

Safeguarding Guideline to Prevent Physical and Sexual Abuse

Leadership, Governance and Culture



This guideline provides risk management advice on safeguarding to prevent physical and sexual abuse.

“Safeguarding” refers to the responsibilities, measures and activities undertaken by an organisation to safeguard children and vulnerable adults from harm, abuse and exploitation.

If an organisation provides services to children and/or vulnerable people, it must have a formal safeguarding strategy.

It starts at the top with the board and the executive team taking the lead.

Safeguarding in an organisation does not just happen; it requires an active approach to increasing awareness, adoption of strategies, good governance and risk management practices that together create a culture where the best interests and safety of children and vulnerable adults are the first priority.



Accountabilities
are communicated
and managed

+



Awareness
of the framework
is enabled and
encouraged

+



Attitudes
towards safeguarding
lead to it being
“everyone’s responsibility”

=



Behaviour

*Keeping people
in your care
safe from harm
must be your
top priority*

Nature and Impact

- 90% of child sexual abuse goes undisclosed to authorities¹
- Only 2-5% of allegations are false²
- 50 residents in aged care sexually abused a week³
- People with disabilities twice as likely to be sexually abused⁴

1. Martin, E., & Silverstone, P. (2013). How much child sexual abuse is "below the surface", and can we help adults identify it early? *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 4, 1-10.

2. O'Donohue, W., Cummings, C., & Willis, B. (2018). The frequency of false allegations of child sexual abuse: A critical review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(5), 459-475

3. Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. (2021). Final report: Care, Dignity and Respect. 144.

4. Royal commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2020). Interim Report. 8



Safeguarding people from sexual abuse

Over the past ten years, State and Commonwealth inquiries have shone light on a widespread failure to keep children and vulnerable people safe from sexual abuse.

Abuse and exploitation went on for decades in a background culture that stayed silent. When people did speak, it was often to excuse offenders or spread myths about the nature of the offence or the people abused.

Governments, communities, families and survivors have made it clear that this cannot go on.

How can we make it stop?

Organisations must put in place reasonable and appropriate measures to protect people from sexual abuse. In other words, they must manage the risks.

If they don't, then more abuse is inevitable.

If they don't, they run the risk of becoming uninsurable.

We don't want this to happen. Vulnerable people, their families and communities, rely on community, faith and care services. They depend on dedicated and skilled people—people who act in the interests of their community and care because it's the right thing to do.

We, Ansvar, want to help you do that.

Directors and executives must take the lead

Poor leadership was identified as a major risk by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the interim report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Ansvar recognises that the leadership of many care organisations will find it difficult to turn their organisations around.

Boards and the executive will need to overcome that inertia though. If they don't their organisation runs a very high risk of becoming unviable.

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Safeguarding doesn't just happen.

If you don't design governance to keep people safe then, by default, it is designed to result in abuse.

– **Hetty Johnston AM,**
Industry Expert

Why is leadership so important?

When you take on a leadership role in an organisation, you become accountable for what happens in that organisation. It's that simple.

Directors who don't manage the risk or put in place governance to prevent abuse and neglect may face criminal penalties.

A lack of effective risk management may also make your organisation uninsurable.

Whatever your leadership role, it's up to you to know the legislation and make sure the organisation takes all the steps it can to comply.

If you're on the board, you need to make sure you know about the kinds of abuse and neglect that could happen in your organisation. You also need to take steps to make sure it doesn't.

If you're the CEO don't sit tight and wait for the board—inform them and help them make their decisions. Once the objectives are in place, implement effective measures, evaluate and report on them, and improve.

No organisation is free from the risks of abuse and harm. Facing up to it is how you show leadership, within your organisation and to the community you serve.



Why we care about leadership

The quality of your leadership makes a material difference to the safety of people in your care.

That is reason alone. But it also means that, to insure your organisation, we need to see evidence that directors and executive leaders are managing safeguarding risks effectively.

Because leadership makes a real difference.

Show leadership in this way and you'll show your employees that they should too when they are giving care day to day.

It will also be a clear sign to your communities that you've got the message of recent State and Commonwealth inquiries and you'll be accountable for any change that needs to happen.



Safeguarding Leadership

Leadership is not about being personally involved in the operations of the organisation. It's about being 'personally involved', though, in making sure the organisation is operating as it should.

This is what your governance and risk management frameworks are for.

As a director and executive leader you need to assess them. Are they fit for purpose? Do they include safeguarding? Is it likely that they'll reduce the risk of abuse and neglect in your organisation? Are you seeing credible information about whether they are effective?

But what counts as an ethical and effective framework for safeguarding vulnerable people?

Ansvar has developed a set of criteria after a careful analysis of the principles, standards, regulations and legislation that govern organisations working or interacting with vulnerable people.

We have listed them here and encourage you to use them in your organisation.

Essential safeguarding criteria

- ✓ Safety and wellbeing of the vulnerable are embedded in organisation leadership, governance, risk management and culture.
- ✓ Vulnerable persons are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
- ✓ Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting safeguarding of vulnerable persons.
- ✓ Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
- ✓ People working with vulnerable persons are suitable and supported to reflect safeguarding values in their practice.
- ✓ Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are focused on vulnerable persons.
- ✓ Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep vulnerable persons safe to the greatest extent possible, and maintain that knowledge through ongoing education and training.
- ✓ Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for vulnerable persons to be harmed.
- ✓ Safeguarding policies and procedures are available, understood, and implemented throughout the organisation.



Abuse and neglect are not an 'operational issue'. It happens when members of a board don't ask questions and executive leaders don't put in place measures to prevent it.

— **Diana Borgmeyer,**
Safeguarding Practice Expert Lead

How we can support you

Our Safeguarding Criteria also form the backbone of Ansvär's self-assessment tool.

The tool will give you a clear assessment of your organisation's current maturity. It will show where you need to focus in order to make things safe for vulnerable people.

From there, you will need to have an informed and courageous dialogue about how to improve. You will need to do the work of leadership to make sure that people are safe and the organisation thrives.

This work starts at the top. You, as a director or executive, need to be across the facts. You need to make sure you have the governance and culture in place to manage the risks.

We have a number of guides to help you do that.



Safeguarding Guidelines to Prevent Physical and Sexual Abuse



Leadership, Governance and Culture

- Roles and obligations of leaders
- Safeguarding governance considerations
- Embed safeguarding as part of the culture



Effective Policies and Procedures and Code of Conduct

- Know how to recognise a potential offender
- Learn the indicators of abuse and neglect



Identifying, recoding, and reporting behaviours of concern and responding to disclosures

- Recognising a potential perpetrator in your organisation
- Sexual abuse training considerations
- Reviewing and reporting abuse allegations



Transparency and Accountability

- The policies and processes you need to have
- Roles and responsibilities
- Listening to disclosures and protecting whistleblowers



Recruiting

- Design a recruitment process that makes safety and wellbeing a priority
- Interviewing techniques
- Performance management and record keeping

Finally, we know your organisation does vital work

And we want to support and care for you in your efforts to care for our communities.



If you would like any further information, contact your broker or reach out to our Senior Risk Consultants directly at info@ansvarrisk.com.au



We will do this with guidance like this on critical actions your organisation needs to take and bespoke advice on policy, governance and culture. Our focus will be on preventing harm but also showing how your board and executive can create and protect value by managing this risk.

By managing risks in this way, you will thrive as an organisation and show your community that you're serious about keeping people in your care safe.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call us on **1300 650 540**
Email us at **info@ansvarrisk.com.au**
Visit us at **[ansvar.com.au](https://www.ansvar.com.au)**

Registered Office:
**Level 5, 1 Southbank Boulevard,
Southbank Vic 3006**

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