



PART FOUR

Australian values



Australian values

Australian values based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity are central to our community remaining a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live.

Our values define and shape our country and they are a reason why so many people want to become Australian citizens.

Australian citizenship is about living out these values in your everyday life and in your local community. It is therefore very important that you understand the values that all Australian people are expected to respect, share and uphold.

Our values

Commitment to the Rule of Law

All Australians are protected by our laws and legal systems. Australians recognise the importance of laws in maintaining a peaceful and orderly society.

Under the Rule of Law, all Australians are equal in relation to the law and no person or group is above the law. In Australia, everybody should obey the law and not break it at any time, otherwise you will face penalties. You should follow the law even if no one is watching.

Australian laws apply to all people in Australia. This means regardless of your background or culture, you must follow Australian laws.

Parliamentary democracy

Australia's system of government is a parliamentary democracy. Our laws are determined by parliaments elected by the people. This means that Australian citizens are involved in how the country is governed. The power of the government comes from the Australian people because Australian citizens vote for people to represent them in parliament.

Voting is compulsory in Australia. This shows the importance of participating in elections.

Freedom of speech

People in Australia should be able to express their ideas freely, so long as it is within the law. In Australia, people are free to meet in public or private places for social or political discussion. People are also free to say and write what they think about any topic and to discuss their ideas with others. Newspapers, television and radio outlets have the same freedom.

Australians are allowed to peacefully protest against the actions of the government, because tolerance of peaceful public protest is an essential part of democracy.

It is never acceptable to promote violence against another person or group of people (such as because of their culture, ethnicity, religion or background) because it is against Australian values and law. It is also illegal to make false allegations or encourage others to break the law. Other people's freedom of speech and freedom of expression must be respected, as long as such expression is lawful.

Freedom of association

In Australia, people are free to join or leave any group voluntarily as long as it is within the law. People are free to join any legal organisation, such as a political party, trade union, religious, cultural or social group. Individuals cannot be compelled to join an organisation or forced to leave it.

Australians can gather freely with others, including to protest against a government action or an organisation. However, all protests must be within the law. This means they must be peaceful, and must not injure any person or damage property.

Freedom of religion

Australia has no official national religion and people in Australia are free to follow any religion they choose. The government treats all citizens equally, whatever their religion or beliefs. However, religious practices must not break Australian laws.

Religious laws have no legal status in Australia. Australian law must be followed by everyone in Australia, including where it is different from religious laws. Some religious or cultural practices, such as polygamy (being married to more than one person at the same time) and forced marriage, are against the law in Australia and can result in severe legal penalties, including imprisonment.

Religious intolerance is not acceptable in Australian society. All people should be provided equal opportunity to pursue their goals and interests regardless of their ethnicity or religion as long as they are obeying Australian law.



Equality of all people under the law

Australian society values the equal rights of all people, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, race, or national or ethnic origin. There are a number of laws in Australia that protect a person from being treated differently from others.

The law is applied in Australia so that people from different backgrounds are not given preferential treatment, nor discriminated against. For example, Buddhists and people of all other faiths receive the same treatment as Christians. Under our laws, two people can marry each other, including marriage between two men or two women.

Men and women have equal rights in Australia and should be provided equality of opportunity to pursue their goals and interests. Both men and women have equal access to education and employment, can vote at elections, stand for parliament, join the Australian Defence Force and the police force, and are treated equally in courts of law.

It is against the law to discriminate against a person because of their gender. In Australia, it is a right for a woman to get a job ahead of a man, if she has better qualifications and skills.

Both men and women have the right to make their own independent choices about personal matters, such as marriage and religion, and are protected by the law from intimidation or violence. Physical violence against a spouse or partner is never acceptable and it is a criminal offence in Australia.

Divorce is acceptable in Australia. Either a husband or a wife may apply for a divorce to the courts, even if the other spouse wishes to continue the marriage.

Equality of opportunity and a 'fair go'

We believe that everyone deserves a 'fair go' and people should not be limited by any kind of class distinction. Everyone, regardless of their background, is given an equal opportunity to achieve success in life, and ensuring that everyone has the same legal rights is an important aspect of fairness in Australian society.

What someone achieves in life should be a result of their hard work and talents. This means a person should get a job based on their skills and experience, not because of their gender, wealth or ethnicity.

When an organisation needs to fill a job, the law supports that they select the person with the best skills and experience for the job.

Many new migrants in Australia have become leaders in business, their profession, the arts, public service and sport through their hard work and enterprise.



Mutual respect and tolerance for others

In Australia, individuals must respect the freedom and dignity of others, and their opinions and choices.

It is against the law to be violent towards another person. Violence of any kind, including verbal and physical abuse, is illegal. Australians believe in peaceful disagreement and above all the right to be safe and free from violence and intimidation.

In Australia, there are very strict laws concerning the age of sexual consent, which is 16 or 17 depending on which state or territory you reside in. For example, in Australia, a 20 year old man cannot have sexual relations with a 15 year old girl, because that is against the law in all Australian states and territories.

In Australia, the lawful actions of the police should be supported. You should obey a lawful request from the police, because all Australians commit to following the law.

Australia values the principles of mutual respect and tolerance. This means listening to others and respecting their views and opinions, even when they are different from your own. People should be tolerant of each other where they find that they disagree.

Racism has no place in Australia. This includes creating or sharing racially offensive material on the internet or other publications and making racially abusive comments in a public place or at a sporting event.

Our community

Making a contribution

Citizenship gives you the opportunity to fully participate in our nation's life and community. It means that you are ready to fulfil your responsibilities as an Australian citizen. Australians expect everyone living in Australia to participate in our society and make a contribution to our community. Everyone has a responsibility to try and support themselves and their families when they are able to do so.

Compassion for those in need

Australians value 'mateship'. We help each other in times of need. For example, this might mean taking a meal to an elderly neighbour, driving a friend to a medical appointment, or visiting someone who is sick, frail or lonely.

In this spirit of mateship, Australia has a strong tradition of community service and volunteering – to look out for each other and strengthen the community. Volunteering is a great opportunity to share knowledge, learn new skills, and increase your integration into and sense of belonging to the Australian community. There are many opportunities for you to volunteer in Australia.

English as the national language

Australian society values the English language as the national language of Australia, and as an important unifying element of society. People living in Australia should make an effort to learn English.

It is important to learn to speak English because it helps to get an education, a job, and better integrate into the community. It is essential for economic participation and social cohesion. Applicants for Australian citizenship must undertake to make reasonable efforts to learn the English language, if it is not their native language.

Helping to keep our society safe

In Australia, we each have responsibilities to help protect Australian society. For example, if people in Australia suspect their friend or neighbour may be planning to commit a serious crime, they should report this to Australian government authorities as soon as possible. In this way, we can help to protect the safety of our community.

Similarly, if a person in Australia sees or has knowledge of a child being abused, they should report this to the police to investigate.

Online abuse is not accepted in Australia. This is sometimes called cyber abuse. Examples include sharing sexual photos or videos online without consent, stalking a person online, or making racially abusive comments about a person online. Many forms of cyber abuse are illegal in Australia.

Loyalty to Australia

In the citizenship pledge, Australian citizens pledge their loyalty to Australia and its people. Australian citizens may also hold the citizenship of another country or countries if the laws of those countries allow. This is known as dual, or multiple, citizenship. However, even if a person is also a citizen of another country, an Australian citizen within Australia must follow all Australian laws at all times. Some Australian laws must also be followed by Australian citizens even when they are overseas. For example, it's illegal for Australians to be involved in any sexual activity, here or overseas, with a child under 16 years of age.

Australian society is based on our shared obligations not to undermine Australia's interests and security. For example, using social media to share official government secrets would be undermining Australia's interests. Similarly, promoting distrust in and fear of an ethnic community would damage Australian community relations.

In Australia, we come together in times of crisis and take care of each other in good times and bad. During Australia's devastating bushfire season of 2019-20, which resulted in the loss of life, property and wildlife, and environmental destruction, many multicultural communities worked to collect money, clothes and food donations to help people affected by the bushfires. For example, members of the Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian communities in Victoria collected donations at shopping centres and fundraised through local community group events, and members of the Sikh community donated thousands of bottles of water to communities and firefighters in Queensland.



In conclusion

Our democratic institutions and shared Australian values have created our peaceful and stable society.

We have a rich and unique culture to share. As an Australian citizen, you will become part of our nation's story and will contribute to our future. Australia welcomes you. Citizenship is our common bond.

In preparation for the citizenship test, try the practice test questions on pages 44–46.