



Safe Church Policy

Adopted by Southern Illawarra Church of Christ Board on 23.7.2022.

Commitment

Ministry to children and young people is a service to the children and youth, the church family and to God himself that offers great opportunities, but also carries significant responsibilities for the wellbeing of the children and young people in our care. We must do all we can to provide an environment that is safe from any form of harm in the teaching and leadership of our children and young people. Children and young people are vulnerable, they will need help to survive and thrive and at times they will need protecting. They are also trusting of adults and are in fact looking for adults to trust. Child protection is about promoting the best, safest environment for children and young people to thrive.

Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (SICoC) is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and safety of all people, including children and young people; and the right to privacy of all people, including children and young people. SICoC is committed to the care and protection of children and young people who are involved in our programs.

Purpose

The Church has adopted this *Safe Church Policy* to:

- help us live out our biblical mandate to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30-31);
- implement the ten Child Safe Standards (see below);
- provide a framework to inform the provision of safe environments and programs for children, young people and vulnerable adults; and
- meet our legal obligations in relation to:
 - staff and volunteers engaged in Child-related Work; and
 - reporting requirements, including Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct, Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct involving a Child, to government authorities.

Our values are based on the authority of the Bible and as an expression of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Children and young people matter to God, therefore SICoC believes that those working with them have a duty of care that demonstrates they value children for their own sake through spending time with them, being patient with them, setting clear boundaries for them and respecting them as valuable people who bear the image of God. All who work with children and young people must demonstrate integrity in all their relationships and comply with legal requirements and the procedural guidelines set out by SICoC.

The *Safe Church Policy* outlines the commitment of the church to principles in various areas. More detail regarding the practical implementation of these commitments is available in the relevant procedures and guidelines.

Southern Illawarra Church of Christ will implement the ten Child Safe Standards (Children's Guardian Act 2019 No 25, Division 2 8C)

The ***Child Safe Standards:***

1. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved.
4. Equity is upheld, and diverse needs are taken into account.
5. People working with children are suitable and supported.
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused.
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.

Children have rights: Children have the right to be safe and well looked after when they are in our care. They have the right to be protected, listened to and their particular needs addressed in all church activities, whether mixed age or child specific.

Leaders are responsible: All those exercising a ministerial ministry involving children in the church have a responsibility for the safety and welfare of the children in their care.

Abuse is power misused: Leaders have authority of children because of their positional power and because of their greater age, maturity, physical size and life experience. Abuse arises from the misuse of authority or power. Any form of abuse is always wrong.

Scope

This Policy applies to:

- all Church Leadership, staff and volunteers;
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs;

1. Activities and Services for Children at the Church

As a church, we commit to providing spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

1.1 Church Leadership Board:

- recognise that children and young people are an integral part of the Church and talk about this in services, sermons, training events and meetings;
- involve children and young people in the routine of church life where appropriate
- consider the needs of children and young people when they make decisions about budgets, buildings, renovations, use of property, décor, or catering; and
- encourage children and young people to have input in decisions that affect them by including them in church forums and meetings when appropriate.

1.2 Safe Church Team:

- talk with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to feel safe, to be listened to and to have their views respected (including discussing what they should do and who they should approach if they feel unsafe or hurt, or they suspect that someone else is unsafe or hurt); and
- ensure their contact details are accessible to children and their caregivers.

1.3 Staff and volunteers:

- listen to children and young people and take seriously what they are saying;
- talk with children and young people about the kinds of behaviours, attitudes or 'culture' that they would like to promote in their group;
- encourage children and young people to have input regarding the content and activities they would like to be part of their group.

Refer to the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

2. Staff and Volunteers

2.1 Screening, selection and induction of Staff and Volunteers

- The church will undertake appropriate screening processes for all staff and volunteers.
- The church will engage in fair and transparent selection processes for all staff and volunteers.
- The church will provide appropriate induction for all staff and volunteers.
- All staff and volunteers are to be recruited, selected and inducted in accordance with the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*.

2.2 Training and Resourcing of Staff and Volunteers

- The church will ensure that staff and volunteers develop the knowledge and skills to create safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
- The church will ensure that staff and volunteers have access to information about creating safe spaces and that they all undergo appropriate training regarding the available Procedures, Guidelines and Forms.

- The church will support staff and volunteers with adequate resources to enable them to maintain and promote safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people.
- The church will implement the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*.
- Will provide evidence of a Safe Working with Children Check (WWCC). See procedure for applying for a WWCC.

2.3 Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

- The church will provide spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.
- The church will expect all staff and volunteers to uphold the *Code of Conduct* which includes expected behaviours for those who engage in ministry with children and/or vulnerable people.
- The church will expect staff and volunteers to follow *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*.
- SICoC requires that all SRE teachers, youth leaders and children's leaders and helpers have completed the Youthworks Safe Ministry or Creating Safe Spaces training. As per Churches of Christ NSW/ACT recommendation, the SICoC requires that every minister, children's worker, youth worker, board member and staff member complete Children/Youth Safe Ministry training every three years. More information can be found on the Creating Safe Spaces website or the Youthworks website at <https://youthworks.net/>.
- All employees and volunteers are to be regularly trained in the code of practice and operating procedures. In addition, they are inducted into the values framework that underlies all of the church's activities.
- Once training has been completed, SICoC staff and volunteers will submit evidence of completion to the SICoC Office Administration Officer and the Leadership Board.
- Paid staff should demonstrate a broad knowledge of the extent of child abuse and an appropriate Christian and legal response to child protection issues.
- All staff/volunteers involved with the church Children's and Youth Ministries, and all people in senior leadership positions should demonstrate an understanding of best practice in relation to supervision of children and identify the steps to take in the event of a child disclosing abuse.
- Student Leaders (or Leaders in Training) aged 15 to 17 years will undertake an adapted safe ministry course during their time as a student leader.

Refer to the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers* and the *Screening Questionnaire* for more detail.

2.4 General Principles for Children and Youth Ministry

- Never abuse children or young people, or cultivate relationships in order to initiate or cloak abuse of children or young people.
- Never detain a single child if there are no other leaders or children present.
- Never physically discipline a child or young person.
- Never touch a child or young person in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender or cultural background.
- Never have children or young people to his or her home or visit children or young people in their home when no other adult is present, and must never meet privately with a child or young person outside of church activities, except with the permission of a parent or guardian.

- Never develop inappropriate special relationships with particular children or youth that could be seen as involving favoritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never make drugs, alcohol or cigarettes available to children or youth.
- Never become romantically involved with any person under the age of 18 in the youth or children's ministry.
- Leaders should not wear provocative or revealing attire.
- On camps or church sleepovers, strict segregation of sleeping quarters is to be maintained. These should be supervised by a person of the same gender as the children or young people in them. Under no circumstances should an adult ever share accommodation with one child or young person only. There is to be a minimum of 2 leaders and 2 children/young people present in the room being shared.
- Leaders have a responsibility to prevent any breach of trust towards children or young people.

Situations offering privacy or secrecy need to be avoided:

- A leader is not to be left alone, away from the presence of other adults, with a child or young person of either gender, no matter what their age. It is always best that leaders have as many children or young people with them as possible. There should always be at least 2 approved leaders at every activity.
- Never engage in any contact with a child or young person that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).
- If counselling is to be done, it should be carried out within sight of other leaders.
- Never help children in ways that involve intimate care if the child is capable of doing it on his or her own (such as, toileting or changing clothes).

3. Conflict, Complaints and Concerns

3.1 Responding to Child Protection Concerns

- The church will ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all child protection concerns and any complaints relating to child sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child in accordance with the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*.
- The church will ensure that all child protection concerns and complaints will be reported to the relevant government departments and, if necessary, Police as soon as possible and in accordance with legislative duties.
- The SICoC Safe Church Team and Team Leader will assist the Senior Minister and Leadership Board to comply with child protection screening requirements as per the Safe Church Team role description.
- The Safe Church Team and Team Leader will be appointed by the SICoC Leadership Board and will meet the following criteria.
 - Be 21 years or older;
 - Have completed Safe Ministry training within the last three years or within three months after their appointment (and every three years after that);
 - Hold a verified WWCC clearance;
 - Have good interpersonal and communication skills; and
 - Have good administrative skills.
 - Provide two written referees.

Professional training or expertise in child protection issues (e.g. teacher, children's/youth worker or a person with behavioural or social sciences qualifications and experience) would also be helpful for the role.

3.2 Complaint Handling

- The Church will respond to complaints in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*.
- Where there is a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has engaged in abuse, including child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct involving a child, the Church will treat the allegation as a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* and respond in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*.
- In the event of receiving a complaint that relates to a minor breach of the Code of Conduct or a grievance, the Church may determine to respond to the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Resolving Conflict*.

Refer to the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns and the Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* for more detail.

4. Safe Environments

4.1 Physical Environments

- The Church will ensure that physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for all people to be harmed.
- The Church will comply with Work, Health and Safety requirements.
- The Church will consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk to children and vulnerable people.
- The Church will identify and address risks arising from the physical environment in which programs and activities take place.
- If the Church has any residential property that is identifiable as being church property then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property obtain and hold WWCC or WWVP clearance for the duration of their residence.
- The Church needs to consider safety issues and minimising risks as a part of preparation of a program. This includes checking all equipment and areas to be used in the program for breakages and potential hazards.
- This also includes using age and skill appropriate equipment and ensuring children are not able to enter areas such as kitchens and storerooms unsupervised.

4.2 First Aid

- Children and youth activities there should include someone trained to an appropriate level in first aid.
- First aid should not be administered in private wherever possible. If the injury requires more private treatment, at least two leaders should be present and any treatment documented. At least one of these leaders should be the same gender as the injured child. Parents/ Guardians should be informed of any injury and medical assistance sought.

4.3 Online Environments

The Church will promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication. For more detail refer to the following policy guidelines:

Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People
Social Media Policy and Guidelines

5. Risk Management

5.1 Persons of Concern

The Church will manage any person identified as a Person of Concern in the *Persons of Concern Policy*.

5.2 Risk Assessments

- The Church will ensure that Ministry Leaders complete and make a record of a risk assessment in relation to any program or activity undertaken at, for or with the Church.
 - for regular activities, the risk assessment will be conducted at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in the program activities, attendance or location.
 - for special activities, the Ministry Leader or Safe Church Team will complete a risk assessment.
- The Church will ensure that appropriate and reasonable precautions are adopted to address risks identified as part of a risk assessment. When considering what measures are appropriate, the Church will consider the likelihood of an incident occurring, the seriousness of the consequences and the difficulty of avoiding the risk.
- The Church will store risk assessment forms in a secure location for a period of at least 45 years.

6. Third Parties and Affiliated Entities

- The church will require any third party (tenant or external party using church property) that provides services to children and/or young people to provide written confirmation of their compliance with the Child Safe Standards at least annually.
- The church will ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with Child Safe Standards including annual reports to the governance body regarding child safety.

7. Recordkeeping

- The Church will retain all written records for a minimum of 45 years, in hard copy and/or electronically in a secure manner.
 - Where records contain, or may contain, sensitive information, they will be kept in a manner that protects confidentiality and will only be accessed by a limited number of authorised persons;
 - Where records are kept in hard copy, they will be held in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and physical conditions; and
 - Where records are kept electronically, they will be monitored to ensure security and ongoing accessibility.
- Records to which this item applies includes, but is not limited to:
 - Ministry Information Sheets;
 - Staff and Volunteer files;
 - Attendance (sign-in/sign-out) sheets;
 - Risk assessment forms;
 - Safe Church Register;
 - Safe Church Concerns forms and any contemporaneous notes regarding reporting decisions;

- Annual Safe Church commitment by third parties and affiliated entities;
- Person of Concern Safety Agreements; and
- Dated copies of any *Safe Church Policy*, Procedure, Form or associated document in force at any time.

8. Review and Accountability

8.1 Internal Review

The Church will review and audit this policy on a regular basis.

8.2 External Accountability

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the Churches of Christ NSW / ACT Safe Ministry Practices Leader in relation to any Reportable Conduct, Child Protection Concerns and/or Complaints against Endorsed Ministers in accordance the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*.

9. Definitions

In the *Safe Church Policy* and associated documents, unless the context otherwise requires:

Children are those people under 16 years of age.

Church means the local church which adopted this *Safe Church Policy*, as indicated on the front page of the Policy.

Complaint includes any allegation, suspicion, concern or report of a breach of the Church's *Code of Conduct* or the *Churches of Christ NSW / ACT Ministering Persons Code of Conduct* (where applicable). It also includes disclosures made to an institution about any child protection concern.

Creating Safe Spaces means the safe ministry training program offered by Churches of Christ NSW / ACT (in conjunction with the Baptist Churches of NSW) or alternative training that is Safe Church Training Agreement approved and has a face-to-face component.

Disclosure means a process by which a person conveys or attempts to convey that someone is being, or has been abused or neglected. They may be referring to themselves or another person.

Churches of Christ NSW / ACT means Churches of Christ in NSW.

Governance body means the body designated by the constitution of the church to be responsible for the management of church affairs. This may be the Diaconate, Elders, Board, or the Church Council.

Mandatory Reporting Legislation means

In NSW, the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Ministerial Staff means any minister or any Endorsed Minister or any paid or unpaid staff member of the Church who is engaged in ministerial ministry through the Church.

Reportable Conduct Legislation means:

In NSW the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* (NSW).

Safe Church Register means the register required to record information relating to:

In NSW staff and volunteers who engaged in Child-related Work and their relevant details in accordance with section 9A of the WWCC Legislation.

SICoC means Southern Illawarra Church of Christ

Vulnerable means the state of being unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason, and includes those that suffer disadvantage such as social and financial hardship.

WWCC Legislation means the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW)*.

Young person means a person who is 16 or 17 years old.

References:

2020, Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT

2022, Churches of Christ NSW & ACT