



# Safe Ministry with Children, *it's up to you*

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## Scope

**The policy applies** to all people (lay or ministry agent) within the bounds of the Synod of Queensland conducting child-related activities as part of their ministries of Uniting Church congregations and faith communities, Presbyteries and Synod. This policy includes, but is not limited to child-related activities such as Sunday schools, youth groups, day camps, camps, children's clubs, play groups, Advent and Easter events and Easter Madness.

**Exclusions:** This policy is not intended to apply to the agencies, regulated businesses, colleges and schools of the church. These entities are required to ensure that they comply with their statutory obligations and to maintain policy, process and resources relating to child protection and safety which are specific to their context.

For the purposes of this policy, the term "regulated businesses" includes but are not limited to child care and outside school hours care programs. Congregations conducting regulated businesses must ensure statutory compliance in addition to compliance with any applicable church policy and process.

## Purpose

"The Uniting Church in Australia (the Church) believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect<sup>1</sup>.

Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people, including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup> that States shall protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

Children are gifts of God to be received, welcomed and to be cared for responsibly and justly. The Gospel also directs us to listen to and learn from children. In *On the Way Together* (1998) it is affirmed that "children in the Uniting Church in Australia are nurtured in Christian faith and discipleship, experiencing relationships which promote trust, cooperation, honesty, positive valuing of persons, responsibility and Christian service." It adds that the church "affirms the value and the rights of children as human beings as it listens to, guides, protects, advocates for, and empowers children within its own communities and the wider community."<sup>4</sup>

The primary purpose of the Safe Ministry with Children Policy is to support the Church's vision, mission and ministry with children within the Queensland Synod. It provides a set of standards which emphasise our collective responsibilities to provide a culture of shared guardianship, prevent reasonably foreseeable harm, and care for those who may be vulnerable to the risk of harm, injury or abuse. The three core elements of this policy include:

1. **A Positive Culture:** in which individuals are welcome to participate in, and feel included in ministry and mission, feeling confident to raise even small concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Safe Place Position Statement developed by the Uniting Church in Australia Commission on Women and Men in 1997 cited in National Child Safe Policy Framework, v.2, 2017 – Assembly

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, 1990, article 49 cited in National Child Safe Policy Framework, v.2, 2017 – Assembly

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from National Child Safe Policy Framework, v.2, 2017 – Assembly

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from National Child Safe Policy Framework, v.2, 2017 – Assembly



2. **Environments:** that reduce opportunities for abuse - physical, social, spiritual and emotional environments that are safe.
3. **Systems:** which are robust and accessible – policies, procedures, guidance notes and tools to assist you conduct ministry safely and with accountability.

The Safe Ministry with Children policy, processes and associated resources are informed by the requirements of:

- The Australian Human Rights Commission, [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
- [The Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening\) Act 2000 \(Qld\)](#) (the Act) and the [Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening\) Regulation 2011 \(Qld\)](#) (the Regulation)
- [Work Health and Safety 2011 \(Qld\)](#)
- [The Privacy Act 1988 \(Cth\)](#)
- The Uniting Church in Australia, [National Child Safe Policy Framework](#) (2017)
- [The Uniting Church Regulations](#), 2015 Edition (the regulations), culture and context
- The [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#), [Research Papers](#) and [Final Report](#)
- Other relevant and emerging research and literature reviews and annual audits

In endorsing the Safe Ministry with Children Policy, the Synod Standing Committee endorses the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and exhorts adherence to the policy and its related documents to ensure alignment with the Principles:

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
6. Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

This policy is to be read and implemented in conjunction with the process documents to ensure compliance with the standards to assist congregations and faith communities in meeting the insurance requirements for conducting safe activities.

A suite of tools and forms is provided, to support congregations to implement the policy and processes. The use of these tools is optional, however congregations choosing to use alternate tools or forms are advised to ensure that they meet the minimum requirements for record keeping, i.e. similar to the tools provided.



## Policy

### 1. Policy Statement

All children who are involved in any of the Uniting Church's activities, services, events or programs have a right to feel and be safe. The Church is committed to provide safe environments where children are cared for, respected, nurtured and sustained.

Abuse thrives on secrecy. To prevent child abuse across the Church, we are committed to developing and maintaining an open and aware culture.

The Church commits itself to the creation and maintenance of a child safe culture to ensure the care, protection and safety of all children engaging with the Church in any of its entities.

We will do all in our power to safeguard children from all forms of abuse. The Church clearly affirms its commitment to upholding the law. This includes the requirement to report abuse.

### 2. Our Values

The Uniting Church's values which apply to the care and protection of children include:

<b>Compassion</b>	We will deal with children compassionately and with an understanding of their vulnerabilities.
<b>Respect</b>	We respect the boundaries of professional relationships and respect the rights of every person to feel safe while in contact with our services.
<b>Justice</b>	We will seek justice for those who have been harmed.
<b>Working together</b>	We will work together to create a culture of individual and collective responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children and to create friendly, welcoming spaces for children.
<b>Leading through learning</b>	We will be leaders by undertaking a continuous improvement approach to the protection of children and to offering child friendly services.

### 3. Roles and Accountabilities

#### 3.1. Accountabilities

Councils of the Church with oversight responsibilities should ensure that this policy is implemented by entities within their oversight.

3.1.1. All congregations and faith communities will be held directly accountable to the relevant presbytery and ultimately accountable to the Synod Standing Committee for their compliance or otherwise with this policy and associated statutory compliance.

3.1.2. Individuals will be held accountable for their actions, and in accordance with the outlined processes, issues of concern are to be referred for appropriate corrective or legal action on every occasion.

3.2. The Synod will provide Safe Ministry with Children as the Church's 'Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy' in line with the dictates of the Act and Regulation. The Synod employs a range of people whose functions support and promote safe ministry with children, including:

- to review and update the policy, processes, and associated resources annually in line with the dictates of the Act and Regulation (Risk and Compliance),
- to assist with enquires and audit requests to congregations from the Government Regulator, Blue Card Services (Risk and Compliance),
- to raise awareness, support learning and the development of capacity/training (Risk and Compliance),



- to monitor the implementation of the policy and processes (Risk and Compliance),
- to provide advice and guidance about planning, managing risk, and responding to incidents (Risk and Compliance),
- to provide guidance and response to matters with legal consequence and to ensure statutory compliance (Risk and Compliance),
- to provide guidance with screening and engagement of (paid and unpaid) workers (People and Culture),
- to maintain blue card records including for ministry agents remunerated by stipend (People and Culture),
- to ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of Synod activities and ministries with/for children (Strategic Mission),
- to provide guidance and acts as designated spokesperson to respond to media enquiries (Uniting Communications).

- 3.3. **The Safe Ministry with Children Reference Group** comprised of representatives from each presbytery and Synod Support staff acts as a conduit for communication and quality assurance. This group plays a major role in the development of capacity and oversight of the network of training facilitators.
- 3.4. **Ministry agents:** [Obligations for ministry agents](#) – under both the [Mandatory Reporting Process](#) and the Act and Regulation (including in relation to blue cards) are to be upheld by all Ministry Agents. [Guidance notes](#) to assist with the implementation of these obligations are provided.
- 3.4.1. Lay preachers, for the purpose of training and [reporting abuse](#) are under the same obligations as appointed leaders.
- 3.5. **Each presbytery council** will annually adopt Safe Ministry with Children as their ‘Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy’ to meet the requirements of the Act and Regulation.
- 3.5.1. Each Presbytery will ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of Presbytery activities and ministries with/for children (e.g. camps). Specific guidance relating to the oversight of child-related activity is provided in [Overseeing safe ministry with children](#).
- 3.5.2. Each presbytery will maintain records including blue card records for ministry agents who are not remunerated by stipend.
- 3.5.3. Each presbytery employs or engages people to assist and support congregations to conduct safe ministry with children. This undertaking is in line with presbytery responsibilities under the regulations of the church, to oversee the conduct of congregations, holding them to account.
- 3.5.4. Each presbytery will support the facilitation of training for congregations and ministry agents in partnership with the Synod
- 3.6. **Each church council** will annually adopt Safe Ministry with Children as their ‘Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy’ to meet the requirements of the Act and Regulation.
- 3.6.1. Each congregation, depending on context, may require a range of roles and functions to conduct safe ministry. The church council is responsible for the oversight of all activities with children within the congregation, and will oversee a local structure which is appropriate for the congregation size, considering availability of suitable leaders, local need and demographic.



3.6.2. Where a council makes the decision to conduct no activities with/for children, the decision should be minuted and reviewed annually. In such instances, there is no requirement for Church Council members to hold a blue card for the purpose of their office, nor for blue card details to be maintained in the congregation's Register of Workers.

3.6.3. Each council will ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of all activities and ministries with/for children within their jurisdiction. This includes:

- PEOPLE: selecting, overseeing and supporting leaders and helpers
- PLACES: ensuring venues are safe and in good repair
- PROGRAMS: reviewing and approving planned activities and programs prior to their conduct
- PROBLEMS: addressing concerns and issues as relevant to their responsibilities under the regulations of the church and as set out in policies of the church

Specific guidance relating to the oversight of child-related activity is provided in [Overseeing safe ministry with children](#).

3.6.4. The council is responsible to ensure that records of screening, blue cards, training and program approvals are kept. Registers, templates and guidance notes are provided. Records are to be made available for monitoring, evaluation, capacity development and practice improvement purposes. Where a recommended tool or template is not used, the alternate is to provide the same standard of record keeping and adhere to policy and process expectations.

3.6.5. The council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities but ultimately remains responsible for ensuring accurate and correct documentation. All approvals and delegations of authority are to be minuted including the acknowledgement by the person receiving the delegation.

3.7. **Faith communities:** Each faith community will be made aware of the expectations of policy and process and will be supported by their respective presbytery to adhere to the requirements therein.

3.7.1. The Presbytery Standing Committee or church council of the congregation overseeing the faith community is deemed to assume the responsibilities of the church council as outlined herein.

3.7.2. The presbytery council or church council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities.

3.8. **Leaders and helpers:** All leaders and helpers in ministry with children will:

- be subject to screening processes upon entry
- attend approved safe ministry with children training every two years
- attend additional supplementary training as required for their role
- adhere to safe ministry with children policy and processes
- keep appropriate records as required within the approved processes

#### 4. Range of Acceptable Behaviours – Code of Conduct

4.1. The range of acceptable behaviours or code of conduct shall be maintained by all people in paid or voluntary positions in children's ministry, regardless of gender, age, cultural background or role. The conduct of all individuals within ministry with children shall be free from abuse including neglect, emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse; grooming behaviour and sexual abuse.



- 4.1.1. All individuals, including children and those not in approved leadership positions, will be encouraged to adopt [these behavioural standards](#) so that the culture of safety is enhanced and grown.
- 4.1.2. Leaders must ensure children are made aware of their rights and of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and its consequences.
- 4.1.3. The physical, emotional, behavioural and spiritual boundaries necessary to support the maintenance of safe ministry environments are outlined in the following documents:
  - Uniting Church in Australia [code of conduct for Lay Leaders](#) applicable to leaders and helpers
  - [Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice](#) for Ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia, applicable to Ministers of the Word, Deacons and lay people serving in an approved Ministry of Pastor role
  - To support the implementation of the code of conduct, see the [Guidelines for councils of the church, when implementing the code of conduct for lay leaders](#).

## 5. Inclusion and Participation

- 5.1. Children experience the world differently from adults, and participate in Church life in ways that are different from adults. Children may have priorities that adults have not considered. Adults cannot guess what is important for children without asking them and listening to the answer.  
Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child. They allow their children to participate in Church activities assuming they are safe.
  - 5.1.1. Particular attention should be paid to the needs and views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## 6. Addressing Concerns

- 6.1. When inclusion and participation are features of the culture of ministry with children, individuals will feel more confident to speak up when they have something to say, knowing that they will be listened to and taken seriously.  
All members, including children, will be given access to information about complaints processes and leaders will provide support and respond to questions about the processes to ensure that they are understood by children, staff, families and volunteers. Where appropriate, leaders will ensure families and children have access to sexual abuse prevention programs and information.
- 6.2. All individuals are required to maintain safe ministry by adhering to the code of conduct, and are empowered and compelled by this policy to interrupt and report any concerns, breaches or suspected breaches.
  - 6.2.1. Obligations and guidelines for reporting are outlined in the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers and the Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents. These documents outline the persons responsible for handling complaints, and, where applicable, the external authorities to which reports must be made.
  - 6.2.2. All disclosures, suspicions or knowledge of abuse or grooming should be believed and reported to statutory authorities and Church officials immediately.



6.2.3. Leaders must treat individuals who raise concerns with respect, providing them with an opportunity to speak openly about issues without fear of being judged or rejected. Individuals who raise a concern should be listened to, treated fairly and the person receiving the concern will do their best to assist, and progress the matter in a way which is healthy and constructive and in adherence to the requirements outlined.

6.3. Protections to individuals who make complaints or reports in good faith include that:

- they will be listened to and taken seriously within the Church
- they will be safe to raise even the smallest concerns without fear of repercussions from within the Church
- they will be informed of the progress and/or outcomes of the actions which follow their complaint or report
- they will be able to escalate the complaint or report if they believe the response is unsatisfactory or the matter unresolved
- they will be subject to existing lawful protections from civil and criminal liability and from reprisals or other detrimental action as a result of making a complaint or report.

6.4. All information relating to knowledge, suspicion or reports of alleged abuse or neglect must be collected, stored and used in accordance with the provisions of the church privacy policy. Complaints and concerns will be analysed to identify causes and systemic failures in order to inform continuous improvement.

## Related documents

<b>Assembly:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uniting Church in Australia Regulations</li><li>• Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice</li><li>• Sexual Abuse and Sexual misconduct Policy (Assembly)</li><li>• National Child Safe Policy Framework (Assembly)</li></ul>	
<b>Synod Policies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Privacy Policy</li><li>• Safe ministry with children using digital media</li></ul>	
<b>Processes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Overseeing safe ministry with children</li><li>• Selecting leaders and helpers</li><li>• Planning safe programs</li><li>• Safe ministry with children using digital media</li><li>• Blue card guidance notes for lay workers</li><li>• Mandatory reporting process for lay workers</li><li>• Frequently asked questions: reporting abuse</li><li>• Glossary of terms</li></ul>	<b>Related tools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Role descriptions</li><li>• Interviewing the applicant</li><li>• Checking with referees</li><li>• Letter of appointment</li><li>• Driver information form</li><li>• Statement of personal commitment</li><li>• New starter check-in</li><li>• Annual review &amp; feedback</li><li>• Liturgy</li><li>• Information sheet for parents and guardians</li><li>• Poster</li></ul>
<b>Toolkit for ministry agents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Obligations for ministry agents</li></ul>	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Statement of commitment</li><li>• Complaints and allegations statement template</li><li>• Mandatory reporting process for ministry agents</li><li>• Blue card guidance notes for ministry agents</li><li>• Confidentiality poster</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attendee information forms</li><li>• Image release form</li><li>• Attendance records</li><li>• Registers of workers</li><li>• Performance management record</li><li>• Performance improvement plan</li><li>• Hazard incident notes and register</li><li>• Emergency procedures flip chart</li><li>• Property maintenance checklist</li></ul>
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## Definitions

See [Glossary of Terms](#)

## Revisions

Document number		POL-SMC-01_v3.0			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
1.0	03.12.2015	Synod Standing Committee #15.184	01.01.2016	Risk and Insurance	Child Safe Church Administrator
2.0	02.03.2017	Synod Standing Committee #17.051	01.04.2017	Legal and Governance	Safe Ministry (Children) Administrator
3.0	02.08.2018	Synod Standing Committee #18.180	01.09.2018	Risk	Safe Ministry, Legislative and Compliance Officer
Next scheduled review		02.08.2019			