



WE PUT CHILDREN  
**F1**RST

Our stance  
on child  
safety and  
wellbeing

We all share the responsibility for child safety

**LIFE  
WITHOUT  
BARRIERS**

# FOREWORD



Terry Lawler  
Chair

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse ran from 2013 to 2017. The Commission held public hearings, conducted a range of research and policy work, and heard the testimony of over 9000 people who had experienced sexual abuse in organisational settings. The Royal Commission made it clear that child sexual abuse is a contemporary problem, that it is a community responsibility to acknowledge that children are vulnerable to abuse, and to do what we can to protect them. Organisations that support children have a responsibility to consider and respond to the findings of the Royal Commission.



Claire Robbs  
CEO

## WATCH: WE PUT CHILDREN FIRST



Valuing children and their rights is the basis of being a child safe organisation. This means that organisations need to act in children's best interests, and actively listen to children and respond to their needs. Life Without Barriers is committed to hearing the voices of children.

We can also make changes and take actions that will reduce the risk of children being abused in our organisation. Cultural, operational and environmental factors can all affect the likelihood of children being sexually abused and whether that abuse will be identified, reported and responded to appropriately. Life Without Barriers is committed to embedding practices that will reduce the risk of children we support being abused.

We launched We Put Children First: Our Stance on Child Safety and

Wellbeing in 2015, for the whole Life Without Barriers community. It articulates our commitment to child safety, outlines our expectations for behaviour, and emphasises the importance of being vigilant and speaking up about child safety concerns. This document is our guiding foundation for preventing child sexual abuse. The Board of Directors, Executive and our employees and carers all signed up to our commitment to child safety.

As part of our continued commitment to child safety, we have introduced educational resources and practice reforms that build upon this foundation, and we will continue to do so as we learn more about how to keep children safe.

Thank you for sharing the responsibility for the safety of children we support at Life Without Barriers.

# OUR VALUES

Life Without Barriers is defined not just by how we look and talk, but more importantly by what we do.



## **WE BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

**We** are people people. Relationships come first. Listening helps us understand.



## **WE ARE IMAGINATIVE**

**We** are imaginative in our thinking and open to new ideas and ways of doing things.



## **WE ARE RESPECTFUL**

**We** are respectful and caring in our dealings. We see the big picture but never lose sight of detail. We welcome diversity.



## **WE ARE RESPONSIVE**

**We** are responsive to needs, determined to get things done and do them well.



## **WE ARE COURAGEOUS**

**We** are courageous in our convictions. We stand up for what we believe in.

# AT LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS WE ALL SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD SAFETY

Every day, Life Without Barriers offers support and care to children. We want each and every one of those children to feel as safe and respected as they should.

We all have a responsibility to make sure their safety comes first – and that they're well cared for, protected from abuse and given the respect they deserve.

# WE PUT CHILDREN FIRST

## OUR STANCE ON CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Here at Life Without Barriers, the wellbeing of children is our greatest concern. Ensuring children are well cared for, supported and protected is an absolute, non-negotiable priority.

This is all about giving children the respect they deserve. That's why we expect the entire Life Without Barriers community to take positive action and responsibility for a key aspect of wellbeing – the safety of children who access our services.

### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM US

When abuse occurs, there's often a pre-existing relationship between the child and carer or staff member involved. Because of this, careful attention to what is happening with and around children is an important way to keep them safe. Rather than dealing with problems after they've already occurred, we're intent on creating an environment where children are not put at risk.

Clearly expressing what is not appropriate behaviour is the first step towards achieving this.

We will not accept any behaviour that contravenes these guidelines.

### WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU

As a staff member or carer within the Life Without Barriers community, we expect you to act in a way that prioritises the wellbeing of children at all times. To do this, we need you to have a clear understanding of what constitutes illegal, unacceptable, and concerning behaviour in relation to children.

As well as making it clear what we expect of you in your own dealings with children, this will allow you to identify and draw attention to behaviour from others which steps

beyond these boundaries – even if it's a close friend, colleague, or senior person within our organisation.

If you become aware of any kind of concerning behaviour, raise it with your manager (or someone else within Life Without Barriers that you're comfortable talking to) as soon as possible.

Remember that this is all part of our quest to ensure that children are respected, listened to, and safe.

### TALKING ABOUT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

We're not afraid to say it directly – child sexual abuse is a risk in an organisation like ours. One of the ways to guard against child sexual abuse and the secrecy that often surrounds it is to talk about it openly. So while we understand it's a difficult topic, we're willing to confront it head on.

With this evidence informed, proactive and positive approach, we're helping everyone to understand and acknowledge what constitutes sexual abuse or grooming behaviour.

### UNDERSTANDING THE BOUNDARIES

All children – especially those in our care – need to feel loved and safe. Naturally, this includes appropriate physical affection. So it's important to remember that our awareness of sexual abuse and grooming behaviour is not intended to create an environment of suspicion, or a culture where adults must be completely 'hands-off' with the children in their care.

Nevertheless, appropriate boundaries must be well respected. By reading and understanding these guidelines, you'll have a clearer understanding of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour in relation to children.

# OFF LIMITS

## ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO CHILDREN

There are many acts that are illegal when it comes to children, and the police will deal with anyone suspected of committing one of these offences.

**Sexual offences** – any sexual contact of any nature with a child is illegal. To make it clear, this includes having, attempting to have, or facilitating any kind of sex with a child; possessing, creating or exposing children to pornography; prostituting children; voyeurism; or sexting.

**Physical assault** – it's never ok to touch a child in a violent way. Physical assault includes hitting, kicking, pushing or throwing objects at a child.

**Neglect** – sometimes, it's what you don't do that constitutes illegal behaviour. This includes depriving a child of life's basic necessities like food, shelter or medical care.

**There are other types of illegal behaviour** – this includes providing illegal drugs to a child, or medications that they have not been prescribed.

It's also illegal to steal money, possessions or government assistance from a child.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR

The police will deal with illegal behaviour as a criminal matter. Given our responsibility for children, your engagement with us will be terminated if you're found to have engaged in any of the behaviour described above.

“That's why we expect the entire Life Without Barriers community to take positive action and responsibility for a key aspect of wellbeing – the safety of children who access our services”



# BEYOND THE LIMITS

## UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO CHILDREN

Some acts are not directly prescribed as illegal, but are unacceptable for people who should have the care and welfare of children as their highest priority.

This includes:

**Sexual misconduct** – it's not acceptable to share details of your own sexual experiences with children in your care, or who you support.

In the right circumstances, you can talk to children about sex in a way that helps educate or guide them. However, during these discussions we encourage you to be mindful of the age and developmental stage of the child, and the nature of your relationship with them.

For example, a carer who has cared for a child for many years would expect to have conversations about sex and sexuality with an adolescent in their care. On the other hand, a residential care worker meeting a young adolescent for the first time would not be expected to have this type of conversation.

**Providing alcohol to children** – no matter what the circumstances, it's not on to provide children with alcohol.

**Crossing appropriate boundaries** – this includes staff having overly personal or intimate relationships with one child, taking children to your house, or seeing children outside of work when there's no existing relationship (like a family connection) to normalise this.

Staff should not share personal phone numbers with children, engage with them through personal social media accounts, or ask them to keep a relationship secret.

Carers and other adult members of the household are expected to be sensitive to the needs and natural sensitivities of adolescents. For example, this means showering with the door closed, and being clothed around the home.

We also expect carers to respect the privacy of teenagers when they're using the bathroom or changing.

**Grooming** – this is behaviour that often prepares a child for sexual activity, and will regularly involve some of the elements described above. Depending on the degree, grooming may also constitute illegal behaviour.

**Neglect** – all children require and deserve the best care possible. Neglect sits at the other end of that scale, and is often shown by failing to adequately supervise a child, leaving them alone for long periods, or leaving them in the care of another child. In certain circumstances, neglect may be treated as a criminal matter.

Having too much to drink or being under the influence of drugs while caring for children can also lead to neglectful behaviour.

**Ill-treatment** – some types of unacceptable behaviour leave no obvious physical marks on a child, but can cause serious emotional or developmental damage. This includes (deliberately or otherwise) exacerbating

an existing psychological condition, using degrading language or calling a child degrading names, cruelty or inhumane treatment.

**Other types of unacceptable behaviour** – this can include inappropriately sleeping in the same bed as a child. While this may be acceptable for very young children in a foster care situation, it is never appropriate for staff members in residential care.

Sleeping naked while working in a residential care service; performing restricted practices or submitting children to medical treatment without consent or authorisation; bullying; or a failure to respect the privacy of children will also constitute unacceptable behaviour.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

Given our responsibility for children, we may terminate your engagement with us if you are found to have engaged in the behaviour described above.

“ We all share the responsibility for the children who engage with our organisation ”



## CAUSE FOR CONCERN

### BEHAVIOUR THAT MAKES US WORRIED

When it comes to children, context is everything. So while the behaviour described in this section is not illegal or unacceptable, it can be of some concern. This is mainly because it can easily cross appropriate boundaries and be a precursor to grooming for sexual activity.

**Concerning behaviour** includes using children to meet your emotional needs, showing favours to one child over others, providing expensive or inappropriate gifts to a child, or unnecessarily sharing details of your personal life with children. Wearing inappropriate clothing can also be considered concerning behaviour. This type of clothing might expose or accentuate the genitals or breasts, or feature sexist or racist language or images.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS BEHAVIOUR

We'll always be on the lookout for concerning behaviour, and will closely examine the circumstances that surround it when it comes to our attention.

# YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE

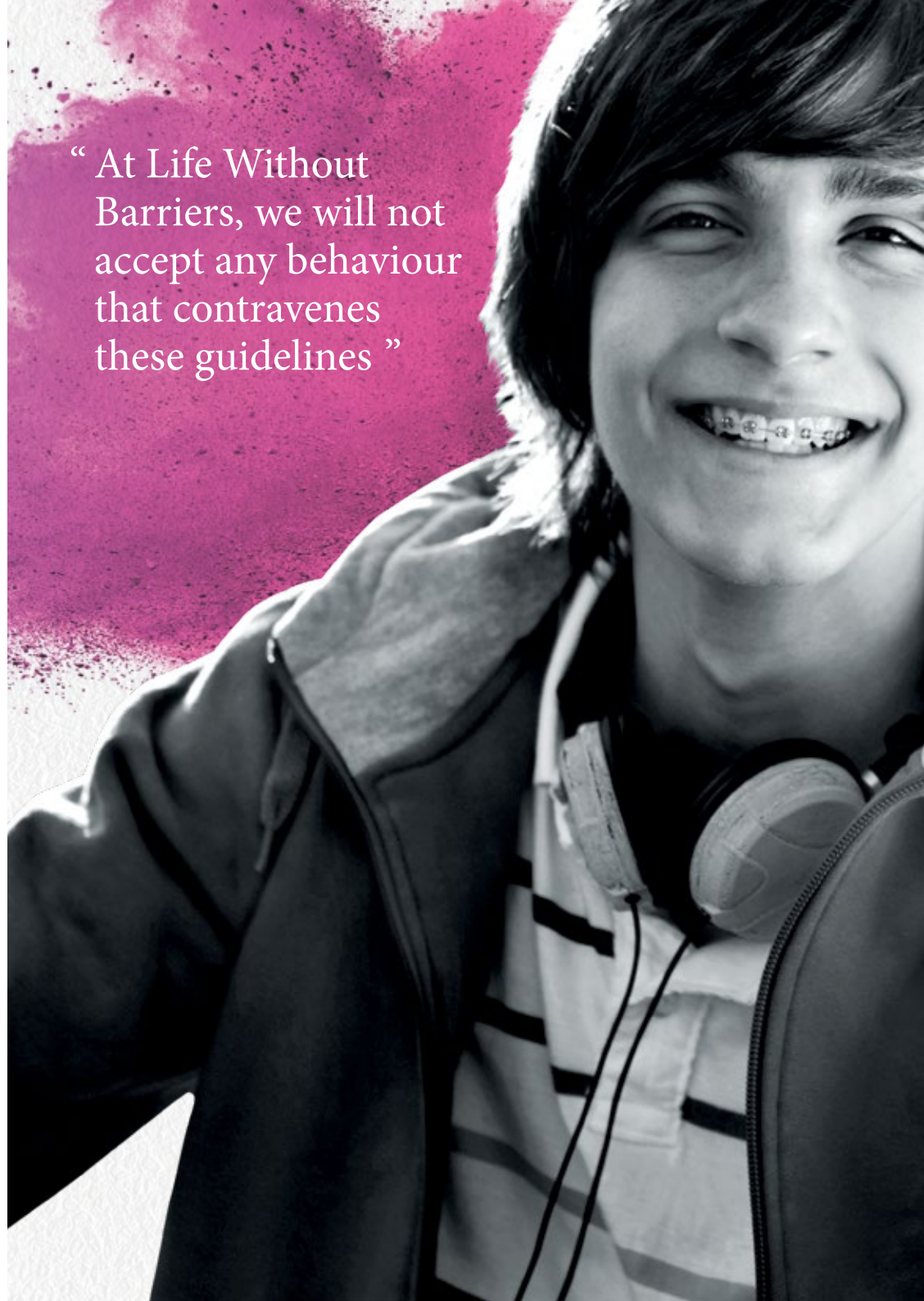
As a Life Without Barriers staff member or carer, you do important and valuable work every day – work that’s appreciated by everyone across the organisation and the wider community. However, your position is one of great responsibility. This means you must act in the best interests of the children you support at all times, and will be made accountable if your behaviour does not meet the standards expected of you.

We all share the responsibility for the children who engage with our organisation. This means we are accountable for our own behaviour, and for noticing and acting upon the concerning behaviour of others.

If you notice any of the behaviour described above, raise this with your manager (or someone else in Life Without Barriers that you are comfortable talking to) as soon as possible. Alternatively you can email [tellsomeone@lwb.org.au](mailto:tellsomeone@lwb.org.au)


Any information you share will be evaluated responsibly and carefully. You will be supported and treated with respect when you provide information in relation to the safety of children.


“ At Life Without Barriers, we will not accept any behaviour that contravenes these guidelines ”







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