Stirling North Childhood Services Centre
Beckman Street
PO Box 1399
Stirling North, SA 5710
Telephone: (08) 86436205
Fax: (08) 86436378
Email: dl.6667.leaders@schools.sa.edu.au

Stirling North Childhood Services Centre: Safe use of digital technologies and online environments procedure

Purpose

This procedure details how we meet our commitment to child safe practices for digital technologies and online environments.

Background

This procedure addresses the requirements of regulation 168 which require an education and care service to have policies and procedures for the safe use of digital technologies and online environments, including the use of mobile devices.

Children and young people have a right to safety and protection at all times, including when being photographed or filmed and when accessing digital devices and technologies at Stirling North Childhood Services Centre.

This procedure is part of the department's obligations and commitment to safeguard children ensuring their safety rights and best interests are of paramount consideration. This procedure builds on the responsibilities and obligations of individuals and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and programs outlined in the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.

A copy of this procedure will be kept on top of the bookcase on the welcome bench in the policies and procedures folder.

Legislative requirement

In relation to the safe use of digital technologies and online environments, the National Regulations requires services to have policies and procedures for the safe use of digital technologies and online environments (regulation 168) which are compliant with Sections 178A – 178J of the Education and Care Services National Law – Devices in education and care services and regulation 179A and 179B of the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

This procedure outlines how Stirling North Childhood Services Centre will implement the Safe use of digital technologies and online environments in early childhood education and care policy.

Procedures

Electronic devices

Personal electronic devices that can take images of children

Staff and volunteers (including work experience students) working with and/or providing a service to children at this service are not permitted to have a personal electronic device in their possession that can take, store or share images when:

- they are working directly with children
- they are in a space or spaces that are primarily used for children's programs or services when children are in attendance.
- Personal electronic devices will be stored in lockers, desk or bag in either the Preschool Director's office or staff room.
- Staff and volunteers can use their personal electronic device when on an authorized break in a space not used for children's programs or services including the Preschool Director's office or staff room.

Smart watches or any other device that do not have the capability to take, share or store images or videos can be worn by staff and volunteers at the service. The Responsible Person on duty each day will check with each staff member upon arrival to ensure that their watch complies with the above information.

Staff and volunteers need to set their watch on theatre or aeroplane mode, if it has this function.

Any smart watch or device that **does not comply** with the above parameters **are not to be worn** in the Preschool.

There are limited exceptional circumstances where an employee or volunteer may seek approval in writing from the site leader to be in possession of a personal electronic device which can take images or video including health needs, disability or urgent pressing necessity.

Where a staff member or a volunteer believes their circumstances constitute exceptional circumstances, they can complete the Exemption request – on site possession of a personal electronic device application form for consideration by the site leader. If approval is granted it will be for the stated essential purpose only and the personal electronic device must not be used for other purposes.

Exceptional circumstances applications will be considered on a case by case basis and the criteria for any approval will be consistent with the Safe use of digital technologies and online environments in early childhood education and care policy, the National Model Code and Guidelines and section 175J of the National Law.

In emergency circumstances such as a child is lost or missing or the site is in lockdown the site leader may give one off approval for educators to use their personal electronic devices. All approvals and details of the device will be recorded on the essential once-off approvals register after the event.

For regular outings, the site leader may approve a staff member or volunteer to have their personal electronic device in their possession for child safety or emergency purposes. When not required any personal electronic devices must be stored securely in a place designated by the site leader or responsible person for example in a backpack during a regular outing.

The site leader will record this approval and details of the device on the essential planned approvals register. No images or videos of children may be taken on personal devices, and the device can only be used for the approved purpose

Where staff or volunteers provide emergency contact details ie. Child their child's school or childcare, staff and volunteers are encouraged to add the Preschool landline number and Preschool mobile number on the emergency contact list, to ensure they can be contacted in an emergency.

Parents will be discouraged from using their personal electronic devices when in attendance at the service. This information will be communicated to parents in the parent handbook, on story park and through personal device free area poster.

Posters will be displayed near the front door of the Preschool to alert parents and visitors of the ban on taking photos or videos of children.

Service issued devices

At our service, only service issued devices are to be used to take, store and share images and videos of children. All educators who need digital devices in the course of their work will be provided access to a shared device or a service issued device at the discretion of the site director. Staff members must also sign in and out of the necessary applications as needed.

All staff must read and understand the Department for Education's ICT cyber security standard and sign the ICT Acceptable Use Agreement declaration and complete PLINK Cyber Security Training Course before using service issued devices.

The site leader will maintain a record of all service issued or borrowed devices.

Service issued devices which are used by staff and volunteers for taking, sharing or storing images or videos of children and/or used in programs with children must not be used for personal use.

Images and videos of children

Consent from parents to take, use and store images and videos of children

We will obtain parental consent before taking, using, distributing or storing images and videos of their children.

At the time of enrolment parents will be asked to complete the consent to publish media and creative work of children, students and the community. The consent forms will be stored with the child's enrolment record in accordance with the department's Information and records management requirements .

If parent permission is revoked, every effort will be made to remove relevant media from distribution, however this may not be possible or practical in some situations.

Taking images and videos of children

We believe:

- electronic devices are a useful educational tool to document children's learning
- digital images and videos play an important role in engaging parents in their child's education and care experiences

We will:

- only take, store or share images or videos on service issued devices
- seek children's consent before taking images or videos
- ensure children's privacy, dignity and rights are respected
- where possible another educator or staff member will be present when images are taken.
- continue to critically reflect on our use of digital images to ensure that images or videos relate directly to children's learning, development and wellbeing.
- be intentional in our approaches to documentation of children's learning.
- ensure we prioritise active supervision, interactions and engagement with children in their learning.

Parents of children enrolled in our service and programs will be discouraged from using their personal electronic device while at the service, noting they will not be prohibited from taking an image of their own child, but must not take images of other children, including where their child is part of a group.

Staff will communicate to parents the importance of child-safe environments and explain how the service is implementing the newly introduced legislation to enhance child safety.

If a parent takes images of children, other than their own, we will request that they stop taking images and delete any taken images. If the request is ignored, or the parent becomes offensive or abusive the site leader will lodge a critical incident report. If required we will contact Conditions for Learning directorate if urgent assistance is required.

Before being granted access to the service visitors, including maintenance contractors, will be asked to agree, as a condition of entry, that they will not take images or videos of children by completing the visitor sign in register.

Visitors including maintenance, contractors may, with the site leader's or delegates permission, take images for approved purposes, such as taking images of site infrastructure to obtain a quote.

Work experience students and volunteers must not take images and videos of children. Where images are required as part of a practicum, additional consent will be obtained from the parent and approval sought from the site leader. Images will be taken on a service issued device by a staff member and the student provided a hard copy of the image.

Inappropriate images and videos of children

Our service will take active steps to ensure the safety, dignity and the rights of a child are respected when taking images or videos and not take any inappropriate images or videos of children. Refer to Safe use of digital technologies and online environments in early childhood education and care policy for more information.

Service issued devices must not be taken to or used in children's bathrooms or nappy changing areas. In exceptional circumstances, for safety reasons, an educator may use a service issue device in a children's bathroom with leader authorisation. For example, in an emergency, as documented in a child's health support plan

Parents will be discouraged from sending inappropriate digital images of their child to the service, for example their child's nappy rash. This information will be communicated by the parent handbook.

Using images and videos of children

We use Story park to share videos or images with families in line with parental consent.

We use images to:

- create identity and belonging through photo displays of individuals and groups of children
- identify children with additional support, health or medical requirements
- document and share children's learning
- inform and support assessment and reporting
- communicate with families about their child's participation in the learning program

Staff will only distribute messages and content to parents using service issued devices and only to parents of children currently attending the service, who have given required consent.

Storing images of children

In accordance with the Safe use of digital technologies and online environments for early childhood education and care policy we will only download, access, share or store images or videos using service issued devices on platforms supported and approved by the department, such as Frog, cloud storage or the sites network in accordance with the ICT cyber security standard.

We ensure that all department official records are regularly backed up on secure departmental networks which are approved by the department for the storage of information by the director or lead educator on a weekly basis.

All records will be stored in accordance with the Identifying, creating and managing official records webpage and the Information and records management for schools and preschools procedure.

Staff will not use personal storage and file transfer media such as SD cards, USB drives, hard drives or cloud storage to save, store or share images or have them in their possession while working directly with children.

Destruction of images

All digital records at our site, from creation to disposal, will be managed in accordance with the School and preschool official records webpage and the Information and records management for schools and preschools procedure.

Staff will transfer children's images and videos from portable digital devices to the sites record management systems e.g. Microsoft Teams on a termly basis.

The site leader is responsible for ensuring that all records are archived or disposed of securely in accordance with the Operational Records Disposal Schedule at the end of each preschool or school year.

Optical surveillance devices

There are no optical surveillance devices in use in this service. Parents and staff will be consulted before optical surveillance devices are installed at the service including on the intended purpose of the footage, the location of cameras and how the footage will be stored and accessed.

CCTV

CCTV is used at our site as a security measure to assist with the following:

- The protection and safety of children and staff
- The prevention and detection of crime
- The protection and security of physical assets.

Digital devices used by children

Our service believes the use of digital technology sits within a broader learning environment that is play based, where children's learning is dynamic and holistic and where children are active participants in their learning.

Early Childhood Australia's statement on young children and digital technologies guides our reflection on children's use of digital technologies including considering how digital technologies enhances children's:

relationships with others

health and wellbeing

citizenship and online privacy

learning through play and intentionality.

We also refer to selecting and using resources for educational purposes guideline for considerations about the appropriateness of children's use of digital resources within the preschool program.

Educators will limit children's screen time in line with Australian Government physical activity guidelines by age, which set out recommendations for the maximum amount of screen time for children.

Physical Activity Guidelines

Age of child	Recommended screen time
birth to 24 months	No screen time
24 months to 5 years	Less than one hour a day
5 – 12 years	For entertainment no more than 2 hours a day.

When children are accessing digital technologies and online environments educators will ensure:

- digital devices are integrated as part of the learning program
- programs and software children can access and use are age appropriate
- they vet children's use of social media platforms carefully to avoid inappropriate content, including
- YouTube
- all new apps and games are checked for age and developmentally appropriate content before they are used

- children only access digital technologies in shared spaces and are actively supervised at all times
- where possible they remain in line of sight of other staff members when working with children
- they model the safe use of digital technologies and online environments
- screen time is strictly limited
- they model appropriate use of the internet and software programs
- children are encouraged to use their protective behaviour strategies when feeling unsafe, for example tell a staff member or a trusted adults if they encounter anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, scared or upset

Educators will not:

- provide unrestricted and unsupervised access to the internet and digital devices
- upload personal child information or images and video to AI tools except EdChat
- upload images or video of children to EdChat on personal devices
- use digital devices as a strategy to manage children's energy, engagement or behaviour
- use digital devices in response to weather conditions
- use free apps that pose risks to pop up advertisement and inappropriate content
- place digital devices in areas where educators cannot monitor their use
- pose risks to children's physical health and wellbeing through overuse, strain or eye glare

Children bringing personal electronic devices from home

Due to safety and security risks parents are requested not to bring children's digital devices from home including smart watches and air tags.

This information will be communicated to families at the time of enrolment through the parent handbook

The site leader may approve the use of children's digital devices from home for educational or communication purposes such as an augmented communication device (AAC) for a child with additional needs or disability. Parents will be encouraged to discuss their child's learning needs and any special considerations at the time of enrolment.

If approval is given for a child to have a digital device, approval will be recorded on the child's enrolment and may be time limited. If approval is time limited a parent who is seeking an extension will be encouraged to make an appointment with the site leader to discuss their child's learning needs.

The site leader will check with parents to ensure appropriate parental controls and restrictions are in place on any digital device bought from home to ensure children's safety prior to it being brought to the service.

Working with parents and the community

We believe that parents are children's first and most important teachers. We will work in

collaboration with parents to support and promote children's safe use of digital technologies and online environments including:

- consulting with parents, staff, Aboriginal Elders and community knowledge holders about culturally appropriate and safe content
- working with parents to ensure appropriate parental controls and restrictions are in place to ensure online safety on any approved child devices brought from home
- encouraging parents to talk to their children about online risks in an age and developmentally appropriate way (see useful resources below)
- sharing information with parents about recommended screen time limits in accordance with the Australian Government physical activity guidelines

Useful resources

- Online safety support – Department for Education
- how to choose good online content – eSafety Commissioner
- Media & technology for preschoolers – Raising Children Network

Induction of staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers including work experience students will have current Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect – Education and Care (RRHAN-EC) training and completed any mandated child safety training before commencing at the site to ensure they understand their role and responsibilities in safeguarding children.

As part of the service induction process all staff and volunteers, including work experience students will have ready access to the Safe Use of digital technologies and online environments in early childhood education and care policy and this procedure.

All staff, volunteers and work experience students will be expected to read, understand and adhere to the Safe Use of digital technologies and online environments in early childhood education and care policy and this procedure.

Staff and volunteers will be supported to access relevant training relating the safe use of digital technologies and online environments including access to relevant Plink online training.

Online Safety

Our site will implement the Responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guideline in response to any incidents of inappropriate or risky online behaviour by children or adult behaviour targeted at children.

For online safety incidents that involve allegations of staff member misconduct our educators will be guided by the following documents:

Protective practices for education and care staff and volunteers

Responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guideline

Child protection policies and guidelines

The site leader will also report any incidents on the department's incident management system in accordance with the Reporting critical incidents, injuries, hazards and near misses procedure.

Use of AI and emerging technologies

Educators at our site are encouraged to use EdChat, the department's secure generative artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot as the preferred tool due to its additional safety features. Due to its additional security controls staff can enter personal or identifying information about children or the site such as images, videos, names, addresses, or health information.

If educators are using EdChat on a personal device, they are unable to upload images and videos of children.

We will adhere to the Artificial intelligence in schools – use and considerations guidelines before approving the use of any other AI tools. If alternative tools are approved, staff will not enter any personal or identifying information about the site or children. This includes uploading images or video of children.

If educators are using AI to help with programming and creating learning experiences this will not be done where children are present.

We will limit the use of AI with children to recognised programs such as those focusing on STEM or early language development. Any programs will be age-appropriate, safe and aligned with the principles, practices and learning outcomes described in the Early Years Learning Framework. Educators will ensure children will be closely supervised when accessing tools and toys with AI capability to ensure privacy and data security is maintained.

Procedure creation and revision record

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Date of next review:	22/5/2029
Amendments(s):	Nil

Governing council

This Policy has been approved and ratified by Governing Council.

Date of next review: June 2029

Signed by the Chairperson:

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Kayleen Patterson

10 June 2026

Signed by the Director:

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Heather Honan

10 June 2026

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