

Heartfulness Institute Australia – Safeguarding Children Policy

Purpose

Heartfulness Institute Australia is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for all children who come into contact with our activities. This policy sets out our responsibilities to safeguard and protect children from harm and abuse, and to ensure that Heartfulness trainers, volunteers, and coordinators understand their role in keeping children safe.

Definition of a Child

For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18 years.

Guiding Principles

1. Best interests of the child: The safety and wellbeing of children are paramount in all activities and decisions.
2. Zero tolerance: Heartfulness Institute Australia has zero tolerance for child abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
3. Boundaries: Trainers and volunteers must maintain strict professional boundaries at all times. Heartfulness practices should not extend into counselling, therapy, or personal advice for children.
4. Participation: Children should be treated with respect, listened to, and encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them, in an age-appropriate way.
5. Confidentiality: Information about a child must be kept confidential except where disclosure is required to protect the child from harm.

Practical Guidance

- Parental/guardian presence: Children must never attend sessions alone. A parent or guardian must always be present during meditation or Heartfulness-related activities.
- No 1:1 sessions: One-on-one sessions with children are not permitted under any circumstances.
- Appropriate communication: Trainers and volunteers must not engage in private or personal communication with children (e.g., texting, WhatsApp, social media). Communication must always go through parents/guardians.
- No personal, medical, or financial advice: Trainers and volunteers must not give advice beyond the scope of Heartfulness practice.

- **Safe spaces:** Sessions involving children must be held in safe, public, and transparent environments (e.g., centers, group sessions).
- **Data protection:** Personal information about children must not be collected or stored without explicit parental/guardian consent and must comply with the Heartfulness Institute's Data Protection Policy, including the taking of photos or videos at events, seminars, and gatherings.
- **Parental Permission Form:** A signed Parental Permission Form must be obtained before a child participates in any Heartfulness activity, including sessions, events, seminars, or gatherings. This form must cover consent for participation, supervision arrangements, and permission for photographs/videos (where applicable). Copies of completed forms must be securely stored in accordance with the Heartfulness Institute's Data Protection Policy.
- **Mandatory Working With Children Check (WWCC):** All trainers, volunteers, and coordinators who interact with children must hold a valid Working With Children Check (or the equivalent clearance required in their state or territory). Evidence of this clearance must be provided to Heartfulness Institute Australia before any direct involvement with children.

Responding to Concerns

If a trainer or volunteer has concerns that a child:

- Is being harmed, abused, or neglected, or
- Discloses abuse, unsafe situations, or inappropriate behavior,

then they must:

1. **Ensure immediate safety:** If a child is at risk of immediate harm, call emergency services (000 in Australia).
2. **Report promptly:** Notify the local Heartfulness secretary and submit a safeguarding report within 24 hours.
3. **Mandatory reporting:** Trainers and volunteers must comply with Australian mandatory reporting laws and cooperate with child protection authorities where required.
4. **Escalation:** Concerns will be investigated under the Heartfulness Institute's Safeguarding and Complaints Handling Policies, with referral to external authorities where necessary.

Responsibilities

- **Trainers/Volunteers:** Must uphold this policy, act with vigilance, and report any safeguarding concerns immediately. They must also maintain a valid WWCC (or equivalent) in line with state/territory legislation and provide evidence of clearance before engaging with children.

- Parents/Guardians: Must be present during all activities involving children and are responsible for their child's participation.
- Administrators: Must ensure trainers/volunteers are trained in child safeguarding responsibilities and reporting procedures. They must also verify, record, and maintain up-to-date records of WWCC (or equivalent) for all trainers and volunteers involved with children.
- Institute: Must provide clear reporting channels, ensure compliance with Australian law, and act decisively on safeguarding issues.

Disciplinary Action

Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal of trainer/volunteer status, and referral to the principal Guide for Heartfulness for further direction. Where required, concerns will also be reported to child protection authorities or the police.