

# Anti-Gossiping Policy

Version 1 (June 2010)



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## BACKGROUND

Definition of “gossip”:-

- (noun)
- Rumour or talk of a personal, sensational or intimate nature
  - A person who habitually spreads intimate or private rumours or facts.
  - Trivial, chatty talk or writing.
  - Idle, often sensational and groundless talk about others
- (verb)
- To engage in or spread gossip

## PURPOSE

Wildcare Australia Inc. has a zero tolerance for gossip.

Gossip is an activity that can drain, corrupt, distract and downshift wildlife rehabilitator satisfaction. It has the potential to destroy an organization or an individual person. Most people involved in gossip may not intend to do harm, but gossip can have such a negative impact as it has the potential to destroy a person’s life, and ruin Wildcare’s credibility.

Any member of Wildcare Australia Inc. who is proven to participate in or instigate gossip about a member of Wildcare Australia Inc. will receive disciplinary action and may have their membership revoked.

## WHAT DEFINES “GOSSIP”?

Gossip is:-

- Talking about a person or person’s personal life when they are not present
- Negative and unwelcome gossip criticizing another person or persons
- Repeating information that can injure a person’s credibility or reputation
- Repeating a rumor about another person
- Repeating a rumor that is overheard or hearsay
- Repeating information given to you in confidence without that persons permission or knowledge

## WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF GOSSIP?

Gossip is negative as it results in:-

- Lost productivity and wasted time
- Erosion of trust and morale
- Increased anxiety among volunteers as rumours circulate without any clear information as to what is fact and what is not
- Growing divisiveness among volunteers as people “take sides”
- Hurt feelings and reputations
- Jeopardized chances for the gossipers' advancement as they are perceived as unprofessional; and
- Attrition as good volunteers leave the organization due to the unhealthy volunteer atmosphere.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT IS “GOSSIP”?

If you are tempted to participate in rumors or gossip, it is always a good idea to step back and ask yourself several questions:-

- Is what I am about to say *true*?
- Is it *harmless*?
- Is it *necessary*?
- How would I feel if someone said something *similar about me*?
- How would I feel if I saw my words quoted in the *daily paper tomorrow*?
- How am I going to *feel later* if I say this? (or listen to this)
- Does gossiping honor my *own personal values*?

Much is to be gained by turning down the opportunity to gossip. With conscious effort and conviction, members can do their part to derail the harmful effects of destructive gossip and keep the Wildcare volunteer environment healthy and happy for all.

## WHAT CAN WILDCARE MEMBERS DO TO PREVENT GOSSIP?

It is essential that all Wildcare members always conduct themselves in such a way as to prevent gossip.

It is very easy to get drawn in to the gossip circle, and often difficult to resist. However to avoid getting involved in non-productive and destructive gossip, members should abide by the following points:-

- Do not speak or insinuate another person's name when that person is not present unless it is to compliment, praise or to ask about matters related directly to their volunteer work with Wildcare Australia Inc.

- Refuse to participate when another person speaks about a person not present in a negative light
- Do not respond to an email or pass it on to any other person if it is derogatory about another member
- Actively call a halt to a discussion if the person or persons initiate gossip about another person when that person is not present.
- If a member of Wildcare Australia Inc. does something unethical, incorrect, against Wildcare Australia's policies, or is disruptive use the proper channels to bring it to the attention of the Core Management Committee so that they can resolve the conflict.
- Mind your own business, be a dedicated rehabilitator, behave as an adult and expect the same from others.

### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STOPPING GOSSIP?

It is *everyone's* responsibility to prevent and stop gossip. It is not only the Wildcare Management Committee that is responsible for taking action, but also that of the Species and Placement Coordinators, Office Volunteers and every single member of Wildcare. All members should put a stop to gossip as soon as they hear it.

### WHAT SHOULD WILDCARE MEMBERS DO IF THEY HEAR OTHER MEMBERS GOSSIPING?

Firstly, you should follow the suggestions listed above under the topic "What can Wildcare members do to prevent gossip?"

Secondly, if you become aware that a fellow Wildcare member is gossiping about another member, then you have an ethical duty to report the matter to the Wildcare Core Management Committee. Consider how you would feel if derogatory information about you was being freely discussed amongst other members. We all have an obligation to prevent gossiping in the volunteer environment.

You can report the matter to the Committee confidentially by forwarding the details to the Wildcare Secretary by email to [secretary@wildcare.org.au](mailto:secretary@wildcare.org.au) or by post to PO Box 2379 Nerang Mail Centre Qld 4211. The information provided will only be provided to the Core Management Committee and/or Head Carers and the matter will remain confidential.

A person from the Core Management Committee and/or a Head Carer will be assigned to deal with the issue directly with the person accused. The member responsible for the gossip, will be entitled to a fair hearing and then may be provided with either a verbal or written warning directing them to refrain from further destructive behaviour, or have their membership revoked.

## DISCIPLINARY ACTION FOR HABITUAL GOSSIPERS

Wildcare cannot, and will not, tolerate habitual gossipers.

If a member is found to have been involved (as having either instigated, encouraged or contributed to) gossip against another member, then the following consequences may be taken by the Core Management Committee:-

- Either a verbal or written warning will be provided to the member directing that they immediately cease the gossiping activity – this may include counselling with the member.
- If a further incident occurs, the Wildcare Core Management Committee has the right to:-
  - Discipline the member in a way considered appropriate by the Core Management Committee and/or Head Carers. Disciplinary action may take the form of the following (this list is however not meant to be exhaustive):-
    - revocation of their Permit Endorsement;
    - removal of the member from the Wildcare Rescue List
    - exclusion of the member from attending Wildcare training workshops
    - exclusion of the member from attending Wildcare events including social functions, displays, talks etc.
    - removal of the member from any key role held by them such as Species Coordinator, Placement Coordinator or any position as appointed by the Committee.
  - Terminate that member's membership to the organization in accordance with the Wildcare Australia Inc. Termination of Membership Policy.

## EXAMPLES OF WHAT CONSTITUTES GOSSIP IN A WILDLIFE CARE ORGANIZATION

It is often difficult for members to differentiate what constitutes gossip and what doesn't.

***To try to put things into perspective, think of “gossiping” as “whispering”. If you say something and think that it is necessary to lower your voice, stop and consider that what you are about to say is most likely “gossip”.***

The following examples are provided to assist members in determining what constitutes gossip.

|   | <b><i>Scenario</i></b>  | <b><i>Gossip – Yes or No?</i></b>   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Carer Mary tells the Bird Species Coordinator that she is concerned about a bird in care with Carer Joan. She saw the bird whilst dropping off another animal to Carer Joan's house. The bird was injured and had not been assessed by a vet.   | <b>No</b> – this is not gossip.<br>Carer Mary has an ethical obligation to report this to the appropriate Species Coordinator so that the issue can be dealt with. This is an animal welfare issue.<br>Alternatively, Carer Mary may report the matter to a Head Carer.   |
| 2 | Carer Mary tells Carer Beryl that she thinks that Carer Joan is a bad carer because she had a bird that hadn't been to the vet and that she wasn't looking after properly.  | <b>Yes</b> – this <b>IS</b> gossip.<br>Carer Mary has no right to repeat this information to any other person. If she has reported the issue to the appropriate Species Coordinator or Head Carer, then she should not discuss the matter any further with any person.  |
| 3 | Carer Robert is aware that new Carer Alice rescued a baby koala and she has kept it for several days and has not reported the animal to the Koala Coordinator.  | <b>No</b> – this is not gossip.<br>Carer Robert has an obligation to report this to the Koala Coordinator so that the issue can be dealt with. Carer Alice does not hold a Rehabilitation Permit for koalas and is holding the animal unlawfully.<br>Alternatively, Carer Robert may report the matter to a Head Carer or DERM. |
| 4 | Carer Mary and Carer James are at a workshop and discussing Carer Beatrice. Carer Beatrice cares for a lot of tiny pinkie joeys and she has recently had a number of pinkie joeys die. Carer Mary and Carer James are discussing that Carer Beatrice mustn't be a very good carer then because some of her animals have died. | <b>Yes</b> – this <b>IS</b> gossip.<br>There may be a very genuine reason why several animals in Carer Beatrice's care have not survived. Discussing this can hurt Carer Beatrice's reputation and would hurt Carer Beatrice's feelings.  |

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| 5 | <p>Carer Beth is talking to Carer Louise. Carer Louise starts to talk about Carer Joan and is telling Carer Beth about all the things that she has heard about Beth and that everyone thinks that she isn't a very good carer.</p>  | <p><b>Yes</b> – this <b>IS</b> gossip.</p> <p>Carer Louise has no right to discuss another member whilst that person is not present nor does she have a right to repeat information that she has heard from other people (this is clearly 'hearsay'). Carer Beth is equally responsible in this situation. She should have stopped Carer Louise from speaking and told her that she does not want to listen to gossip and that Carer Louise should refrain from gossiping about another member. Carer Beth should remind Carer Louise about Wildcare's zero-tolerance on gossiping policy.</p> <p>Carer Beth should report this matter to the Core Management Committee or a Head Carer.</p> |
| 6 | <p>Carer Julie is friends with Carer Louise. Carer Louise cares for wombats and Carer Julie is aware that she has over 30 wombats in care and is having trouble meeting the housing and feeding requirements for all of these animals. Carer Louise is a very private person and won't ask for help.</p> <p>Carer Julie is very concerned about not only the welfare of the wombats but also Carer Louise's emotional and physical health so she discusses this matter with the Wombat Coordinator.</p> | <p><b>No</b> – this is not gossip.</p> <p>Carer Julie should speak with either the appropriate Wombat Coordinator or Head Carer so that a solution can be found to help relieve Carer Louise of some of the wombats in care. This could be done confidentially and discreetly so that Carer Louise is not offended.</p> <p>As this is an animal welfare issue also, Carer Julie has an ethical obligation to the animals to report the matter.</p>   |
| 7 | <p>The Wombat Coordinator tells all of the Wildcare telephone people not to send Carer Louise out on any rescues. The Wombat Coordinator also tells all of the wombat carers not to give Carer Louise any more wombats because she isn't coping with the wombats that she has and isn't able to look after them properly. She also tells them that some of her wombats are being taken off her.</p>   | <p><b>Yes</b> – this <b>IS</b> gossip.</p> <p>The Wombat Coordinator has no right to divulge any of this information to any other person, including other wombat carers and/or the Wildcare telephone operators.</p> <p>There are more discreet ways of handling this situation.</p> <p>This will also put Carer Louise's reputation at jeopardy as some members may assume that animals are being taken off her because of poor management or incorrect care.</p>   |
| 8 | <p>Carer Bella is telling Carer Rosalie about Carer John. Apparently Carer John just lost his job and his wife is having an affair.</p>   | <p><b>Yes</b> – this <b>IS</b> gossip.</p> <p>This is private information and should not be discussed with anyone.</p>   |
| 9 | <p>Office Volunteer Joy told Carer Kerry that Volunteer Rhonda was doing a wonderful job helping in the Wildcare Office and should receive an Award for her efforts.</p>  | <p><b>No</b> – this is <b>not</b> gossip.</p> <p>It is nice to praise the work of someone else.</p>  |