



GRACE COMMUNION
INTERNATIONAL

CHILD SAFETY PROTOCOLS

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL LTD PO Box 402 Varsity Lakes QLD 4227

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Foreword.....	4
Policy Statement	4
Child Safe Church Protocols.....	4
Goal	4
Background.....	5
Additional Reporting for State of Victoria.....	6
Our Responsibilities	7
The Church as Sanctuary.....	7
Protecting Against Harm or Abuse and Reporting Harm or Abuse.....	7
The Protection of the Weak	8
Blessing of Children and Child Safety	8
Duty of Care	8
General Principles.....	8
Scope of Principles.....	9
Church Community.....	9
The Development of Children and Adolescents	10
Guidelines Concerning Touching.....	10
Stages of Development	11
Discipline.....	11
Participation and Empowerment of Children	11
Responsibility and Accountability	12
Responsibilities of the Denomination.....	12
Responsibilities of the National Church office in liaison with the National Youth Ministry Coordinator/Team	12
Responsibilities of the Local Congregation.....	13
Responsibilities of Leaders and Helpers	14
Responsibilities of Parents.....	14
Property (Buildings and Grounds)	14
Practical Safeguards	14

Internal Considerations	15
Outdoor Considerations	16
Congregational Safety Audits.....	16
People (Recruiting and Selection).....	16
Reliance on Screening of Applicants	16
Written Application Forms.....	17
Selection Process for Volunteers.....	17
Interview Process	17
References.....	17
Use of non-Christians, People from another Denomination and non-Members .	17
Minimum requirements for all youth workers by state law	17
Code of Conduct and other Policies	19
Modelling	19
Reviews and Accountability	20
Staff Training	20
Programs	20
Programming	20
Medication	22
Transportation Register (PGM4).....	22
Administration and Communication.....	23
Insurance	23
A Note on Pastoral Care.....	23
Reporting Accidents and Incidents	24
Prevention.....	24
Preparation	24
Responding to an Accident or Emergency.....	25
Media	25
Responding to an Incident	26
Indicators of Possible Harm	26
Family Influences	26
Behavioural Indicators	27

Visual Indicators	27
Vulnerability of Children to Abuse	27
Responding to Harm	28
The Need for Appropriate Responses	28
Responding to and reporting accidents, harm and abuse	28
Responding to an Incident	29
Responding to Harm	30
Signs of Harm	30
General rules for handling suspicions of allegations	31
Reporting sexual abuse, or suspicions of sexual abuse	31
Cases of Family Violence, Sexual or Physical Abuse.....	33
Allegations or suspicions involving a Pastor	34
Harm Report (PGM8).....	34
Ongoing Care	35

Child Safety Protocols – Policy and Procedures

Introduction

Foreword

One of the most important tasks of the Church is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout our communities. This role for the Church was given to us by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (28:16-20), where Jesus tells us to go throughout the world to share the Good News by preaching, teaching and baptising. In order for us as a church to share this Good News with children and young people, we must provide a safe environment in which the sharing of the Good News can happen.

Policy Statement

Grace Communion International has a deep concern for the wholeness and wellbeing of each individual. Our church seeks to safeguard the welfare of all people, regardless of age, who come into contact with the church and its ministries. It is the responsibility of each individual within the fellowship of the church to ensure the physical, spiritual, emotional, and sexual safety of our children and young people.

Child Safe Church Protocols

The protocols will address the issues of child safety, sexual abuse, family violence and the creation of a safe physical environment for children, through the development of effective guidelines in the following areas:

- The selection/recruitment of persons who wish to work with children
- An ongoing training program for all persons who work with children - an annual briefing/training of leaders
- The development of simple guidelines for the maintenance of church buildings in a manner that makes them safe for children.
- Processes for reporting and responding to suspected child abuse
- Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

Goal

The goal of the child safety protocols is, as far as possible, to ensure that congregations provide a safe place for children and young people to grow and develop and ensure that if harm occurs it is dealt with appropriately. The protocols are an endeavour to minimise, or remove anything that could represent a threat to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of children and young people.

The care of all of our children and young people is served when we:

- become better informed about the safety and the care of children and young people;
- work towards reducing the factors which contribute to the harm of children;
- listen to children and support them;
- empower children to be able to raise concerns and seek help
- treat children with the dignity and respect they deserve;
- welcome all children and acknowledge that some are particularly vulnerable;

- seek to promote the cultural safety of children who are Aboriginal or from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, recognizing that cultural identity is fundamental to a child's safety and wellbeing.
- acknowledge the particular importance of safety for children with a disability, and the need to encourage their participation and inclusion
- take actions on suspicions we may have about children who may be at risk, or the inappropriate actions of others towards them; and
- introduce standard principles and procedures to protect children from harm, and to protect innocent adults from wrongful accusation.

Background

This policy and guidelines now incorporate the Child Safety Standards implemented in Victoria in January 2017. There are seven standards which incorporate three overarching principles:

- the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- the cultural safety of children from culturally and or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- the safety of children with a disability

As a national organisation, we have adopted these seven standards as best practice for all our congregations nationwide.

To create and maintain a child safe environment, Grace Communion International will ensure that it implements these seven standards which are:

- strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
- a child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- a code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Grace Communion International has a rich history of ministry to the children and young people. This ministry takes place in a variety of settings - children's church, youth groups, weekly services, camps, church socials, and activities where child care is offered as part of some special occasion. For the most part, this work is carried out by faithful adult volunteers who give their time and expertise and without whom this ministry would not be possible. Ministry to children and young people has never been taken lightly and we are compelled to recognise that there are people and situations which represent a threat to children. We must create a safe environment for children, young people and families in our churches and we recognise that this responsibility is greater than ever before.

The church must be beyond reproach in this matter. To say this is to make a statement about the safety of the physical environment we conduct activities in, and the level of competent, caring supervision that we guarantee to our families, children and young people.

In approving this policy and guidelines, the Grace Communion International requires those working with children and young people to be more aware than ever before of procedures of good practice in securing the safety of children and young people. The policy, procedures and practices of the church in relation to the provision of a safe environment for children and young people are based on three criteria:

1. the need to protect children and young people in our care;
2. the need to protect leaders and teachers (e.g. from undue temptation or from behaving in ways which may be well-intentioned but inadvisable, or from false allegations); and,
3. the need to protect the church, especially as an institution, from litigation.

Additional Reporting for State of Victoria

Reportable Conduct Scheme:

In 2017 the Victorian government passed legislation to enable the Reportable Conduct Scheme to be established and to enable oversight of the scheme by the Commission for Children and Young People. This came into effect for religious organizations in Victoria in January 2018. Under the Reportable Conduct scheme GCI (Vic) is required to respond to allegations of child-related misconduct made against their Employees, Volunteers or Contractors and report those allegations to the Commission for Children and Young People.

When the head of an organisation becomes aware of a reportable allegation against an employee, volunteer or contractor, they must notify the Commission for Children and Young People within three business days. Within 30 calendar days the head of the organisation must provide the Commission with detailed information about the allegation, disciplinary or other actions undertaken and the response of the worker or volunteer to the allegation. The Commission requires that heads of organisations use the online form for reporting, which will guide them through the notification process.

What is misconduct that may involve reportable conduct?

This refers to behaviour that breaches a code of conduct or workplace expectation (such as a departure from accepted standards that was deliberate or seriously negligent and where the Employee, Volunteer or Contractor was indifferent to the welfare of those affected), and involves one or more of the 5 types of reportable Conduct as follows:

- A sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of a child, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the offence has been commenced or concluded
- Sexual misconduct committed against, with, or in the presence of a child
- Physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- Any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- Significant neglect of a child

*NB Please check state legislation for Reportable Conduct Scheme as applicable in your

Our Responsibilities

The Church as Sanctuary

The ancient and historic tradition of sanctuary has been around for over 3000 years. It extends through the Bible with the provision of protection to the stranger being a clear biblical imperative.

The church has always stressed the sanctity of human life and the importance and worth of each individual as a child of God. It is always our call and spiritual mandate to protect those who are entrusted to our care. As the Church of Jesus Christ, we are committed to protecting the children and are bound by God to intervene on behalf of any child we believe is being harmed. A twenty-first century manifestation of sanctuary is the provision of a safe environment for children and young people.

Protecting Against Harm or Abuse and Reporting Harm or Abuse

The Victoria Child Safe Standards were to be implemented by Faith Communities by 1 January 2017 to ensure the safety of children. As a result of the inquiries and research and the Royal Commission Betrayal of Trust Inquiry, new criminal laws were introduced:

- **Grooming offence** which targets communication, including online communication, with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse
- **Failure to protect offence** that applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so
- **Failure to disclose offence** that requires adults to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so)

Dept Justice and Regulations website:

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/proecting+chidren+and+families/betayal+of+trust+implementation>

Grooming behaviours refer to actions deliberately undertaken to befriend and influence a child or a member of the child's family, with the intention of achieving sexual activity with the child. It can occur in person or online (eg Facebook) and is designed to help the perpetrator establish an emotional connection in order to lower the child's inhibitions. In most states and territories of Australia, procuring or grooming a child for 'unlawful sexual activity' is a sexual offence and must be reported to the police. (Moores CP Toolkit 2016).

Any person in a position of authority within the church has a responsibility to reduce or remove substantial risks to children. A person of authority is anyone who has the power or responsibility to reduce such a risk. In particular if a person of authority knows of a likely risk that a child may be abused by another person associated with the church, they must not fail to act and remove or reduce this risk. Failure to protect is a criminal offence under Victoria law.

Any adult who has a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence in Victoria.

Ref: www.childsafestandards.org.au

The Protection of the Weak

In the context of our present world, children and young people constitute a large percentage of the world's poor and oppressed. In some countries, they are caught in the grip of war, famine or poverty. Within our own culture, children are not only the victims of poverty but also the victims of physical abuse and sexual exploitation. If we are to be true to the Gospel and the message inherent in the Scriptures, then, as a Christian community, we must take the safety of children and young people very seriously. Children are precious gifts from God and are to be nurtured and protected from the ills and dangers of our society.

Blessing of Children and Child Safety

Keeping children physically safe is not the sole responsibility of parents. As a caring, nurturing church, all community members must take responsibility for the care and safety of children - we implicitly promise this at the blessing of a child. We recognise the sacredness of each person from birth and carry a commitment to helping persons to live life in the fullness that Jesus proclaimed. This commitment is more than a warm sentiment. Grace Communion International in Australia has a duty of care towards children.

Duty of Care

Children and young people must be cared for and ministered to in an environment that is free from danger or harm. The physical, spiritual and emotional environment must be such that at all times children and young people are affirmed and nurtured in a place where they are safe.

How do we do this? In many ways, achieving a safe environment is very simple. We apply the same safety rules and standards that we have in our own homes. We follow the safety standards recommended by police, hospitals and experts in child care. We look to see what is happening in our schools and we use these standards as a minimum guide.

Because we are the church, we are not exempt from taking measures to ensure that children within our community are safe. We cannot assume that children will be safe in our buildings or attending our programs merely because we are the church.

General Principles

With the care of children, a duty of care includes the provision of adequate supervision, safe premises, grounds and equipment.

When a child is engaged in an activity of the Congregation that is designed for children, it is the responsibility of the Team Leaders and volunteers to ensure that adequate safety measures have been taken. Team Leaders need to ensure that all activities offered to children are safe, including an assurance that all adults helping are trained, and that the physical environment is safe for the activity being undertaken.

All volunteers need to protect children from injury or from being injured by others. Volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care to see that neither their acts nor their omissions cause damage or injury to other people. In this way, all volunteers will avoid breaching the duty of care.

When considering the level of care, a beneficial question to ask is:

Given what a person in my position should know or could reasonably foresee,
what steps can I put in place to ensure that those under my care are being afforded
an environment which is as safe and respectful as I can reasonably provide?

Scope of Principles

This statement of principles applies to all congregations within Grace Communion International in Australia. These principles apply to those activities that are designed for and aimed at providing ministry to children and young people within our congregations, regionally and nationally.

These principles are offered as a general guide and are not exhaustive. It is not possible to give an exhaustive list covering the wide variety of accidents that may occur, or the dangers that could exist. The above descriptions endeavour to contain the underlying principles that ensure safety is offered to children and young people in our care.

Church Community

Places of Harm

It is unfortunate that the actions of a few have brought the Church into disrepute when people take advantage of the trust placed in them by harming children in their care. As a result, there are some who see or have experienced the Church as a place of harm. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this:

Opportunity: Churches are very vulnerable to the problem of child abuse due to their extensive involvement in children's work. Because of this work, they are in a position that attracts people with a sexual interest in children. There are a variety of occasions where a leader and child could be alone. This may occur as a result of dropping children home, counselling, discipleship, baptism classes, new Christian classes and camps. All of these provide opportunity for harm to occur.

Shortage of Leaders: Because of the numbers of children involved in the Church there is often a shortage of leaders and helpers. Often those who are invited to help, or volunteer are readily accepted without question.

Poor Screening: It is unfortunate that in the eagerness to find leaders for Children's Ministry, shortcuts are at times taken in an effort to fast track people into ministry or to reduce 'hurdles' which may discourage people from applying. At other times, churches rely too heavily on screening, using it as the only form of harm reduction.

Inadequate Supervision: The nature of the Church is to be a trusting environment where the lines of responsibility for supervision are not always clear and assumptions can be easily made.

Naivety: There is a tendency in churches to see sexual abuse as another denomination's problem rather than something that can occur within their own congregation.

Ignorance: Poor understanding regarding the forms of harm and their perpetrators leads to assumptions being made in risk assessment. Adult friendships formed in churches have at times taken precedent over believing a child when they report harm. This often results in a minimisation of the child's pain and breaks down the trust relationship between child and adults.

Powerlessness: Children, and at times leaders, have a poor understanding of how churches are run and may be unaware of how or to whom to report harm or the potential of harm.

Policies: Churches can increase the effects of harm on children because of a lack of policies in dealing with allegations of harm. Children may also not be consulted in the making of decisions that affect them.

Forgiveness over Repentance and Justice: On occasions, Churches place a higher priority on forgiveness by the victim over the need for repentance in the life of the offender and justice to be served (discussed further in sections 12 and 13). Failure to report harm and appropriately involve the police allows for a greater opportunity of repeat offending, and a reduction in true repentance, justice and in the church's ability to address the factors surrounding the offending behaviour.

Inappropriate Response: Churches may only regard harm perpetrated by leaders as a "sin issue", rather than also regarding it as an abuse of "positional power". Churches have at times had a higher concern for accusations of criminal negligence, costly litigation and insurance increases, than for the victims and their healing.

Understanding other contributors to harm

While it is easier, it is too simplistic to blame the offender for the harm without considering what influences have contributed to the occurrence of harm. Instead, there is usually a range of factors contributing to harm. In the family setting, harm can occur when the family experiences high levels of stress, tiredness, a lack of parenting skills, or suffer from domestic violence and family breakdown.

Other factors also include:

- Substance abuse
- Poverty
- Accelerated social and technological change
- Tolerance of violence
- Financial stress
- Isolation from the extended family, neighbours and the wider community
- The perpetrator's own was once the victim of harm.

The Development of Children and Adolescents

Guidelines Concerning Touching

We live in an age where child abuse is a reality in our society. The Church should deal with this issue as a "good shepherd" by taking steps to protect the children in our care. A "touching policy" will safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them. The guidelines below are recommended for anyone working with children and youth:

- While hugging, kisses and other forms of appropriate physical affection between workers and children are important for a child's development, it is generally recommended that workers cease from engaging in these activities in our church setting.
- Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or young person. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in a nursery worker's lap, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.)
- Touching should be initiated by the child or young person. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.
- Touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children or young people, teachers or leaders. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adults are present, and the touching is open to observation. This rule is especially important when changing a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the toilet.
- Touching behaviour should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As workers with children and young people, our behaviour must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.
- A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child.
- Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

- Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behaviour by other workers with their ministry leader or a pastor.

Guidelines re social media

Staff and Volunteers must not condone or participate in bullying behaviour either in person or on social media, which seeks to target a person, to cause them distress and humiliation or to exploit them, or cause exclusion from a peer group

- Ensure that any messages which are posted are positive and encouraging, and not post messages, status updates or links to material or content that is inappropriate or offensive such as pornography, racial or religious slurs, information which encourages criminal skills, gambling or illicit drugs.
- Ensure that social media conversations uphold a high standard of conduct and not participate in any sexually explicit conversations via social media, chat rooms, gaming or any other means

Stages of Development

Throughout the various stages of development of children, it is important to plan activities and teaching times that reflect the variety of ways people learn. Programs should encourage the development of a child. The language used in teaching and prayer should reflect the child's everyday language, with any new words or terms properly explained. During interaction with children it is beneficial to use open-ended questions rather than closed questions.

Discipline

Regardless of the child's developmental stage, there are common principles in disciplining a child that need to be followed:

- Be sure the child understands why the behaviour is wrong
- Outline choices of positive and negative behaviour
- Clearly explain the consequences of each choice (both the positive and negative)
- When sharing feelings about misbehaviour do not manipulate, exaggerate or hold them responsible for YOUR feelings
- Be consistent over time (what is inappropriate today should also be inappropriate tomorrow/yesterday)
- Be fair and equal with all the children
- Redirect the child into positive behaviour
- Give positive reinforcement and praise for correct behaviour
- Maintain open and honest communication
- Don't lecture, talk down to, or threaten children

As previously mentioned, under no circumstances should a leader or helper, even in fun, use physical punishment.

Please refer to the Stages of Development chart in the Additional Resources handout.

Participation and Empowerment of Children

Standard Seven requires organisations to have simple and accessible processes which help children understand how to report abuse. The basis for this is because children often do not report as they are not comfortable, or they do not know how to raise their concerns or allegations of abuse. Strategies to help children can include:

- promoting age appropriate education about standards of behaviour for children, healthy and respectful relationships, resilience and child abuse awareness and prevention
- promote child safety standards in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand and user-friendly for children
- recognize children from Aboriginal or CALD backgrounds may require specific care and support regarding child safety issues
- recognize that children who have a disability may require specific care and support regarding child safety issues

Responsibility and Accountability

Who is responsible to ensure that this policy and the above principles are implemented and practiced? Accountability rests with the national administration of the Church, the local congregation and parents.

Responsibilities of the Denomination

Grace Communion International Ltd has a responsibility to provide leadership and support to local congregations in the area of youth ministry.

This responsibility is expressed in a variety of ways, by:

- notifying local congregations of new legislative requirements in child protection;
- providing leadership and consultation opportunities with local congregations on Child protection issues;
- advising congregations of training opportunities;
- recommending guidelines that will improve the running of children's ministry;
- providing a voice at a denominational level on matters relating to children's ministry
- supporting smaller churches in the implementation of recommended guidelines and policies;
- working with other denominations in increasing the standard of children's ministry; and,
- exploring new ways of providing culturally relevant children's ministry.

Responsibilities of the National Church office in liaison with the National Youth Ministry Coordinator/Team

The National Church office in liaison with the Youth Ministry Coordinator/Team will be responsible for providing oversight of local congregations. In terms of providing a safe environment for children and young people, such oversight will involve:

- Regular consultations with the congregations involving communication with the congregational Child Safety Officer to discuss:
 - what had been done to provide a safe environment for children and young people;
 - procedures surrounding the selection of youth ministry leaders and volunteers; and
 - various aspects of program/activity planning and delivery, and curriculum materials in use in programs for children and young people.
- Assisting in the training of safety programs
- Aiding congregations in conducting their annual safety audits
- Updating congregations on any changes to child safety legislation and guidelines.

Responsibilities of the Local Congregation

To assist children's ministry in being effective it is important that the church has safe facilities that create a positive atmosphere. A similar priority should be placed on the aesthetics of children's ministry areas as for the church sanctuary. The oversight of the application of this policy in the local church shall be the responsibility of the congregation and Local Pastor.

The local church is responsible for the appointment of suitable leaders as required. While a local church may not have the resources to fully train their own leaders, groups of local churches can combine to provide a training event, to purchase quality training resources for leaders to read and/or send their leaders to special training days. Until a leader is competent, the congregation must provide adequate supervision for new leaders. Their training should include practical skills, spiritual formation, theological reflection and church philosophy at a level adequate for the tasks involved. Where ministries are co-educational, it is desirable that the church provide both male and female leadership.

Congregations are encouraged to look annually at their own situation and decide how they are getting on, and what needs to be done next to ensure the safety of children and youth. This will include an annual safety audit and the annual training of those working with children and young people.

One area of special consideration is the responsibility of the local church in clearly communicating to the wider congregation what constitutes harm to children, and how to respond to allegations of harm. Failure to effectively communicate this may not only allow harm to occur, but increase the suffering caused by inappropriate responses and time delays.

It is important that congregations provide children with the opportunity and encouragement to voice their suggestions or feelings at church, ministry meetings or special forums. By inviting their participation, the church communicates to the children their value and contribution to church life, especially those areas directly affecting them.

Where possible every congregation shall appoint a Child Safety Officer. The role of this officer focuses on prevention procedures.

The role of the Child Safety Officer is to:

- Consult with children in the congregation and seek their feedback on decisions that affect them
- Make information available in child-friendly ways
- Ensure that children know how to raise concerns
- facilitate and promote the dissemination of information on risk management and the protection of children and young people;
- advise on and possibly facilitate training opportunities for all who work directly or indirectly with children and young people;
- facilitate such vetting procedures as may be required in respect of would-be volunteer workers;
- be available to leaders and others associated with the congregation who may wish to express concerns relating to practices or procedures;
- monitor, on behalf of the congregation, the continuing implementation of this code of good practice by all ministries under the oversight of the congregation; and
- liaise with their Local Pastor and/or LAC who are responsible for the use of church properties, to ensure that such groups are aware of the safety protocols, and that the properties are maintained in such a way as to protect children.

The role of the Child Safety Officer is a responsible one. This person should show competence, maturity and experience in this area and be one who attracts the respect and trust of others.

Responsibilities of Leaders and Helpers

Youth ministry volunteers (both leaders and helpers) carry a heavy weight of responsibility for modelling Christianity and influencing those entrusted to them. Inherent in this position comes authority and power, which may be open to abuse. It is recognised that a volunteer's simple request can be a seemingly impossible expectation for a child to decline. Children are often taught not to question the authority of adults, and from a child's perspective, to not conform would normally result in punishment or loss of privileges. It is therefore imperative that all volunteers:

- conduct themselves in a way that reflects the values of God's kingdom;
- show that all children are respected, and their opinions valued;
- be a voice to the wider church for the concerns of children;
- encourage and praise children in their development; and,
- allow children to make mistakes.

Youth ministry leaders also have a responsibility to the parents to provide a positive environment for their children and to notify the parents of all planned programs, including any changes or delays.

Responsibilities of Parents

The role of parenting is a vital one and implies responsibility as the primary care giver for the child. Parents have the primary responsibility in training their children with regards to their spiritual development and the church is happy to help assist this process through its youth ministry programs and activities. In this light, youth ministry leaders look to partner with parents in developing a ministry that meets the needs of the local congregation.

Parents place high expectations on churches to provide the best care possible for their children. To this end, parents and primary care givers are expected to support their local youth ministry by completing various Child Safety Documents. For example, the Personal and Medical Information – Family (PPL4f) form is designed for communicating important medical information to youth ministry volunteers. It is important that parents communicate to youth ministry leaders that their child is required to take any self-administered medication so that the leaders can monitor this. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that the church has up-to-date information on their child as can be reasonably expected. A church's ability to properly care for a child is diminished when this information is not communicated. Any information gathered will be stored and accessed according to privacy legislation.

Property (Buildings and Grounds)

Practical Safeguards

Buildings and grounds must be made safe for children. Parents need the security of knowing that there are no hidden dangers within our facilities. Achieving safety involves following some very practical safeguards that prevent accidents or unfortunate incidents.

The physical wellbeing of property is the responsibility of the local church. It is recognised that the vast majority of our congregations meet in rented facilities and as such should do what is reasonable to ensure that properties are safe for children and young people. .

Internal Considerations

(The following considerations in no way represent an exhaustive list)

Cupboards and Drawers - should have child-resistant catches where:

- sharp objects such as knives or scissors are stored;
- plastic bags are kept; and
- household cleaners or garden supplies are stored.

Electrical Equipment - including power points and cords should be checked regularly. Safety plugs should be plugged into power points when they are not in use.

First Aid - Groups should have their own approved first aid kit, or ready access to one. First aid kits must be regularly checked to ensure there are adequate supplies and that no items are out of date. All groups need a person with a current first aid certificate. St John's Ambulance runs a first aid course specifically designed for people who work with children and young people.

Plastic Bags - are a hazard to children and should be stored in a locked cupboard or drawer.

Playpens and Cots - must be checked regularly. They must be kept in good working order. Playpens and cots should not have sharp edges. They must conform to Australian Standards.

Poisons - are a common threat to children. They are often stored in kitchens. Simple precautions can prevent an unfortunate accident from happening:

- Keep all cleaning products and other poisons in their original packaging.
- Do not store poisonous household products under the sink or where a child may reach. Poisonous household products include detergents (especially for dishwashers), disinfectant, bleach, furniture polish. These products should be stored in a separate locked cupboard.
- Wash out empty containers before throwing them away.
- Check walls, railings, etc. for old, peeling, lead-based paints.
- Do not leave matches or lighters where a child may reach.
- Keep insecticides, lighter fluid, paint, paint thinners or petrol in original containers and locked in a cupboard.
- Do not keep poisonous liquids in unlabelled containers.
- Keep the phone number for the Poisons Information Centre (13 11 26) in your first aid kit and/or near the telephone.

Step, Stairs, Hallways - must have good lighting and non-slip treads with secure handrails of an appropriate height for older children.

suited to the age and stage of development of the children using them. They should be able to be cleaned

Toys – those used in children's church or provided to amuse children when child-minding at an event should be chest. Wooden toys should be smooth and painted with non-toxic paint. No toys should have small pieces that regularly allowed should be stored in a container that does not have a heavy top. Toy chests with lids should be fitted with a hinge/latch system that will stop the chest from closing on a child as they remove toys from the

windows should have security screens to prevent a child falling. Fly screens must be strong enough not to collapse if someone falls into them or leans against them.

Windows - should be fitted with child resistant catches, especially those windows which are very high. High

Outdoor Considerations

Barriers and Fences - stair or veranda barriers help prevent falls. Care must be taken to ensure that openings on a gate or veranda are narrow enough not to permit a child's head to become stuck. Children should not have direct access to areas where cars are parked, busy roads, or building sites. These points should be securely fenced.

Biting and Stinging Pests - buildings and grounds should be checked regularly for infestations of biting and stinging pests such as spiders, bees, wasps, centipedes. Buildings should be sprayed regularly with an environmentally friendly substance.

Plants - Did you know that many familiar popular plants are poisonous? Poisonous plants are a potential hazard to young children and should be removed from our buildings and grounds. For an updated list of hazardous plants and trees the local churches should contact the appropriate authority in their region.

Playground Equipment - must adhere to Australian Standards. Any equipment not meeting these standards should be dismantled.

Sun - outdoor programs need to be built around an awareness of the damage that the sun can do to our skin. All groups need to adopt a "slip, slop, slap" policy. No hat, no play. Groups may need to supply their own sunscreen to ensure that all children receive adequate sun protection and constantly educate adults and children on correct clothing and protection.

Congregational Safety Audits

A regular audit should be done to review the safety of the physical environment. This check should be carried out yearly and if required, in connection with the review of rental agreements. The Annual Safety Checklist (PTY1) located in the "Child Safety Protocols – Forms" document, is designed to assist you with this process. Procedures for handling emergent matters of safety need to be developed.

Safety reviews will address the following broad areas:

- the people procedures for appointing staff; the probationary period and supervision of all workers;
- the safety of property in terms of the presence and activities of children and young people;
- the church's programs for children and young people, ensuring that attention is given to the physical safety of all who participate; and
- the church's ministry with children and young people from the perspective of emotional and spiritual security.

People (Recruiting and Selection)

It is important that the task of recruiting and selecting leadership for programs is taken seriously and done carefully. As a rule, the more that is known about a person and his/her experience with children, the better the decision will be about that person's ability for leadership.

Reliance on Screening of Applicants

The effectiveness of screening prospective volunteers is reliant on the availability of accurate information on the volunteer. There is always the potential for a person to be a 'first time offender'. Additionally, a prospective volunteer who has never been reported to police or the previous church leadership is in a position to slip through the cracks and re-offend. As a result, we can never become complacent by relying on screening alone to ensure harm will not occur. Screening is no substitute for appropriate supervision and accountability.

However, the use of a thorough screening process is an essential step in helping reduce the risk of harms occurring.

Written Application Forms

It is recommended that those volunteering to serve regularly in youth ministry complete the Volunteer Application for Youth Ministry (PPL1) form. It is important that only those who have been successful in their application be utilised for children's ministry. These forms should be reviewed and updated every two years.

Selection Process for Volunteers

The Local Pastor will assess volunteers for their suitability to work in children's ministry. This assessment will relate to the skills, spiritual gifts and contributions being offered, and will often include validation from various members of the local congregation, e.g. Pastoral Team and Local Advisory Council members, parents and feedback from the youth. An interview may be required at the discretion of the local pastor.

Interview Process

When reasonable, it is recommended that an interviewing team approved by the local church interview all applicants. Where possible, the interviewing team should consist of a minimum of three people, contain both male and females, and include where suitable: an elder (or other spiritual leader), ministry leader and a parent. The interviewing team should regard information received as confidential. Any information gathered will be collected, stored and accessed based on the processes and procedures outlined by the national office. It is important that during the interview, the applicant be made fully aware of their role, any expectations or other relevant information (from theological to budgetary areas).

References

It is essential that the interviewing team check each of the applicant's references and include previous churches (in the last five years and children's work experience).

Use of non-Christians, People from another Denomination and non-Members

In Children's Ministry the use of non-Christians, people from another denomination or non-members is ultimately a decision for your local congregation. There are both positive and negative implications in engaging people from each of these groups. Regardless of the applicant's affiliation with the church, it is important that the child's best interests are served, and the values of God's kingdom upheld. For this reason, if a person is not willing to support the principles of your local church, then their application should be declined.

Minimum requirements for all youth workers by state law

All volunteers are required to meet the minimum State requirements for working with children and young people.

Blue Cards Register – QLD

Under Queensland legislation, only those who have applied for a "Suitability Card" (blue card) can be considered for regular ministry to children (unless otherwise exempt). These applications are processed through the Commission for Children and Young People. A volunteer is not permitted to work with a child or young person

without possession of an approved Blue Card. If the applicant is declared not suitable, they must not be allowed to work with children or young people. The Blue Card Register (PPL 3q) must be kept up to date in the local congregation and a copy of this register should be sent to the National Office whenever changes or updates are made.

WWC Check Register - VIC, WA

Volunteers serving in youth ministry in VIC and WA must now apply for a WWC Check. Volunteers are permitted to volunteer once they have applied for the check and hold their lodgement number. An assessment notice will be issued to the volunteer notifying them of their acceptance and their card will follow shortly. If the applicant is declared not suitable, they must not be allowed to work with children or young people. The WWC Check Register (PPL3) must be kept up to date in the local congregation and a copy of this register should forward to the National office whenever changes or updates are made.

Working with Children Check - NSW

A Working with Children Check is a prerequisite for anyone in child-related work. It involves a national criminal history check and review of findings of workplace misconduct.

The result of a Working With Children Check is either a clearance to work with children for five years, or a bar against working with children. Cleared applicants are subject to ongoing monitoring, and relevant new records may lead to the clearance being revoked. The Check is fully portable which means it can be used for any paid or unpaid child-related work in NSW for as long as the worker remains cleared. Other states:

Working with Children Check – ACT

www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/app/answers/detail/a_id1804/kw/wwwvp

Working with Children check – Tas

www.justice.tas.gov.au/working_with_children

Working with children check – NT

www.workingwithchildren.nt.gov.au

Working with children check - SA

<https://screening.sa.gov.au/types-of-check/working-with-children-check>

Team Leader Ministry Descriptions (PPL2)

It is suggested where deemed reasonable that Youth Ministry Leaders complete a Team Leader Ministry Description (PPL2) with their Local Pastor. This description outlines the major responsibilities of the leader, who they report to, their length of service and the date of their next review. This process provides volunteers serving in leadership roles the opportunity to formally discuss the expectations of the local congregation and local pastor, to raise questions regarding their role in youth ministry, and set a specific time-frame of service in their particular role.

Upon completion of time of service, volunteers and the local pastor have the opportunity to reassess individual performances and congregational needs. It may be decided that a volunteer is best suited to serve in a particular leadership role and both the local pastor and the volunteer are happy to keep the current arrangement. In such a case a new Ministry Description must be completed. In the event a new Team leader is to be appointed to a particular leadership role there should be a clear exit procedure that aids in the positive transition of a volunteer into another role of services should this be desired.

Volunteer Agreement ([CSE3-OA_Application_Form.doc](#))

All volunteers serving in youth ministry – aside from team leaders – are required to complete a Volunteer Agreement (PPL5) with their particular team Leader. This form addresses what is expected by all volunteers with regards to Code of Conduct, their understanding of the Child Safety Policy, and our Duty of Care. Volunteers will also have the opportunity to clarify their roles and responsibilities in regard to specific activities they will be engaging in.

Occasional Workers with Children and Young People

There are situations where those who work with children or young people may be described as “occasional” — they may be parent helpers who operate on a roster system, or it could be “a friend of a friend of the person next door” who is an expert in some skill. Such a person may be completely unknown to the people in the church. They are required to complete a Volunteer Agreement (CSE3-OA_Application_Form.doc).

Code of Conduct and other Policies

All volunteers and applicants should possess and agree to support the church’s Statement of Beliefs and Code of Ethics and other policies including a code of conduct. The current Code of Conduct outlined in youth ministry is as follows:

Continued service in youth ministry is subject to satisfactory standards of conduct being maintained. Volunteers must operate in accordance with the denominations Statement of Beliefs and Code of Conduct. Volunteers are asked to wear attire that is modest and suitable to their particular activity or ministry. Involvement in youth ministry activities prohibits intoxication or possession of intoxicants, sexual misconduct, use or possession of illegal drugs, stealing, smoking, foul language, disorderly conduct, practical jokes, malicious destruction of property, or refusal to co-operate with other volunteers or the Team Leader. Volunteers found to have wilfully damaged church property will be asked to reimburse the cost of repairs or to replace the damaged item(s). Failure to uphold the policies, procedures and guidelines that support youth ministry activities will result in immediate dismissal.

Where there are concerns about the Code of Conduct, these should be brought to the attention of the relevant Pastor as soon as possible. The Pastor should promptly meet with the volunteer or applicant in an appropriate setting and explain to them the Code of Conduct expectations and the concerns raised. The volunteer or applicant should be given the chance to discuss this with the Pastor.

If the concerns remain relevant after this meeting, any applicant should not be deemed a suitable person for the volunteer position. If the person is already a volunteer, appropriate steps should be taken to provide them with additional training and close supervision. Where the concern is significant, the person should be removed from the volunteer position immediately.

Where there has been a breach in the Code of Conduct, the relevant Pastor should meet with the volunteer and explain the breach. The person should be removed from the volunteer position [at least until the matter is resolved or appropriate steps will be taken]

Modelling

Through the ministries of your church, leaders and helpers have an opportunity to both teach and model to children the various aspects of being a follower of Jesus. Children often reflect attitudes and actions of significant people in their lives. For this reason, leaders and helpers need to be positive examples in behaviour, attitude and speech.

In the Australian context, put-downs and negative humour is often the norm. Yet children may not see the humour or the context in which a comment is made. For this reason, leaders and helpers are to exercise extreme caution in the way they speak to both children and other adults. It is far better to provide a positive role model to a child than to get a laugh at someone else’s expense.

At no time are sexist, racist or derogatory comments about other religious groups or lifestyles appropriate. We

must be mindful at all times of the diverse nature of families today with single parents, blended families or religions. Leaders must encourage the ministry to be a positive and stable environment for children where they are extended love and acceptance.

Reviews and Accountability

Each person involved in children's ministry should have regular, scheduled opportunities for review and accountability. It is recommended that ongoing reviews of the ministry and of those involved be conducted at least annually. The desire of regular reviews and accountability is to promote a positive environment of communication and support rather than one of criticism and judgment. There ought to be clear lines of accountability that encourage all participants to serve to the best of their ability.

Staff and Volunteer Training

People working with children and young people need to undertake the Childsafe online training, which incorporates understanding the [10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) as drawn from the work of the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and endorsed by COAG in 2018.

The Principles focus is on harm from sexual abuse, but there are other ways that children can come to harm. Childsafe has adopted the 10 Principles and extended their definitions to help organisations keep children in their care safe from all forms of potential harm.

Programs

Programming

An important consideration in the planning of any program is the underlying message the program is designed to give. During the planning process, team leaders and volunteers will take into consideration the age appropriateness and personality types of the children to encourage a positive atmosphere. Activities or games that involve children being unsupervised or in contact with strangers are to be discouraged or steps taken to minimise risk. While segregation of boys and girls for some activities may be beneficial, it is important that leaders carefully assess the appropriateness of any activities that exploit these differences.

Forms PGM1, PGM2, PGM3, PGM4 and PGM5 have been designed to aid those planning activities in addressing all of the needs of participants and their families both prior to and during the running of a youth ministry program. In addition to this, the assessment of possible risk to participants and spectators is taken into consideration during the planning process and monitored throughout the duration of the program. Below a few key areas have been raised for special consideration when planning a program.

Participation

All those who attend an activity should be encouraged to participate to the level of their ability and desire. However, a child must never feel forced or bullied into participating in an activity. Alternatively, children should

not be singled out for special attention as this may result in other children feeling resentment, or an increase in competing for the leader's/helper's attention.

Viewing of media

We live in a world of multimedia with an increasing number of homes that have computers with Internet access and numerous virtual reality games. The media is a powerful tool that can enhance a program. Unless parental approval has been previously obtained, leaders are required to comply with the recommended ratings when viewing or using various forms of media. However, it is also wise to preview the media with regard to its appropriate usage in a Christian Ministry.

Supervision Number

The ratio of adult leaders to children should always be appropriate for the activity in terms of children's age and stage of development. The recommended ratio for adult-child supervision is often 1:6. It is important that both male and female leaders and helpers be present for any ministries that incorporate both boys and girls. Additional or specialised leaders/helpers may be required when a participating child has behavioural problems or a specialised medical condition. These children should always be viewed as people not problems.

While there may be occasions where there is only one leader and one helper involved in an activity, it is preferable that the minimum be two leaders. A leader or helper should not be alone with a child where they cannot be observed.

The following suggested supervision numbers is to be used only as a guide and will vary depending on the nature of the activity, its location, experience of the children and leaders, and the age of the children. The team leader must consider all these variables when setting appropriate leadership numbers.

Base camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:10 is the minimum adult-child ratio
Bush-walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:10 is the minimum adult-child ratio for day bushwalks. 1:6 is the minimum adult-child ratio for overnight bushwalks. All leaders must have current first aid training appropriate to the activity. Leaders should have the necessary experience and training required for a specified activity. Orienteering 1:20 is the minimum adult-child ratio for city or town parklands with well-defined boundaries. 1:15 is the minimum adult-child ratio for neighbourhood streets, and in small areas of bushland with well-defined boundaries and close proximity to centres of population. 1:10 is the minimum adult-child ratio for larger areas of bushland and more remote bushland areas.
Swimming (Venue 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:10 is the minimum adults-child ration for pools and confined, shallow, natural-water venues. At least one leader must hold a current: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming & Water Safety Cert, or Bronze Medallion of the *RLSS of Australia, or Bronze Medallion of the **SLSAA, or Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA)
Swimming (Venue 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:10 in the minimum adult-child ration for deep and/or flowing water at non-surf beaches, lakes, channels, rivers and dams. At least one leader must hold a Bronze Medallion (RLSS), or Bronze Medallion (SLSAA), or a Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA), for every twenty swimmers (1:20) or part of. All other leaders must hold a current: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUSTSWIM Teacher of Swimming & Water Safety Cert, or Bronze Medallion of the *RLSS of Australia, or Bronze Medallion of the **SLSAA, or Surf Rescue Certificate (SLSAA), or Have documented swimming experience, water safety and rescue training, knowledge and experience of the venue, and The ability to competently initiate emergency response procedures, including CPR

Leaders for the mentioned activities and many other activities must have relevant experience and training. When planning a program for youth it is advised that the youth ministry leaders contact the specific state regulatory body that governs the safety of a particular activity, for up to date safety guidelines.

Medication

The appropriate use of medication can assist a child in maintaining a high quality of life and increase their ability to participate in activities. Conditions such as asthma and diabetes can often be treated in such a way as to have minimal impact on a child's life. It is important however that leaders carefully monitor any prescriptive or non-prescriptive medication. The following guidelines are to assist the leader in the positive use of medication and reduce the risk of harm.

Prescription medication

The Personal and Medical Information (PPL4f or PPL4u) form should list any medication, frequency and dosage levels that a child may take during the program. If the prescription of the medication takes place after the completion of the PPL4F or PPL4u form, then the parent should advise the Team Leader of the change. Any relevant instructions are to be given to the Team Leader in writing and then attached to the PPL4f or PPL4u form for future reference.

The Team Leader is to normally supervise the administration of the medication. At no time should the Team Leader administer the medication on behalf of the child. The medication must never be shared, given to another child or taken in a way contrary to the directions. Under consultation with the parent, the Team Leader may choose to look after the medication until it is required.

Non-Prescription medication

During the course of the program, Paracetamol is to be available only to children whose parents have given permission via the Personal and Medical Information form. The Team Leader should normally supervise the administration of non-prescriptive medication. At no time is the Team Leader to administer the medication on behalf of the child. The non-prescriptive medication must never be shared, given to another child or taken in a way contrary to the directions.

At no time are children to take any illegal drugs or alcohol. Children who appear to be under the influence of an illegal drug or alcohol must not be permitted to participate in the program and their parents immediately contacted to collect the child.

Transportation Register (PGM4)

The transportation of children to, from and during a program is an important aspect of the ministry to children. The Transportation Register (PGM4) will aid youth leaders in addressing all of the transport policy requirements. Policies vary from church to church as to the most effective way of transporting children. It is important that the youth ministry leaders have a clear understanding of our church's policy on the transportation of children. The three main options are:

Parents

Having parents transport their own children is the most preferred option as parents are responsible to ensure their own children are dropped off and collected safely. More importantly, it increases the link between parents and the youth ministry. This link provides opportunity to build the parents' ownership of youth programs and opportunities for bridges to be built with non-christian parents.

Bus

The purchasing or hiring of a small bus provides opportunity for two leaders (one or both with the appropriate licence) to collect a number of children. This allows for children whose parents may not be able to transport their children to still participate in the ministry.

Leader/Helper

A leader/helper is often used in youth ministry and will collect and drop off some children as they drive to and from a particular youth ministry program. In this situation, two leaders should occupy the front seats of the car, while the children sit in the back seat, as they are transported to their destination.

General guidelines

It is important that those travelling wear the seat belts where fitted and the driver has the appropriate licence. Vehicles must be registered and have comprehensive insurance cover, be safe and never carry more than the legal number of passengers. When dropping children home, it is advisable to wait until the child is in the house before continuing.

The Team Leader should be satisfied as to the suitability of a provisional driver's license holder's ability. If satisfied, only children who have parental permission should travel with a provisional driver. Drivers should not take any unnecessary detours when transporting children.

If it is unavoidable for an unaccompanied leader/helper to drive a child home, then it is recommended that the driver first contact another adult, advising them of the reason, time and destination. Once the child has been dropped off, the driver should recontact the adult and advise them. During this trip, it is best if the child travels in the rear seat for safety and security reasons.

Under all circumstances it is strongly recommended that individuals transporting children or teens keep a travel log that outlines the time of pick-up, who was present in the car, the drop off time, the occasion or event and any other information the driver may deem relevant.

Conclusion of the Program

Care must be taken when children are being collected at the conclusion of a program. Only those who are noted on the Personal and Medical Information form are to be allowed to collect the child. If another person comes to collect the child, the parent must be contacted first for approval before releasing the child into their care. It may be appropriate for an attendance book to be used in the signing in and out of children.

Administration and Communication

Children draw encouragement from spending time and maintaining ongoing communication with those they make friends with in a children's ministry. Contact lists, directories or email lists can help in facilitating this. Only the children of parents who give permission are to have their relevant information distributed. This must not be circulated to those outside the church or ministry without prior approval of the parents. It is important that parents and children receive regular communication on ministry programs and other relevant information.

Insurance

The Church has public liability insurance coverage for approved activities (if in doubt check with David Jordison). It does have insurance for volunteers and employees in the case of an accident but does not carry insurance for anyone else. Each person participating in a church activity needs to rely on their Medicare and their own insurance cover. The Church is committed to making its activities safe and does a risk assessment of them for the safety of all participants.

A Note on Pastoral Care

There may be occasions when children need extra support. However, it is important that the long-term care of the child and leader is kept in mind. Where possible, pastoral care should be conducted in an environment that encourages the healing process, without placing the child or the leader at risk. Before engaging in pastoral care with a child, the leader or helper should consider:

Necessity: If initiated by the child, ask the nature of the conversation and assess whether this needs to be private discussion.

Gender: It is preferable for males to meet with males and females with females as this will help to reduce the appearance of impropriety. However, this provides only minimal protection against possible allegations and possible physical or emotional attraction.

Assistance: Where possible meet with the child in the presence of another adult, possibly someone suggested by the child. If this is not possible meet with the child at a location where the presence of other adults is immediately available and notify another adult prior to starting and at the conclusion of the meeting.

Location: Wherever possible meet in a public location. Never meet in the child's bedroom or an isolated location. If possible, plan for another adult to be nearby.

Permission: Always seek the child's permission to meet together and be sure that they understand they can decline or conclude the meeting at any time.

Awareness of feelings: Good pastoral care for children includes the referral to another suitable person if there is any suspicion of a child becoming dependent on the leader or displays a desire to become romantically involved with the carer.

Awareness of ability: Carers must be aware of their own limits of competence and training and be ready to seek assistance or refer on as necessary.

Beyond reproach: Carers are to conduct themselves in a manner that is always beyond reproach.

Touch: While touch in public presents some risk, touch in private holds even greater risk of being misinterpreted and should be avoided. When a child initiates touch it is important to affirm the child without seeking to prolong the contact. Any touch initiated by a leader to meet a leader's needs is always inappropriate.

Records: It is important that the carer keep in a secure location some record of the time, place, duration of the meeting including whom it was with and what was discussed. However, it is inappropriate to make comments or a diagnosis of the child.

Frequency: The greater the frequency of meeting, the greater the risk of dependency being developed. As a guide a carer should only meet with a child for three occasions before recommending they speak with a qualified counsellor.

Confidentiality: Under no circumstance should a carer promise not to tell anyone about what is discussed, especially before anything is discussed. While most conversations can remain confidential, a leader's responsibility for a child's safety takes precedents over the responsibility for confidentiality.

(Adapted from West Olive Christian Reformed Church, *Abuse Prevention and Child Protection Policy*)

Reporting Accidents and Incidents

Prevention

In all youth ministry, our highest priority is to provide a safe and positive environment in which children can develop. The cost of ensuring the facility and program are safe is usually much less than the related costs when a child is injured. However, we do also recognise that accidents and incidents occur from time to time.

Preparation

In the event of an accident or incident, a well-prepared church and leadership team can help reduce the impact of such events. Preparations such as: leaders trained in first aid; a well stocked first aid kit; planned responses to fire; ready access to a telephone; and agreed responses to behaviours will assist the ministry in caring for the child.

Responding to an Accident or Emergency

In the event of an accident or emergency, it is important not to panic. Panic often results from inadequate training or preparation for the situation.

The first priority in any accident or emergency is that of safety. It is necessary to keep yourself and others safe from any or additional harm. When responding to an accident or emergency, it is important to do your best according to your ability. Survey the scene and consider if it is safe or appropriate for you to respond or should additional/outside assistance be called for. The other leaders or helpers are to protect additional children from harm and assist you as required. **Always err on the side of caution and if in doubt, contact the emergency services on 000.**

When contacting the emergency services it is important to have the following:

- Your name
- Your location (with nearest cross street or landmark)
- Your contact number
- The nature of the emergency, (including how many are involved) and other relevant information.

Once the emergency services are involved, the responsibility for care of the child is shared between yourself and the emergency services' personnel. Relevant information from the child's Personal and Medical Information (PPL4f or PPL4u) form must be disclosed to the emergency services. This may include information such as health information like diabetes, asthma, contact details, Medicare number or private health insurance provider. Where possible, a suitable leader who is known by the child should accompany the child to the hospital.

It is the responsibility of Team Leader or other leader to reassess the current activity in light of the accident/emergency and implement any changes deemed necessary. During this time, it is important to consider the immediate needs of others in the group. They may require emotional or physical support. Signs of shock include: pale, cool, moist skin; rapid breathing; rapid and weak pulse; excessive thirst; nausea and/or vomiting; altered conscious state (Australian Red Cross First Aid, 1995). The Church should provide follow-up professional counselling where appropriate. Unless the emergency services' personnel contact the child's parents, Team Leaders should contact the parents and in some the case the local pastor. If the accident is serious, it may be beneficial to take photographs of the location of the accident for future reference. These photos are to be attached to the Accident Report (PGM6) form. In the event of death, only move the body after receiving approval (usually by the police). A representative of the church should accompany the police when notifying the next of kin.

As soon as practical, the Team Leader should gather information from other leaders/helpers and children so that the necessary accident report can be completed. Accidents involving an overnight stay in hospital may require the completion of an additional form from the Office of Workplace Health and Safety through your Workplace Health and Safety officer.

Media

The church's media liaison person is: Local Pastor unless otherwise advised.

If the media become involved, this person should be contacted and briefed on all relevant information. All those involved in the accident or emergency should direct any external enquiries to this person without additional comment on the accident or emergency. Additionally, the media are not allowed direct access to the

participants unless approved and/or supervised by the media liaison person. Additionally, information is not to be released to the media without first gaining approval from the media liaison person.

Responding to an Incident

Whereas an accident is any unexpected happening that causes injury to someone, an incident is an act that has a negative impact to someone or something. Incidents include: fighting or bullying, acts of vandalism or bad behaviour.

Once again, it is important that the leader stays calm so they do not negatively respond to an incident, as often these can be teachable moments to highlight the result of negative behaviour and encourage positive behaviour. It is recommended that the church have an established set of guidelines for responding to discipline problems so that consistency is maintained.

It is important that a leader complete an Incident Report (PGM7) form if the incident could be referred to at a later stage. As a guide, when a parent or another leader needs to be involved in the incident, a report form should be completed.

Indicators of Possible Harm

When a child becomes the victim of harm, they will often feel disempowered and untrusting of adults. As a result, children may internalise, blaming themselves for the harm that occurred. Some children only realise and then subsequently disclose they have been victims of harm once they reach adulthood.

Your ability to recognise the signs of possible harm may help to prevent ongoing abuse of a child, empower the child with the knowledge that abuse is wrong, and help in assisting the family and others involved. It is important to remember that there is no single behaviour or sign to indicate harm. In this section, we will seek to highlight a number of possible indicators of harm.

Suspensions of harm will often involve several indicators; however, it is not necessary to wait until you have confirmation or proof before reporting. It is important when assessing the suspicions that consideration is given to other influences. A child affected by the weather or medication may display indicators similar to one who has been harmed. Being aware of the surrounding influences on yourself and the child may assist in clarifying your suspicions. It may be appropriate to discuss your concerns with the team leader so they can also observe the child.

The purpose of early recognition is to help, not to find proof or lay blame.

Family Influences

Most parents want to provide a loving, positive environment for their children and while some parents who have themselves experienced harm as a child, harm their own children, most do not. Some family settings which increase the risk of harm to a child include:

- Stress
- Tiredness
- Poor parenting skills, support networks and access to information
- Substance abuse
- Poverty
- Family/domestic violence
- Isolation from extended family, neighbours and the wider community

Leaders observing children should be aware of both behavioural and visual indicators of possible harm. Change

in a child's behaviour should be given special consideration, especially in the way they interact with adults. A child who normally interacts well with adults but then becomes fearful and resistant to adults OR a child who normally interacts well with adults but then becomes overly 'clingy' or displays sexual behaviours may indicate possible abuse.

Behavioural Indicators

Leaders should look for a cluster of symptoms, rather than an isolated indicator. Children displaying one or more of the following behaviours may indicate their experience of harm. These include:

- Lack of supervision, begging, or stealing food or clothing
- Sudden behavioural changes
- Fear or dislike of certain people, places or touch
- Afraid to go home or be with parents (running away from home)
- Problems with attention or discipline at school
- Antisocial, aggressive or destructive behaviour
- Withdrawal from activities or people (including other children)
- Sleep problems (nightmares, bed-wetting)
- Obsessive or poor hygiene
- Returning or regressing to more babyish behaviour (sucking, biting, rocking)
- Headaches or loss of appetite
- Depression, anxiety, irritability, low self-worth
- Self-harm (suicide attempts/threats, anorexia, bulimia, drug abuse)
- Seeking/demanding extra attention
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual organs or copying sexual behaviour
- Sexually active
- Indirectly hints at, comments on or increased interest in abuse
- Confusing or illogical explanations of injuries

Visual Indicators

- Abnormal or unexplained injuries
- Bruises
- Burns (cigarette or lighter)
- Cuts, abrasions or bite marks
- Broken bones
- Bald spots (from having hair pulled)
- Pain when walking or sitting
- Pain or itching around genitals or when toileting
- Pregnancy
- Underdeveloped for age or constantly hungry
- Speech problems
- Poor hygiene or state of clothes

Vulnerability of Children to Abuse

Children find it hard to stop sexual abuse because of the inherent authority of an adult. Once a child has been abused, it is difficult for them to tell others about an abusive experience due to feelings of confusion, guilt, vulnerability and the fear of not being believed by other adults. Children are taught from an early age not to challenge the demands or expectations of adults. To question an adult often brings punishment while conforming brings reward or at least a lack of punishment. It is therefore essential that children be empowered

to share their views and concerns, which are listened to and valued so as to promote a positive environment for disclosure.

It is important to remember that some children are particularly vulnerable to abuse. A child's background, situation, or personal characteristic (eg: disability) may make them more susceptible to abuse, and less likely to feel able to report it. We must ensure that children in our church feel empowered to report their concerns. All children should feel included and valued.

If the reporting of alleged abuse is not appropriately dealt with the first time, a child becomes reluctant to report any additional occurrences, as they were not protected from it occurring again. It becomes increasingly difficult to pick up subsequent instances of abuse, as the child may not develop any additional signs of ongoing abuse.

Responding to Harm

The way a leader or helper responds to harm is important, especially when a child makes the allegation. As adults, we can use the disclosure as an opportunity to reassure the child that they are valued and harm is wrong, or we can minimise and dismiss the allegations, thus reinforcing the child's perception that adults cannot be trusted and do not care for children.

The immediate reaction of an adult who suspects or hears an allegation of harm can range from: shock, disgust, denial, blame, sympathy and pity for the child, distress, anxiety, guilt that the adult could not prevent the harm from occurring, sadness and anger. The way we then relate to the accused can impact their ability or willingness to seek help and may even place the child in greater risk of further harm.

The Need for Appropriate Responses

The church can reduce the risk of harm occurring by establishing and communicating to the congregation an appropriate response. Both children and volunteers need to not only know that it is OK to report harm but to be encouraged to do so and to whom it should be reported. Leaders and helpers may be resistant to reporting harm when they fear not being believed, personal repercussions or that nothing will be done. Members of the congregation can become a barrier to the reporting of harm, through gossiping or downplaying the significance, when harm is reported. Therefore, it is essential that our church has a strategy in place for handling allegations or suspicions of harm before they occur.

Responding to and reporting accidents, harm and abuse

This guide has been produced with reference to the Victorian Child Safe Standards and GCI Child Safety Protocols.

In This Guide:

Reporting an Accident or Injury	page 28
Responding to an Incident	page 29
Responding to Harm	page 30
Reporting Sexual Abuse	page 31

REPORTING an ACCIDENT or INJURY

If an accident or injury occurs at a church location or event, the following are important steps.

- 1) **The first priority in any accident or emergency is that of safety.** It is necessary to keep yourself and others safe from any or additional harm. When responding to an accident or emergency, it is important to do your best according to your ability. Survey the scene and consider if it is safe or appropriate for you to respond or should additional/outside assistance be called for. The other leaders or helpers are to protect additional children from harm and assist you as required.
- 2) **If serious, contact the emergency services on 000.** Always err on the side of caution and call for an ambulance if unsure.

When contacting the emergency services, it is important to have the following:

- Your name
 - Your location (with nearest cross street or landmark)
 - Your contact number
 - The nature of the emergency, (including how many are involved) and other relevant information.
- 3) **Once the emergency services are involved, the responsibility for care of the child is shared between yourself and the emergency services' personnel.** Relevant information from the child's Personal and Medical Information (**PPL4f or PPL4u**) form must be disclosed to the emergency services. This may include information such as health information like diabetes, asthma, contact details, Medicare number or private health insurance provider.
 - 4) **If the child is taken by ambulance for treatment, responsibility for the child passes to emergency services personnel.** If the child's parents or guardians are not present, they should be immediately notified. Where possible, a suitable leader who is known by the child should accompany the child to the hospital.
 - 5) The Church should provide follow-up professional counselling where appropriate for those affected.

Responding to an Incident

Whereas an accident is any unexpected happening that causes injury to someone, an incident is an act that has a negative impact to someone or something. Incidents include: fighting or bullying, acts of vandalism or bad behaviour.

Once again, it is important that the leader stays calm so they do not negatively respond to an incident, as often these can be teachable moments to highlight the result of negative behaviour and encourage positive behaviour. It is recommended that the church have an established set of guidelines for responding to discipline problems so that consistency is maintained.

It is important that a leader complete an **Incident Report (PGM7)** form if the incident could be referred to at a later stage. As a guide, when a parent or another leader needs to be involved in the incident, a report form should be completed.

Responding to Harm

When a child becomes the victim of harm, they will often feel disempowered and untrusting of adults. As a result, children may internalise, blaming themselves for the harm that occurred. Some children only realise and then subsequently disclose they have been victims of harm once they reach adulthood.

Where harm occurs, or is alleged or suspected, the local Pastor should be informed. They are responsible for ensuring that the **Harm Report Form PGM8** (parts A and B) is completed and forwarding it to the Grace Communion International Limited head office.

Signs of Harm

It is important to remember that there is no single behaviour or sign to indicate harm. In this section, we will seek to highlight a number of possible indicators of harm.

Behavioural Indicators:

Leaders should look for a cluster of symptoms, rather than an isolated indicator. Children displaying one or more of the following behaviours may indicate their experience of harm. These include:

- Lack of supervision, begging, or stealing food or clothing
- Sudden behavioural changes
- Fear or dislike of certain people, places or touch
- Afraid to go home or be with parents (running away from home)
- Problems with attention or discipline at school
- Antisocial, aggressive or destructive behaviour
- Withdrawal from activities or people (including other children)
- Sleep problems (nightmares, bed-wetting)
- Obsessive or poor hygiene
- Returning or regressing to more babyish behaviour (sucking, biting, rocking)
- Headaches or loss of appetite
- Depression, anxiety, irritability, low self-worth
- Self-harm (suicide attempts/threats, anorexia, bulimia, drug abuse)
- Seeking/demanding extra attention
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual organs or copying sexual behaviour
- Sexually active
- Indirectly hints at, comments on or increased interest in abuse
- Confusing or illogical explanations of injuries

Visual Indicators:

- Abnormal or unexplained injuries
- Bruises
- Burns (cigarette or lighter)
- Cuts, abrasions or bite marks
- Broken bones
- Bald spots (from having hair pulled)
- Pain when walking or sitting

- Pain or itching around genitals or when toileting
- Pregnancy
- Underdeveloped for age or constantly hungry
- Speech problems
- Poor hygiene or state of clothes

General rules for handling suspicions of allegations

When one suspects or has someone allege harm has occurred it is important to know what one's responsibilities are. Our role is to care for the person involved, not to investigate if harm has actually occurred.

An allegation of harm is a serious matter and needs to be dealt with accordingly. Never minimise an allegation of harm or the impact it has on the victim. Dismissing an allegation may increase the effect of the harm and prolong the healing process. When harm is suspected or reported, it must be treated as an allegation or suspicion. While a child may fantasise or lie about the occurrence of harm, this is rarely the case. (Project Axis, Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland, Selected Research Papers, 2000)

Where there is concern that the harm involves sexual abuse, follow the steps in the next section.

Reporting sexual abuse, or suspicions of sexual abuse

If you are concerned that a child faces physical, emotional or sexual abuse, these steps should be taken. In an emergency contact the local police immediately. Contact the following departments:

- QLD – Department of Child Safety, 07 3884 8800 after hours 07 3235 9999
- VIC – Department of Human Services Crisis Line 131 278
- NSW – DOCS Helpline, 132 111 or 02 9633 77698
- WA - Department of Community Development
- TAS – Child Protection Hotline (24 hrs) 1300 737 639
- SA – Dept Education & Child Development – Child Abuse Report Line (24 hours) 13 14 78
- ACT – Office for children, Youth & Family Support 1300 556 729
- NT – Department of Health & Families Child Protection Hotline (24 hours) 1800 700 250

Contact can be made anonymously and is confidential. Carefully follow any instruction you may be given. If the abuse is happening within a congregational activity, you must report the incident to the Pastor, and the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, immediately.

Note: The congregation is not to be advised when an allegation or suspicion of harm has been formally lodged when it involves a fellow member of the local church community. When the accused is in a ministry, the accused is to step down from that role pending both the external and internal investigations and be recommended to seek independent legal advice.

Duty to Report

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child has an obligation to report that information to police.

A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused
- Signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

Confidentiality and Duty of Care

When a leader or helper is faced with the conflict of 'Confidentiality and Duty of Care' towards a child, 'Duty of Care' always takes priority. One cannot promise not to tell anyone when there is an allegation of harm. Instead, explain to the person that because you care for them, you need to discuss this with someone who can help. Care must be taken to preserve the privacy of families, children and young people. Information relating to health issues and family histories that are shared with leaders should remain within the leadership group.

Assessing the suspicion or allegation

As we have already discussed, it is not our role to prove that harm has occurred. Nor are leaders/helpers expected to assess what type of harm has taken place. Rather we are to respond to suspicions or allegations in a way that provides the best opportunity for the ongoing safety and care of the child. When the frequency of harm continues, or the degree increases then the risk to the child is more significant. The child may also be at greater risk if the person who harms the child is not seeking help and still has access to the child.

The greater the degree of risk to the child, the more urgent the response. For example: If a child discloses to you that they were physically abused by their father a year ago, and their father no longer has contact with the child or other members of the family, then the risk to the child is lower. However, when a child who comes to the ministry with bruising in areas that are uncommon and the child is visibly distressed and does not want to go home, then the risk to the child is higher. In both circumstances, you are to report the harm to the Pastor or another designated person immediately and encourage the child to make a formal allegation to the designated person. The designated person will decide what the appropriate course of action is.

Due to the autonomy of Grace Communion International Limited, the primary responsibility of ensuring any allegations of harm are properly responded to lies with the local church. The local Pastor or designated person is responsible to contact the head office. The local Pastor or designated person will be responsible for:

- **Coordinating and communicating** with the various authorities, the local church and relevant youth ministry representatives, legal counsel, and the church's insurer;
- **Reviewing** the factors that allowed harm to occur; and,
- **Recommending** additional ways to reduce the risk of harm;
& **Forwarding** copies of the Harm report form (parts A and B) to the Grace Communion International head office.

Direct

It is important that every allegation of harm made by a child is taken seriously and acted upon. This will usually involve additional interviews of the child by professional people. A child who is required to retell their story

several times will experience significant stress. It is therefore better to ask only that which is necessary for you to be confident of your actions. You are not required to provide proof that harm has occurred.

It will be rare that the child will lie about being harmed or disclose harm at the time it occurs. Children will usually talk around the issue, not knowing how to explain it, testing out your reaction to what they are hinting at, so it is best not to rush them. Staying calm and sensitive to the child will help them to feel more confident that they are doing the right thing. Affirm the child and actively listening to the details being shared with you but do not ask probing or leading questions. Great damage can be caused to police investigations when evidence is tainted through asking closed or leading questions, by confronting the child or the alleged offender. If you are not comfortable hearing the information the child is sharing with you, ask them if they would be willing to tell their story to the local Pastor or the designated person and offer to accompany them for support.

Explain to the child that help is available, what will happen next and that you are there to care for them. They will need plenty of support as things proceed, however do not tell them that everything will be OK or make promises that you are not able to keep. As soon as possible, contact the Pastor/Designated Person and complete Section A of the Harm Report Form (PGM8) within 24 hours of being advised.

Note: When recording the information that has been passed on to you by a child or another party, stick to the facts. To the best of your ability record only what you were told or what you have witnessed personally (i.e. the state of the individual making the allegation). There is no room for personal interpretations, judgements, opinions or assumptions when making a report of this nature. Because the reporting of harm may have significant impact on you, it is important that you seek help in working through your own feelings and reactions. It is important not to make the allegations a public discussion as this can affect criminal proceedings and reduce the opportunity for natural justice.

Indirect

There are occasions when another person will come to you with either their suspicions of harm or after being told by a child that harm has occurred.

Suspicion

When it is another person's suspicion, advise the complainant that either the Pastor or another designated person will need to be advised of the suspicions of harm. Have the complainant write down their suspicions and meet with the designated person. Under no circumstances should the child be questioned by either yourself or the complainant.

Allegation

When a person comes to you after receiving an allegation of harm from a child, they are to document the allegation, speak with either the Pastor or another designated person and encourage the child to make a formal allegation.

Cases of Family Violence, Sexual or Physical Abuse

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence in Victoria.

A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- A child states that they have been sexually abused
- A child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- Someone who knows a child states that the child has been sexually abused

- Professional observations of the child's behaviour or development leads a professional to form a belief that the child has been sexually abused.
- Signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

A person will not be guilty of the offence if he or she has a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information. A reasonable excuse includes.

- fear for safety of self or others
- where information has already been reported

If you are concerned that a child faces physical, emotional or sexual abuse, these steps should be taken. In an emergency contact the local police immediately. Contact the following departments:

- QLD – Department of Child Safety, 07 3884 8800 after hours 07 3235 9999
- VIC – Department of Human Services Crisis Line 131 278
- NSW – DOCS Helpline, 132 111 or 02 9633 77698
- WA – Department of Child Protection & Family Support (24 hours) 1800 622 258
- TAS – Child Protection Hotline (24 hours) 1300 737 639
- SA – Dept Education & Child Development. Child Abuse Report line (24 Hours) 13 14 78
- ACT – Office for Children, Youth & Family Support (24 hours) 1300 556 729 or 1300 556 728
- NT – Child Protection Hotline (24 hours) 1800 700 250

Contact can be made anonymously and is confidential. Carefully follow any instruction you may be given.

If the abuse is happening within a congregational activity, you must report the incident to the Pastor, and the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, immediately.

Note: The congregation is not to be advised when an allegation or suspicion of harm has been formally lodged when it involves a fellow member of the local church community. When the accused is in a ministry, the accused is to step down from that role pending both the external and internal investigations and be recommended to seek independent legal advice.

Allegations or suspicions involving a Pastor

When the accused is a Pastor of the Grace Communion International Limited, the Designated Person is to contact the head office. The Pastor is required to step down from active ministry and those that are employed by Grace Communion International Limited will receive full remuneration, until the matter is resolved.

Incident Report (Incident Report)

Within 24 hours the volunteer (or other member of congregation) must complete Section A of the Incident Report and pass the suspicion/allegation on to the Pastor or Designated person. Within 24 hours of disclosure, the Pastor or designated person should complete Section B of the Incident Report for future reference. If another person has been involved in the initial assessment, they should also be included in the report details and sign the form.

Ongoing Care

There are many aspects of ongoing care required by a church responding to harm towards a child. While there is no easy solution, the church should extend fair treatment and God's grace to all those involved, including the alleged victim, the accused, their families and the wider congregation. Often the level of care required is beyond the ability of the local church and external assistance should be sought to provide appropriate support. Providing care to all involved will help to reduce the risk of further harm occurring.