or written stories

12-18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feelings of shame, guilt and humiliation ○ Eating disorders/disturbances ○ Sleep disturbances, nightmares ○ Distant and withdrawn ○ Depressed ○ Spacey, distractible, blanking out, loss of ability to concentrate ○ Challenging behaviours ○ Substance abuse ○ Aggressive/violent behaviour ○ Self-harming eg. cutting, burning ○ Suicidal ideation ○ Hurting animals, fire lighting
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8.0 Conducting relevant history assessments

Any leaders, volunteers or staff appointed to run or assist with the running of the activities involving children in SGIA must have a current WWC Check in keeping with their State's legislation.

8.1 Principles of procedural fairness

SGIA observes the principles of procedural fairness by ensuring people are:

- informed of any allegations against them and provided with an opportunity to respond to those allegations
- informed of any proposed decision to be made about them
- provided with the rationale for the proposed decision and provided with an opportunity to respond to that proposed decision
- given the right to have a decision reviewed by an independent body

APPENDIX A

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The following government departments, websites and relevant organisations have been contacted or their resources included in preparation of the Child Safe policy.

- <http://www.tools4dev.org/resources/does-your-organisation-need-a-child-protection-policy/>
- <http://www.childhope.org.uk/resources/learning-resources/>
- <https://bravehearts.org.au/services/have-children-in-your-care/child-protection-training/general-community/>
- <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>
- <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>
- <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation>
- <http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/index.htm>
- <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/child-safe-standards-resources>
- [http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/7C1AE31A45DC458FCA25806C0010977F/\\$FILE/16-063aa%20authorised.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/7C1AE31A45DC458FCA25806C0010977F/$FILE/16-063aa%20authorised.pdf)
- <https://www.bluecard.qld.gov.au/volunteercoordseducationproviders/yourobligations.html>
- <https://www.bluecard.qld.gov.au/risk-management.html>
- <https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/child-protection/child-safe-environments>
- <https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/R/CHILDRENS%20PROTECTION%20REGULATIONS%202010.aspx>
- <https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx>

- <https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx>
- [http://www.asc.wa.edu.au/files/8b%20-%20Child%20Safe%20Policy%20\(WA\)%20V3.pdf](http://www.asc.wa.edu.au/files/8b%20-%20Child%20Safe%20Policy%20(WA)%20V3.pdf)
- <https://childsafestandards.com.au/>
- www.community.nsw.gov.au
- www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
- www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au
- http://childwise.blob.core.windows.net/assets/uploads/files/Speak_Up_booklet.pdf