

CHILD SAFE POLICY

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Contact: General Manager/Registrar

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INTRODUCTION:

In our Safe Church policy, we affirm that all people have the right to be emotionally and physically safe, respected and have their views and opinions valued at all times. We also live in a country that legislates for the people's safety.

The Victorian government has introduced child safe standards, through the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* ("the Act"), to create and maintain child safe organisations:

- Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.
- Standard 2: A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.
- Standard 3: A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children.
- Standard 4: Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.
- Standard 5: Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
- Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse.
- Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

The following resolution was passed by Diocese of Bendigo Synod, May 2016 as a part of its commitment to child safety.

Statement of commitment to child safety

This Diocese of Bendigo, welcomes the report of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations (2013), known generally as the Betrayal of Trust enquiry, and the consequent legislated child safe standards;

- acknowledges that the Diocese is due to be compliant by 1 January 2017;
- recognizes the pain and suffering of survivors of childhood abuse;
- encourages the Bishop and Council of the Diocese to continue educating and reforming the Diocese through policy development and the safe church awareness workshops;
- is especially aware of and commits to the safety of Aboriginal children, children from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and children with a disability;

and determines to comply with the child safe standards in order to be a Child Safe Church.

OUR POLICY AIMS TO:

The intention of this policy is two-fold:

1) PROTECT AND EMPOWER OUR CHILDREN

Children are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally

2) GUIDE OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our church leaders/workers, employees and volunteers must agree to abide by Faithfulness in Service (as amended from time to time), the Anglican Professional Standards Protocol and Diocesan Safe Church Policies which specify the standards of conduct required when working with children

WE COMMIT TO:

- children being safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.
- the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.
- zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- our legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, in every instance.
- to preventing child abuse, identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.
- robust recruitment practices for all church leaders/workers, employees and volunteers.
- to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Other checks include police record checks or screening as required by the Lay Authorisations Policy or Anglican Professional Standards.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks as per our Lay Authorisation Guidebook.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. This is conducted primarily through the National Council of Churches Safe Church Training Agreement.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers, parents and children to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. Through the Safe Church Workshops, we provide information to assist our staff and volunteers to identify and minimise risks of child abuse.

Through the Safe Church Awareness Workshops, we also encourage our staff and volunteers to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including Anglican Director of Professional Standards and Victoria Police.

Communication

The Diocese has a Communication Policy to maintain integrity and safety for all church members and in particular children. Electronic Communication Guidelines are in place to ensure that parent or guardian consent is obtained prior to any communication with children and records are maintained. The guidelines also outline requirements when taking photos or videos of children participating in church activities and require permission prior to publishing.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** Reporting to the Commission of Children and Young People, any reasonable belief of 'reportable conduct' (as defined by the Act) within 3 days. This is done via Kooyoora Ltd (as per the Allegations, Concerns, Complaints section below).

Through the Safe Church Awareness Workshops we encourage all staff and volunteers to be ethical reporters.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously. All complaints are directed to Kooyoora Ltd which operates according to a Province of Victoria Abuse and Harassment Protocol. The Director of Professional Standards can be contacted at Kooyoora Ltd on **1800 135 246**.

Safe Church Awareness Training includes ensuring all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

Definitions

Child: a person who is under the age of 18 years

Professional Standards Protocol – refers to the Power and Trust in the Church Protocol – Victorian Anglican Provincial Abuse and Harassment Protocol

SCTA: Safe Church Training Agreement under the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Policy Scope & Coverage

The Child Safe Policy applies to all church leaders/workers, employees and volunteers associated with ministry in our church

Policy Responsibility

The Council of the Diocese is responsible for the implementation and review of this policy

Related Documents: Internal

Other relevant policies and documents relating to child safety and which should be considered in conjunction with this policy include:

- Diocese of Bendigo Safe Church Policy
- Diocese of Bendigo Communication Policy
- Diocese of Bendigo Electronic Communication Guidelines
- Diocese of Bendigo Lay Authorisation Guidebook
- Faithfulness in Service (as amended May 2016) – Code of Good practice
- The Joys and Responsibilities of being a Christian in this Parish _ Code of Practice for Congregations
- Power and Trust in the Church Protocol – Victorian Anglican Provincial Abuse and Harassment Protocol is available to the public online
- The Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) Awareness Workbook of the National Council of Churches.

Related Documents: External

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Reportable Conduct – Information Sheet 2 <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/What-is-reportable-conduct.pdf>

Betrayal of Trust – State Government Victoria

- Failure to disclose offence
- Failure to Protect offence
- Grooming Offence

Adopted by Bishop-in-Council November 2017