

# CHILDREN IN THE WORKPLACE POLICY

## PURPOSE

This Policy has been developed to ensure the duty of care to all people present in the workplace in the event that a staff member is required to bring their child/ren to work.

The Policy outlines the process of which to seek approval to have a child in the workplace, and the expectations that are required to be adhered to while the child is present in the workplace.

## OBJECTIVE

The Shire of Quairading (“the Shire”) is committed to equal opportunity and supports its employees to balance the various demands they face with family, social and community responsibilities. Council understands that childcare arrangements can break down and there may occasionally be the need for staff to bring their children into the workplace.

However, it is a firm Council policy that children should only be brought temporarily onto Shire premises when all other possible initiatives have been considered. Under no circumstances should children be brought into any other council work area other than an office where their caregiver is present.

## DEFINITIONS

### Child

A child is a person under the age of 15 for the purposes of employment, health and safety, and child employment laws.

### Caregiver

A family member, guardian or paid helper who regularly looks after a child.

## POLICY

### 1. Council Responsibilities

Under the *Work, Health & Safety Act 2020* employers have a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of all employees in the workplace. This extends to making sure there is no unnecessary risk of exposure to harm, infectious diseases, distraction or other hazards. There is also a responsibility to ensure the safety of others who come into the workplace including children of employees.

### 2. Employee's Responsibilities

All employees need to be aware that what constitutes a safe work environment with appropriate safeguards, for employees may not be equally safe for children. For this reason, any employee that brings a child to the workplace are directly responsible for their supervision at all times and employees who bring children onto Council premises do so entirely at their own, and their children’s risk.

Sharp office supplies and specialised equipment are all common in an office situation where employees are trained in their use, but that can constitute a threat to a child's safety. There are also many restricted areas including cleaning cupboards, storerooms, kitchens, construction sites, and other areas where toxic or hazardous substances are kept.

In such an environment, there is not only a risk to the child, but a potential risk to other people as a result of the actions of a child. Furthermore, there is a potential risk of damage to Council property and consequently allowing children to use equipment such as photocopiers or computers is prohibited.

Bringing children, especially young children, babies or toddlers into the workplace should be an action of last resort. Efforts should be made to seek appropriate alternative childcare options (such as a friend, neighbour or family member) while the parent is required to work.

Council provides leave to cover a variety of situations, for instance, if a child becomes ill, sick and carer's leave is available. Employees should refer to the Leave Management Policy for further information about leave entitlements.

An employee must not threaten the health of other employees by exposure to a sick child. Where childcare arrangements break down at the last minute flexible working hours may be negotiated.

### **3. Seeking Approval**

Employees are required to request permission and receive approval from their supervisor on each occasion that they bring a child into the workplace and employees must provide to their supervisor the names and ages of all children who will be present on Shire property.

There may be occasions where – because of an employee's specific duties and responsibilities over a period of time – this policy will be suspended so that the employee can devote their full attention to their assigned tasks. Under such circumstances, alternate childcare will need to be arranged by the employee.

Employees must understand that when permission is granted, having a child in the workplace is only temporary due to difficult circumstances and should not be for more than one day at a time.

Should the supervisor consider the workplace is too dangerous for the child, then the employee involved will have to absent themselves from the workplace utilising suitable/available leave entitlements.

### **4. Supervisor's Responsibility**

A supervisor should treat requests for children to be in the workplace sensitively and make a decision on a case by case basis having regard to the reason for the request and current work conditions. The supervisor must be satisfied that the child will be supervised by the caregiver at all times and that having a child in the workplace is on a temporary basis only.

The supervisor can decide whether it is appropriate that the child be allowed to be on the premises.

Where a child becomes disruptive or they aren't being adequately supervised, the supervisor has the right to ask that the caregiver to remove the child from the workplace.

The supervisor should ensure that a child being present in the workplace is not an ongoing arrangement, and in each case, there is justifiable cause not to organise alternative arrangements for the child.

### **5. Supervision of Children**

At all times children under the age of 15 years remain the sole responsibility of their caregiver while in any Council workplace. Employees are fully responsible for the behaviour and actions of their children whilst on the premises and should not leave the premises without their child at any time. Such supervision must be able to prevent accidents.

The Shire will not provide childcare assistance. The children must exclusively stay in the employee's office or workspace, unless the employee escorts the child to the bathroom or when entering/exiting the premises.

Parents/carers must:

- a. Ensure that the child has signed in on arrival and is aware of emergency procedures.
- b. Continually assess the risks to which their children are/could be subjected and attempt to minimise these.
- c. Take into account that children will be unfamiliar with the working environment.
- d. Accompany their children at all times.
- e. Ensure that their children are not disruptive and do not interfere with normal office operations.
- f. Not bring sick children to work with them.

The supervisor has the right to ask for the removal from the premises of children who are disruptive in any way to the work of other staff, visitors or contractors.

Children are not permitted to use any Council equipment including computer equipment.

#### **6. Areas that are prohibited to children.**

All children under the age of 15 years are prohibited at all times in the following areas unsupervised:

- a. Kitchens.
- b. Storage/cleaning cupboards.
- c. Any areas where chemicals, dyes, cleaning fluids and any other potentially hazardous substances are in use or stored.
- d. The depot workshop/compound/machinery yard and any areas where tools or machinery are located or used – even when these are not in use.
- e. Staff offices that are not the child's caregivers.
- f. Office carparks and outdoor areas.
- g. Employees must not take their children in a Shire vehicle during work hours/for work purposes, or have their children with them while operating any vehicle or machinery while performing duties on behalf of the Shire.

#### **7. Exceptions to Policy**

This policy does not apply to the children of staff attending organised events where they are the responsibility of their school or other institution or Shire functions.

#### **8. Complaints**

All complaints related to this policy should be made directly to the caregiver's immediate supervisor.

All complaints will be handled in accordance with the Shire's Grievance Policy.

**STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT**

*Local Government Act 1995*

*Fair Work Act 2009*

*Work, Health & Safety Act 2020*

<b>Record of Policy Review</b>						
Version	Author	Council Adoption	Resolution	Reason for Review	Review Date	CEO Signature
01	Nicole Gibbs	Oct 2022	100 – 22/23	New Policy	Oct 2024	