



Safe Church Policy

Safe Church, Safe Guarding Individuals

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Related Documentation

Legislation, Processes & Procedures, Policy Guidelines, and Forms

Version Control

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1	WA Synod	Synod Standing Committee	Dec 2016	Dec 2017

1. Policy Statement

The WA Synod is committed to protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults from all forms of harm and abuse.

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to providing a safe environment for all people to encounter God, to deepen relationships and grow in faith. We believe that every person is precious to God and that in following Jesus' example we are called to protect all people, especially those who are vulnerable.

The Uniting Church Synod of Western Australia (WA Synod) also reinforces our commitment to the care, protection and safety of all people within our congregations, faith communities, schools, agencies, related entities, ministries, programs and/or events through this policy.

Safe Church is achieved as safe leaders in churches fulfill and integrate their pastoral, legal, insurance, risk management, denominational and ethical responsibilities as required by the WA Synod.

2. Policy Aims

The WA Synod aims to foster a community which:

- provides and maintains welcoming and safe environments
- offers suitable and well-equipped leadership
- provides a level of resourcing that reflects the value of all people
- provides clear and appropriate Duty of Care guidelines
- believes the safety and well-being of children, vulnerable people and the elderly is paramount
- ensures that all suspected abuse and ministry misconduct is handled thoroughly, in a timely manner and in accordance with this policy and all current, relevant legislation
- ensures strong governance structures within church councils, boards and commissions to fulfil their obligations

This policy applies to:

- all members of congregations and faith communities
- all children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Synod and Presbytery boards, commissions, committees, agencies, schools and related entities of the WA Uniting Church
- all ministers, lay leaders and 'staff and volunteers' (refer to the Definitions page 5)
- any activities and events run under the Uniting Church banner

3. Vulnerable People

The WA Synod recognises that all people regardless of age, gender, race, culture, religious belief, disability, LGBTI identity and/or family/social background have equal rights to freedom from abuse and harm.

We are committed to the care, protection and safety of all in the WA Synod – children, young people, vulnerable adults, ministers, leaders, members, 'staff and volunteers'.

Protection of Children and Young People

The Uniting Church abhors the crime of child abuse.

We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child or young person is paramount, and is everyone's responsibility as outlined in the Uniting Church in Australia's *National Child Safe Policy Framework* and

the Commonwealth Government's *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*

- we need to create friendly, welcoming spaces for children in our churches and related programs and opportunities for them to be actively involved in planning these activities

We are committed to developing, implementing, reviewing and improving policies, practices and responses to children that continually protect them from harm. We will listen to and believe children and young people who disclose or raise concerns of abuse.

Protection of Vulnerable Adults and the Elderly

We recognise that:

- all adults at some time in their lives may become vulnerable and require protection and support due to ill health; mental stress; abuse and bullying; loss; grief; disability; cognitive impairment; age and/or frailty
- it can be difficult for adults and the elderly to disclose and deal with abuse by relatives and friends, because of the emotional and social ties that exist within these relationships.

We believe that people over the age of 18 have the right to make choices, take risks, or refuse support and intervention, as long as they have the cognitive capacity to make informed decisions and can understand the consequences of those decisions.

Safety and Wellbeing of all Vulnerable People

For the safety and wellbeing of all vulnerable people the WA Synod will:

- provide 'staff and volunteers' with the overarching principles and values that guide our approach to protecting vulnerable people: due diligence; integrity; duty of care; transparency; inclusive and collaborative ministry; Christian ethos and the Gospel foundations
- minimise the risk of abuse, misconduct and misuse of positional power
- provide clear and directive reporting protocols and procedures for all ministry leaders, who must report disclosures, concerns about or allegations of abuse in a sensitive, confidential and timely manner
- require all church leaders, members 'staff and volunteers' to attend Safe Church Awareness training endorsed by the National Council of Churches Australia to broaden their knowledge and understanding about how to protect vulnerable people; the types and indicators of abuse; how to respond to disclosures appropriately; and where to report concerns and allegations
- require the appointment of a dedicated safe church team or a safe church concerns person in each congregation and/or ministry program and provide them with induction, support and training

All people (including children) have the right to be respected and valued as well as feel emotionally, physically and spiritually safe at all times.

4. Safe Leaders

The Basis of Union of the Uniting Church (para 13) clearly recognises the different and complementary roles of church members:

"The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.

The term 'leaders' in this policy applies to: ordained Ministers of the Word and others listed under Uniting Church Regulations (2.7.22), lay leaders, staff and volunteers involved in Uniting Church ministries"

Safe Recruitment of Leaders

The WA Synod acknowledges that the recruitment and selection of leaders is an important task.

- The Uniting Church seeks to provide an environment where individuals are given tasks suitable for their gifts, graces, skills and interest.
- We will apply sound recruitment practices and screen all prospective leaders in our ministries, before they are appointed and commissioned.
- Within Uniting Church congregations, we will only accept people for leadership roles where they have been part of the congregation or the ministry program for at least six months to a year.
- Occasional leaders who have not undergone a screening process will always be supervised by an experienced church leader, appointed following the church's recruitment process.
- We will require all leaders to sign, commit to and follow a Code of Conduct set out by their congregation, ministry or program and based on the UCA Assembly Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders

Adequate Training of Leaders

The WA Synod believes the provision of induction, Safe Church and Code of Ethics training and ongoing professional development and refresher courses for leaders is essential.

- We will provide appropriate training to enable those who serve in the church to fulfil the tasks assigned to them.
- We require all leaders to undertake a Safe Church Awareness workshop within their first year of ministry and to attend a refresher workshop every 3 years.

Continued Supervision of Leaders

We commit to ongoing leadership training, supervision and support for leaders.

- Ordained ministers will work within the Uniting Church Code of Ethics for Specified Ministers.
- All lay leaders will wherever possible have peer support, ongoing supervision and ministry reviews to ensure they continue to be suitable and effective leaders.

Responding To Allegations of Risk of Harm (Abuse) and Serious Ministry Misconduct

- All leaders will report disclosures or suspicions of abuse, particularly child abuse in accordance with this policy and in line with their congregation or ministry and WA Presbytery and WA Synod reporting protocols.
- Where a leader has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them, we will initiate a complaint process and if necessary put in place disciplinary measures for that leader. During the entire process we will also provide pastoral support to alleged victim/s and perpetrator/s to work towards a just and fair resolution.

Those in positions of power and authority must have a sound understanding of, and must uphold, appropriate leadership boundaries so as to protect the less powerful person.

5. Safe Programs

The WA Synod is committed to ensuring all church-authorized programs are well-planned, adequately resourced and physically, emotionally and spiritually safe having had all foreseeable risks identified, reduced or negated.

Safe Emotional and Spiritual Environments in our Programs

- We will seek to give participants, including children, a say in the programs and activities in which they participate, by fostering and valuing their ideas.
- We will work to ensure planned activities do not exclude people on gender, physical or intellectual grounds. Likewise we will not force or coerce individuals to participate in any activity with which they are uncomfortable.
- We will obtain appropriate information relating to the program participants, including children's health and family situation, to ensure we are able to care for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Safe Physical Environments

- All leaders will discharge their duty of care through the use of risk management strategies, including the use of appropriate forms and checklists, approved by the council of the church responsible for the activities provided.
- The aforementioned Safe Church Team/Concerns Person will be appointed to establish and maintain health, wellbeing and safety risk management strategies.
- Leaders in all areas of life of the church will provide to their governing council at least annually a summary of programmed activities, including details of resources being used.
- The approval of these programs is to be minuted by the governing council to ensure coverage under the Uniting Church's insurance policies.

6. Policy Review

We are aware that the Safe Church policy must adhere to on-going legal changes and obligations. This policy will be reviewed in the first year and then every two years after approval by the WA Synod.

The guidelines, processes and procedures related to this policy will undergo regular review and assessment to ensure that the Uniting Church is continuing to provide a safe and supportive environment.

We encourage each congregation and Uniting Church entity to produce an annual report on Safe Church and Safeguarding for their Council, Board or Commission to provide feedback, monitor, evaluate and review all protection and safety issues.

7. Helpful Definitions

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

'staff and volunteers': refers to all relevant (according to the context in which it appears) persons, and may include board/council members, employees, volunteers, parents, carers, presbytery members, Church council members, elders, congregation members, people in the specified ministries of the Church and any other person with responsibility for the care of children

Safe Environment: discharges duty of care by taking steps to keep all those in our care safe, including protecting vulnerable people from for example, spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect.

Duty of Care: is a responsibility to ensure safety for those in our care. Duty of care involves anticipating and avoiding foreseeable harm, or minimising harm when it occurs. There can be both a legal and moral duty of care and a moral duty of care may exist even if there is no legal duty of care.

Safe Church Team/Concerns Person is responsible for the oversight of the implementation of the Safe Church Policy and supporting documentation and processes within each Congregation, agency, school or related entity of the Uniting Church.

Entities: Uniting Church community service organisations/activities, Boards, Councils and/or Commissions.

Abuse: The violation of an individual's human or civil rights, through the act or actions of another person or persons.

Child Abuse:

Physical abuse: non-accidental aggressive act towards a child including slapping, shaking, punching, kicking etc.*

Psychological abuse: includes rejecting, ignoring, terrorising and/or not providing emotional support and care.*

Sexual abuse: any sexual activity between a child and an adult or older person (5 or more years older). Includes fondling, penetration, exposing or involving a child in pornography, voyeurism, cyber sex etc.*

Neglect: failure to provide for a child's basic needs, including not enough food, shelter, clothing, supervision, medical attention etc.*

Exposure to

Family Violence: a child being present, either hearing or seeing, while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical, sexual or psychological abuse or is exposed to harm caused by the abuser.

NB Child abuse is rarely a one-off incident and is always harmful. Tens of thousands of children are psychologically and/or physically harmed each year or die from the impact of child abuse and neglect. Far too often that damage lasts a lifetime. (National Association of Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) *AIFS National Child Protection Clearing House

Elder/Vulnerable Adult Abuse: can be any act which causes harm to a person over 18 years of age. Elder abuse can be emotional, psychological, social, physical, financial, sexual abuse or neglect. Typically it is perpetrated by someone in a position of trust, possibly through ignorance or negligence, but often through deliberate intent or predatory actions.

NB Elderly people who have been victims of abuse may be unwilling to report the abuse or prosecute the abusers, as they may believe the fault is their own; or feel a sense of shame that someone close to them is abusing them; be dependent on the abuser; worry about being estranged from their adult children or a partner; and worry about their resultant financial or residential situation.

Grooming: is described as the 'precursor' behaviour to abuse and refers to the process by which a perpetrator manipulates those around them to provide opportunities for abuse and reduce the likelihood of being reported or discovered. Perpetrators create a relationship built on trust or dependency and will often seek out adults and groom them too in order to get access to a child. Some befriend parents or carers who are facing difficulties or who are vulnerable themselves.

Related Documentation

Legislation, Policies and Resources

- Children and Community Services **Act** 2004 (WA)
- Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) **Act** 2004 (WA)
- Child Safe Organisations WA (Commissioner for Children and Young People)
- Child Care Services **Act** 2007(WA)
- Community Protection (Offender Reporting) **Act** 2004 (WA)
- Aged Care **Act** 2007 (Commonwealth Government)
- The Privacy **Act** 1988 & Australian Privacy Principles
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (Commonwealth Government)
- National Child Safe Policy Framework (UCA Assembly)
- Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders (UCA Assembly)
- Member and Adherent Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Complaints Policy (UCA Assembly)

Policy Guidelines

- Creating a Safe Church Culture
- Compliance Requirements
- Confidentiality and Privacy
- Ministry Approval
- Leaders' Approval and Commissioning
- Children's Ministry – inc Behaviour management (See a Safe Place for Children resource),
- Electronic communication
- Photography
- Safe Physical Environment – First Aid, Manual Handling
- Safe Emotional and Psychosocial Environment – pastoral care staff, supportive, caring
- Risk Management – Uniting Church Insurance Services material

Procedures, Processes and Checklists

- Safe Church Checklist
- Types of abuse and indicators
- Responding to and reporting concerns including flow chart
- Support after Disclosure/Risk of Harm reporting
- Recruitment of leaders and volunteers
- Managing Persons of Concern (PoC) in congregations
- Handling Complaints, Grievances and Mediation
- Annual Compliance Audit/ Report
- Audits, assessments, evaluations and reviews – Annual Ministry review
- Checklists – Events/Camps/Excursions/Health and safety

Forms

- Code of Conduct
- Children's Code of Conduct
- Reporting and Recording Disclosures/Concerns Form
- Safe Church Concern/Risk of Significant Harm Referral Form
- Ministry Approval Form
- Safe Ministry Check (over 16) / Leaders' Approval Application Form
- Ministry Registration Form
- Child/Young Person Medical Details Form

- Parent Permission Form
- Program Sign in and out Form
- Program Attendance Register
- Incident/Accident Report Form