

## Child safety in our Synagogues on Lag Ba'Omer

**Tzedek advises that all Jewish organisations in Australia should have written child protection policies in accordance with state legislation and the national principles for child safe organisations.**

**There are additional cultural considerations that are important in the development of organisational policies.**

There are times in the Jewish calendar when our children are more vulnerable. Children and young people are keen to participate in certain Jewish festivals and celebrations, sometimes without a level of adult supervision. In Australia, there has been more and more publicity about concerns regarding our children's safety at Purim and Simchat Torah, often associated with alcohol abuse and other risk taking behaviour.

Another festival where there is potential risk for our young people is Lag Ba'Omer. In Australia it is customary for a number of shul communities and youth movements to run festive bonfires on their grounds to celebrate this festival. It is celebrated on the 33rd day of the Omer which is a different date each year on the Gregorian calendar. The day commemorates the end of the deaths of 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students who were killed during the Omer.

Tzedek would like to raise community awareness at this time. This awareness is based on experience from Israel. In Israel, Lag Ba'Omer has become an annual nightmare it is the worst night of the year for child abuse. The reason for this is OPPORTUNITY. Thousands of children in Israel are out-and-about, generally with minimal or zero adult supervision. Such an evening highlights the need for increased awareness and vigilance in the community.

The risk and level of opportunity may not be the same in Australia, but nonetheless, some of our children attend these functions with groups of friends, possibly without a level of adult supervision.

Tzedek would like to share advise at this time. We suggest sitting down with your children before Lag Ba'Omer to calmly warn them about the nature of the risks and to give them practical tools and ground rules.

1. On Lag Ba'Omer do not walk or hang around by yourself. Stay at all times with one or more friends.
2. If someone who is not a part of your family or group, who is older (eg. more than 2 years your senior), even if they look religious, invites you to go with them, even to do a big mitzvah (eg. to help them with something, or to find an object or location), or with the offer of a present, firmly reject the offer and tell the person they should find an adult to help them.
3. No touching or revealing areas of your or other people's bodies which are normally covered. Just say No and get away.
4. Tell your parents. Especially if anyone tells you NOT to tell something to your parents, you must tell your parents straight away. Your parents will not be angry with you.
5. Fix a to-be-home-by time.