



Safe Church Policy

Safe Church, Safe Guarding Individuals

Contents

1. Policy Statement	2
2. Policy Aims	2
3. Vulnerable People	2
4. Safe Leaders	3
5. Safe Programs	5
6. Policy Review	5
7. Helpful Definitions	5

Related Documentation

Legislation, Policy Guidelines, Processes & Procedures, and Forms

Version Control

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1	WA Synod	Synod Standing Committee	Dec 2016	Dec 2017
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This Policy is available on the UCA WA website on the Safe Church page <https://unitingchurchwa.org.au/culture-of-safety/safe-church/sc-policies-and-principles/>

1. Policy Statement

The WA Synod is committed to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from all forms of harm and abuse, keeping them safe and helping them to thrive.

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 acknowledges our responsibility for 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 all Church leaders 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:

- believes the safety and well-being of children, vulnerable people and the elderly is vital
- provides and maintains welcoming, safe and inclusive environments
- ensures strong governance structures within church councils, boards and commissions to fulfil their obligations
- 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
- ensures that all suspected abuse and ministry misconduct is handled thoroughly, reported in a timely manner and in accordance with this policy and all current, relevant legislative requirements.

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 6)
- any activities and events run under the Uniting Church banner

3. Vulnerable People

The WA Synod recognises that all people regardless of age, gender diversity, race, culture, religious belief, disability/ability, LGBTIQ+ identity, sexual orientation and/or family/social background have equal rights to freedom from abuse and harm, to feel safe and thrive in all UCA spaces.

Protection of Children and Young People

The Uniting Church abhors the crime of child abuse and will be proactive in the prevention of harm and in safeguarding our children and young people.

We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child or young person is paramount, and is everyone's responsibility as outlined in the UCA's *National Child Safe Policy Framework* which the WA Synod has endorsed and requires all congregations, agencies and schools to adopt and implement

- *the National Principles of Child Safe Organisations* and the National Office of Child Safety are Commonwealth and State Governments' initiatives which support us in safeguarding our children and young people
- we need to create friendly, welcoming spaces for children in our churches and related programs and provide opportunities for them to be active participants in planning these activities

We are committed to developing, implementing, reviewing and improving policies, practices and responses to children/young people which continually protects them from harm and ensures that they can thrive. We will listen to and believe children and young people who disclose or raise concerns of abuse and who let us know what they believe will keep them safe.

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, harassment 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, so they will need our sensitive response.

We believe that people over the age of 18 have the right to make choices, take risks, or refuse support and intervention, and/or are supported to make informed decisions and can understand the consequences of those decisions where required.

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 from May 2022 are mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse and ensure they 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/Refresher 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 detect and stop grooming behaviours; 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 contact person in each congregation and/or ministry program and provide them with Safe Church information, an 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.”¹

The term ‘leaders’ in this policy applies to: ordained Ministers of the Word and other Specified Ministers listed under Uniting Church Regulations (2.7.22); lay leaders; staff and volunteers involved in Uniting Church ministries/programs/activities.

Safe Recruitment of Leaders

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

- The Uniting Church seeks to provide an environment where individuals are given tasks suitable for their gifts, skills and interests.
- We will apply sound recruitment practices and screen all prospective leaders in our ministries, including the Working With Children Check and National Police Clearance 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 preferably twelve months.
- Occasional leaders who have not undergone a screening process will always be supervised by an experienced church leader who has been 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 and other Specified Ministers will work within the Uniting Church Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice and complete other Professional Standards as required.
- All lay leaders will wherever possible have peer support, ongoing professional 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, the WA Presbytery and WA Synod reporting protocols².
- Where a leader has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them, the WA Synod will initiate a reporting and complaint process and if necessary put in place disciplinary measures

¹ The Basis of Union, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1992, pp25

² How to Handle Disclosures & Reporting Protocols and Reporting Reportable Conduct Fact Sheet(WA Synod)

for that leader. During the entire process we will also provide pastoral support to all parties 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, young people and vulnerable adults, a say in the programs and activities in which they participate, by fostering and valuing their ideas.
- We will work to ensure planned activities are inclusive of all people and do not exclude people based on any discriminatory grounds, practices or beliefs. 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 situations, to ensure we are able to care for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs appropriately.

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/Contact Person will be appointed to establish, promote 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 with approval of any changes 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 and incidents.

7. Helpful Definitions

Child/Young Person: 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 responsibilities in the Church.

- 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 Environment:** a place where duty of care is endorsed/promoted and steps taken to keep all those in our care safe, including protecting vulnerable people from, for example, spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect.
- Safe Church Team/
Contact 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 deliberate 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 involving 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, when a parent or sibling is subjected to physical, sexual or psychological abuse or is exposed to harm caused by the abuser.
 - Grooming:** is described as the 'precursor' behaviour to abuse and refers to the process by which a perpetrator manipulates those around them to set up 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.

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.

Related Documentation

Legislation, Policies and Resources

- Children and Community Services **Act** 2004 (WA) and Amendment Act 2021 (Mandatory Reporting)
- 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
- Work Health and Safety Act 2020 (WA)
- Reportable Conduct Scheme (WA) 2023
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (Commonwealth Government)
- National Child Safe Policy Framework (UCA National Safe Church Unit)
- National Person of Concern Policy (UCA National Safe Church Unit)
- Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders (UCA Assembly)
- Member and Adherent Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Complaints Policy (UCA Assembly)
- How to Handle Disclosures & Reporting Protocols and Reporting Reportable Conduct Guidelines - Fact Sheet (WA Synod)

Policy Guidelines

- Creating a Safe Church Culture
- Confidentiality and Privacy
- Ministry Approval
- Leaders' Approval and Commissioning
- Children's Ministry – inc Behaviour management
- Electronic/on-line communication
- Photography and Videos
- 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 – NCCA 2024 Safe Church Workbook
- 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 Feedback, 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