

27th August 2012

Parliament of Victoria
Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House
Spring St
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Ms Bush

Girl Guides Victoria welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the inquiry about the processes by which religious and other organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children within their organizations.

On reading through the guidelines provided, we believe the most applicable section for us to respond to relates to items in section 11.

In general terms all of the Managers Position Descriptions include a general statement to reinforce Girl Guides commitment to child safety which include the phrase '*to understand the commitment of Girl Guides Australia (GGA) to a child safe and child friendly environment*'. It should be noted that policies adopted by Girl Guides Victoria are aligned with the overarching policies of Girl Guides Australia.

The following provides a response to items 11.1 through to 11.10

11.1 Policies, protocols currently developed to address child abuse within Girl Guides Victoria?

Girl Guides Victoria adhere to a policy that before commencing work undertaken with children, all adults are required to undergo a Police Check and a Working With Children Check. Further requirements are that:

- Police Check be not more than 5 years old
- Working With Children Check be not more than 5 years old

Volunteers of Girl Guides Victoria are expected to adhere to a Code of Conduct (copy attached). Particular relevant points are 1,2,5,6,7,8 and 9.

Relevant Policies:

- GGA Child protection (*Guide Lines 8.1*) (Copy Attached)
- GGV Child Protection (GO 44) (Copy Attached)

Procedures:

- Policy Managing non compliance with requirements of GGV GO 43
- Constitution 2011: Art 26 Suspension
- Bylaws 2011: Right of appeal: Art 18 Grievance Procedure
- GGV Grievance procedure GP 43

11.2 What is the nature of the policy?

11.2.1 Policies are proactive

11.2.2 Policies and procedures are on our website. This is accessible to all members of GGV but not to the public as the site is password protected.

11.2.3 Policies are not time limited and are reviewed every 3 years for currency, or more frequently if necessary.

11.3 Who is responsible for the policy? Is the policy internal or external to the governing bodies of the religious or other organization?

Policies are adopted by the Executive Committee of Girl Guides Victoria (Governance Board) after development and drafted by a specifically constituted sub committee.

11.4 How are alleged and proven offenders dealt with?

A proven offender should be discovered by the security checks made before they commence working with children. An alleged offender would be treated by following the relevant policies and if necessary reported to the appropriate authority. Once proven or before if indicated, the suspension process would be followed.

Accountability Mechanisms

11.5 What accountability mechanisms apply to the organisation's policy? Is it open to outside scrutiny or review?

At the three yearly policy review, opinion may be sought from outside experts to ensure the policy is up to date. Any changes are presented to Executive Committee for adoption.

11.6 Is there any appeal process or dispute resolution process for victims or offenders?

There is a right of appeal process and a grievance procedure available for all decisions.

Support for Victims

11.7 What supports are available to victims and other family members or significant others?

Support for victims would be provided through the most appropriate professional group.

11.8 Can victims seek independent support?

The victim would be able to seek independent support.

11.9 What is the role of counsellors in religious and other organisations?

We do not have counsellors attached to our organization.

Compensation and reparation

11.10 Do systems for addressing abuse within the organisation allow for monetary or other forms of compensation?

Our systems do not allow for monetary or other forms of compensation.

We trust that the information provided is useful towards the work being undertaken for the enquiry.

Yours faithfully



Robinette Emonson
State Commissioner
Girl Guides Victoria



GIRL GUIDES VICTORIA POLICY

GO 44

CHILD PROTECTION

Girl Guides Australia recognises that all children should be protected from situations which would jeopardise their general welfare and safety. *Guide Lines 8.1.*

Girl Guides Victoria is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of harm. In particular the safety and wellbeing of the children involved in our programs is of paramount concern.

This policy provides guidance to adult volunteers on the acceptable behaviours and appropriate boundaries when working with children.

Definition of a child: For the purpose of this policy, a child is regarded to be any person under 18 years , regardless of the age of consent locally.

Members and volunteers with Girl Guides Victoria will:

- Treat every child with dignity and respect regardless of differences of ethnicity, religion, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation and economic circumstances.
- Conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their position as a positive role model to children and as a representative of Girl Guides Victoria.
- Avoid unaccompanied or unobserved activities and try to ensure that other adults are present when working with children.
- Listen to children, take their concerns seriously and allow them to have a say in the decisions that affect them.
- Immediately raise any concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child with the Chief Executive Officer of Girl Guides Victoria or person acting in her/his stead. The Chief Executive Officer could consult with a child psychologist or other expert to determine the appropriate way forward for each particular child.
- Try to stop observed breaches of this policy.

Members and volunteers with Girl Guides Victoria will not:

- Engage in behaviour that is likely to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as assistance with toileting or changing clothes.
- Smack, hit or physically assault children.



GIRL GUIDES VICTORIA POLICY

GO 44

- Develop relationships with children that could in any way be deemed sexually exploitative or abusive.
- Act in ways that may be abusive or place a child at risk of abuse.
- Behave physically in a manner that is inappropriate or sexually provocative towards a child, or towards another adult in the presence of a child.
- Condone, or participate in, behaviour towards children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Act in a way that shows unfair differential treatment, or favouring particular children to the exclusion of others.
- Photograph or video a child without the consent of the child and her/his parents or guardians.
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way. Touching should: only be in response to the need of the child; be only with the child's permission (except in an emergency situation); avoid the breasts, buttocks and groin; and be open and non-secretive.

Leaders in charge of an event should ensure that all members and volunteers are aware of this policy and have access to it.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Girl Guides Australia requires that each adult member at all times will:

- abide by the Guide Promise and Law, the Aims and Principles of Guiding and all other rules and policies of Girl Guides Australia and the relevant State organisation;
- treat youth members with respect and accept responsibility for the physical and emotional safety of youth members, as required by duty of care;
- recognise the importance of and encourage the spiritual development of youth members according to Girl Guides Australia policy;
- not use Guiding to promote personal beliefs, behaviours or practices where these are not compatible with Guiding;
- adhere to the drugs, smoking and alcohol policies of the organisation;
- behave in such a way as to bring credit to Guiding and maintain the standards of Guiding;
- respect everyone's right to privacy;
- accept the need to avoid unaccompanied or unobserved activities, including discussions and interviews, with individual youth members; and
- recognise that physical, sexual or verbal abuse, bullying, tormenting or ridicule is unacceptable behaviour by any member and will take appropriate action to deal with such behaviour. (ref 1)

8 POLICIES

8.1 Child Protection

Girl Guides Australia recognises that all children should be protected from situations which would jeopardise their general welfare and safety. Refer to individual State Guide offices for child protection information relevant to each State.

8.2 Copyright

Girl Guides Australia expects every member of the national and State Guide organisations to adhere to the Copyright Act 1968 (as amended). Requirements under the Act are outlined in PUB.2 Copyright Procedures of the Girl Guides Australia *Administration Manual*—refer to your State Girl Guide office for further information. (ref 22)

8.3 Environment

Girl Guides Australia incorporates best environmental practice in all aspects of the program. Members are encouraged to care for our environment and be actively involved in its preservation.

Sound environmental policies and practices are actively applied to Guide properties and participation of members in community environmental service programs is encouraged.

8.4 Family

Girl Guides Australia is concerned about the rights of the child and believes that the fundamental social unit for the care and nurture of children is the family.

8.5 Food Handling

Girl Guides Australia recognises that food handling legislation at local and State levels must be followed.

8.6 HIV AIDS and Other Infectious Diseases

Girl Guides Australia ensures its members and its employees have adequate information and instruction available:

- to promote the prevention of infection with viruses such as HIV, hepatitis and other infectious diseases;
- to protect from infection with HIV, hepatitis and other infectious diseases through appropriate hygiene and safety practices; and
- to protect from discrimination on the grounds of actual or imputed infection with HIV, hepatitis or other infectious diseases.

State Guide organisations are responsible for ensuring that information for Leaders on HIV, hepatitis and other infectious diseases is up to date and relevant to State requirements.

8.7 Internet

Girl Guides Australia requires any member placing Guide related information on internet websites to adhere to the following requirements.

- The corporate graphic and publications standards of Girl Guides Australia must be maintained. Any use of the Girl Guides Australia logo must be in accordance with the logo guidelines outlined in Chapter 2.
- The content of the site should be current and conform to Girl Guides Australia policy and standards.