

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

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Introduction

Berwick Church of Christ (the Church) is committed to being a safe and welcoming place for all people who engage with the Church including children, young people, and especially those most vulnerable. The welfare of children in our care will always be a high priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how the Church prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all Staff and Volunteers who serve in any ministry, whether directly working with children or not. This policy applies to all activities and programs conducted by the Church, where children attend or participate.

Definitions

Please refer to the General Definitions document.

In addition to the General Definitions, the following definitions are relevant to this policy:

“Child abuse” as defined in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving—
 - (i) a sexual offence; or
 - (ii) an offence under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958; and
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of—
 - (i) physical violence; or
 - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- (c) the serious neglect of a child.

“Harm” is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

POLICY

Our Commitment to Child Safety

- We are committed to child safety in every aspect of our mission and vision.
- We are committed to implementing child safety standards.
- We want children to be safe, supported, happy and empowered.

- We have zero tolerance of child abuse. All allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures.
- We acknowledge our legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety.
- We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.
- We have comprehensive policies and procedures for recruiting and managing our people, both staff and volunteers.
- We are committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- We will always report any reasonable belief of child abuse to police, child protection and the Commission for Children and Young People, and comply with mandatory reporting requirements.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse, phone 000

Our Children

We find practical and age-appropriate ways to give participants a voice in the programs and the activities in which they participate, by fostering and valuing their ideas and encouraging participation. We provide a child-friendly environment, allowing people to raise their concerns in an appropriate manner.

We request appropriate information relating to the program participants, including children's health and family situation, to ensure that we are able to care for their physical and emotional needs.

We promote diversity and acceptance of people, languages and cultures, loving one another as Christ modelled.

We ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate meaningfully; and are committed to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Children and their parents are made aware of our Codes of Conduct and are required to abide by them, creating a safe environment for all.

Refer to the Code of Conduct and Code of Conduct for U18s for further information.

Responsibility for Safety

Everyone associated with the Church has responsibilities for safety as set out below:

Who	Role in promoting Safe Places
Individuals (participants)	Take personal responsibility for their own and other's safety; raise any issues of concern. Be aware of and act in accordance with policies and procedures
Volunteers	Be aware of and act in accordance with this policy and its procedures. Encourage program participants to take responsibility for their own and others' safety and advise how to report any issues of concern.
Staff or Leaders	Be aware of and act in accordance with this policy and its procedures. Carry out responsibilities in accordance with employment contract / position description.
The Board	Take responsibility for what happens in the Church. Identify, assess and control risks, and review the effectiveness of control measures. Ensure appropriate insurance arrangements are in place. Adopt appropriate policies and review them regularly. Ensure the relevant policies are widely communicated and lived out in the Church. Ensure the Church is compliant with regulatory obligations. Liaise with Churches of Christ Vic Tas (CCVT) and be guided by CCVT as is necessary.

The Board

The Board has the role of making sure the Church prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

The Board will champion and model a child safe culture at the Church. The Board will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at the Church has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The Board will make sure that Staff and Volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The Board will conduct regular reviews of how effectively the Church is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with the Church will be sought as part of this review.

Safety Contact Person

At least one person is nominated as a Safety Contact Person. The name and contact details of the Safety Contact Person are provided at the end of all policies and is widely publicised.

Our Staff and Volunteers

All Staff and Volunteers are required to:

1. Sign and agree to the relevant Code of Conduct and to abide by it.
2. Be aware of and act in accordance with the relevant policies and sign the relevant Policy Induction.
3. Obtain a Working With Children Check, if over the age of 18 years, whether they are working directly with children or not.
4. Complete awareness-raising online training within 3 months of commencement in their role, and undertake refresher training every 3 years.
5. Agree to become a Partner within 6 months of commencement of their role.

In addition, all Staff and Board members are required to have a Police Check at the commencement of employment and every 3 years thereafter.

Staff and Volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the relevant Code of Conduct and all our policies.

A person cannot be involved in Children's or Youth ministry unless they have been screened, have completed the required policy induction, obtained a Working With Children Check and have signed the Code of Conduct.

All Staff and Volunteers have a clear description of their role in the form of a position description or short statement.

Refer to the Volunteer Recruitment Policy for further information.

Recruitment and Screening

We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety for all Staff and Volunteers.

Refer to the Volunteer Recruitment Policy for further information.

Training and Supervision of People involved in Children's and Youth Ministry

Everyone who is involved in children's / youth ministry must undergo training in child safety, including how to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse, how to detect potential signs of child abuse and how to report any concerns appropriately.

We want all Staff, Volunteers, parents/carers and children, and others involved with our activities to be willing and able to raise any safety concerns in accordance with our Child Safety Reporting Procedure.

We require all Staff and Volunteers to complete the relevant Safe Ministry Check online awareness training within 3 months of commencing in their role and every 3 years thereafter, as well as any other training relevant to their role.

Media and Communications

The Church is committed to ensuring media and communications involve children in safe and ethical ways. Written consent must be provided by parents/guardians before capturing and/or publishing photographs, video recordings or written information involving children.

Only representatives designated by the relevant Pastor are permitted to photograph or record children during Church activities. Photos and recordings must capture children in a positive and dignified manner and ensure they are appropriately dressed. Photos and recordings must be securely stored on the Church Shared Drives and not kept on personal devices.

All media content must be approved by the relevant Pastor and only posted by the designated social media representatives. Content must only include general information of children and must not include identifying information, such as full names, contact details or social media account tags.

Refer to the Church's Social Media Policy and Privacy Policy for further information.

Responding to Complaints and Concerns

We work to ensure all children, families, Staff, Volunteers and others involved with our activities know what to do and who to tell if they are concerned about any behaviour towards themselves or others.

The Church takes all allegations, concerns and complaints seriously and we will respond promptly and thoroughly, and will investigate where appropriate in accordance with regulatory requirements. If a concern/complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then Staff and Volunteers at the Church must report it in accordance with the Mandatory Reporting Procedure.

Our Mandatory Reporting Procedure recognises that in Victoria:

- all adults have an obligation to report information to the police if they have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16; and
- any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Refer to the Mandatory Reporting Procedure for further information.

Reportable Conduct

It is the duty of the Chairperson of the Board under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 to report any allegations made against Staff or Volunteers of 'reportable conduct' to the Commission for Children and Young People, and take further specified action.

There are 5 types of 'reportable conduct':

1. Sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child.
2. Sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child.
3. Physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child.
4. Any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.
5. Significant neglect of a child.

If any person associated with the Church suspects an offence under the 5 types of Reportable Conduct, you must notify either the Senior Pastor, a Pastor or the Safety Contact Person.

Refer to the Mandatory Reporting Procedure for further information.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting refers to the legal requirement of certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.

All Staff and Volunteers involved in any ministry at the Church became mandatory reporters on 17 February 2020.

Mandatory reporters are required to report in relation to significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse. They may choose, as can anyone, to report in relation to other types of significant harm.

Significant harm may relate to:

- Physical injury
- Sexual abuse
- emotional or intellectual development
- physical development or health
- abandonment or parental incapacity

If you make a report or need assistance to make a report, please notify the Safety Contact Person or a Pastor.

Refer to the Mandatory Reporting Procedure for further information.

Record-keeping and Privacy

The Church will keep records of Working With Children Checks, and all allegations of abuse and other safety concerns. All records are securely stored.

We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected in accordance with the Church's Privacy Policy.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

The Church will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our Child Safety Reporting Procedure.

Refer to the Privacy Policy for further information.

Risk Management

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess and take steps to minimise child abuse risks in both physical and online environments.

Refer to the Risk Management Policy for further information.

Safety Contact Person

Name:	Karen Fletcher
Phone number:	0438 886 337
Email:	karenf@bcoc.com.au
Other contact details:	Church Office: 9702 1011 (Mondays to Thursdays)
Feedback, suggestions and concerns can be sent to:	safety@bcoc.com.au

Applicable Legislation, References and Other Policies

Item	Link
Australian Human Rights Commission (National Child Safe Principles)	https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/national-principles
BCOC – Policies	All policies and forms are located at www.berwickchurch.org.au/policies

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (including Victorian Child Safe Standards)	https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/child-wellbeing-and-safety-act-2005/035 https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (including reporting to Child Protection)	https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/children-youth-and-families-act-2005/121
Commission for Children and Young People	www.ccyp.vic.gov.au
Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)	https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/crimes-act-1958/293 https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-a-new-criminal-offence-to https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence
Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (see Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)	https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/wrongs-act-1958/127

