



PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF
VICTORIA

SAFE CHURCH BASIC TRAINING

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VICTORIA

PARTICIPANTS WORKBOOK

www.safechurchpcv.org.au



Safe Church Basic Training

Welcome to Basic Training – and thank you for your willingness to serve God and the church by attending this session.

The aim of Basic Training is to help you in your role in the church by ensuring you understand the Safe Church material and how it applies to you and your ministry. By taking part today you also ensure you and the Presbyterian Church of Victoria comply with Victorian Government training requirements for organisations that work with children.

Thank you for helping our denomination provide a good witness to our Victorian community of our godly love for our fellow neighbours – young and old.

How to use this workbook

As we work through the four sections of training you will find that critical information is reproduced for you here in the workbook, along with sections for reflection and notes.

At one point during this training you will be considering a scenario in groups. The scenario will be given to each group at this time. The aim of working through scenarios is to give you an opportunity to think through how the material might be applied in a real life situation.

More information

In this workbook you will find lots of information about dealing with and preventing abuse. This information is valuable because it tells you what is required of you and how we go about dealing with these issues within the church.

www.safechurchpcv.org.au also has further information and resources. If you have any further queries or concerns regarding Safe Church feel free to contact the Safe Church Unit:

Mrs Fiona Bligh, Safe Church Facilitator, Safe Church Unit

Telephone 0499 090 449

Email safechurch@pcv.org.au

Safe Church is everybody's responsibility –
Anyone can contact the SCU with complaints or concerns

DISCLAIMER

Safe Church deals specifically with the issue of abuse of children and young people and the abuse of authority by those in a position of authority within the church. It does not deal with any other form of grievance or personal injury claim. Safe Church is provided on the terms and understanding that the writer and the church is not responsible for the results of any action taken on the basis of information in this publication, nor for any error in, or omission from, this publication. The author, the publisher, its employees or any other persons involved in the preparation of Safe Church expressly disclaim all and any liability and responsibility to any person, in respect of anything, and of the consequences of anything, done or omitted to be done, by any such person in reliance, whether wholly or partially, upon the whole or any part of this publication. Where a specific issue / incident arises, expert professional advice should always be sought. The information and advice is made available in good faith, reflects current knowledge, literature, legislation, regulations and standards and is derived from sources believed to be accurate at the time of publication. Safe Church should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation and is not a substitute for it. The content will require updating in line with amendments or additions, which may supersede those cited, later in time, after the publication of this document.

Before you begin

What is Safe Church?

Safe Church is the Policy, Code of Conduct and processes used within the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to deal with and prevent abuse within the church.

Safe Church Basic Training:

- Familiarises you with the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct
- Informs you about the legal environment in which the PCV operates from an abuse response and prevention perspective
- Informs you about the nature of abuse and abuse prevention and response within the PCV specifically
- Focuses particularly on child protection and child abuse to comply with government requirements, including the Victorian Child Safe Standards (VCSS)

The terms “child” and “children” are defined within Safe Church Basic Training as people under 18 years of age and as such includes teenagers or young people.

Please read this entire booklet in addition to attending the training.

Who must complete Safe Church Basic Training?

This training is to be completed by everyone in a position of authority and everyone who works with children under 18 in the denomination. This includes all ministers, home missionaries, board members, deacons and deaconesses, church workers, elders, paid employees and volunteers.

Safe Church Training Compliance

Safe Church **Basic Training** must be completed once, within 12 months of commencing working with children or in a leadership (both volunteer and paid roles) position in the PCV. A brief online **Refresher Course**, available at the PCV Safe Church YouTube channel, must also be viewed yearly. **Advanced Training** is delivered to designated leaders within PCV churches and organisations. See the Training page of the website for details and Advanced Training dates.

How is training delivered?

Presbytery-wide or individual congregational Basic Training is available upon request. Individual congregations may choose to hold their own Basic Training sessions using the online videos and training kit available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au Basic Training can only be delivered by SCRs in congregations and must be registered with the SCU. Advanced Training is delivered by the Safe Church Facilitator in person.

What is included in this training?

It is recommended to allocate approximately 2 hours for the training. There are four sections in Basic Training:

1. Safe Church PCV
2. Recognising and Reporting Abuse.
3. Wise leadership.
4. Wise practices.

1. Safe Church PCV

At the end of this section you should know:

- Why we need Safe Church PCV
- What the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct are
- How Safe Church Basic Training assists leaders within the church
- The role of the Safe Church Unit (SCU)

Introduction - Why do we need Safe Church PCV?

“The Bible shows us that we live in a moral universe, because it is created by the holy God. Therefore, our actions matter, they have consequences and affect relationships. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that relationship, and personal relationships, are not incidental to reality but are the heart of reality.” *Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Study Paper, John McClean, 2003*

Reflection

Thinking about the above statement, why would having policies concerning prevention of and response to abuse be important within the church?

We know from the Bible that

- As human beings we are made in the image of God

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them Genesis 1:27

- God has a special concern for the vulnerable, especially children

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Matthew 19:14

- Jesus commands us to express our love for God in how we treat others

[Jesus] answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ ” Luke 10:27

- Jesus treats our actions towards others, particularly those under our leadership and care, with the utmost gravity

Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. So watch yourselves.” Luke 17:1-3a

Reflection

How does reading these verses make you think and feel about being a leader and/or caring for children within the church?

Getting the Balance Right

Attitudes towards abuse in the Church may generally fall somewhere on the following spectrum:



Reflection

Where do you feel you are on the above spectrum?

Thinking about historical attitudes towards abuse within the church, what attitude do you think should be adopted by Christians in the 21st century?

Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct

The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct are our commitment to preventing and responding to abuse within the PCV. These documents clearly communicate that as a church we treat dealing with abuse with the utmost seriousness and commitment.

You must read through the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct in your own time. You must abide by the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct in your ministry role(s). Note that:

- Our Policy and Code of Conduct are public. We want to be held accountable.
- Our Policy and Code of Conduct acknowledge that people place an enormous amount of trust in us, and that the right response to that trust is to be committed to making sure that all our actions are morally upright.
- We want our ministries to be places of safety for everyone.

Safe Church Policy

- We commit ourselves to respect other people's minds, emotions and bodies. We have established Safe Church - PCV as the public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of the church to address issues of abuse within the church.
- We acknowledge and accept the trust granted to us by those who are taking part in church activities, their families, and the wider community. We therefore commit ourselves to striving to ensure that all our actions are morally upright.
- We acknowledge that, as a church, our responses to victims in the past may have varied greatly. We express regret and sorrow for any hurt that may have been caused whenever the response appeared to be inappropriate or inadequate.
- We are committed to establishing a process that strives for truth and confidentiality. We will ensure as far as possible that a compassionate response is the first priority in all allegations, even at a time when it is not yet certain that the allegations are accurate, through offering assistance, protection and care without passing judgment or prejudicing the rights of the alleged offender. We acknowledge that concealing the truth is contrary to the character of God, unjust to victims and a disservice to offenders.
- We understand and value the need for support to all parties involved in an allegation, including the aggrieved person and the alleged offender, and we actively seek to provide this support.
- We acknowledge the personal and public difficulties that a false, misconceived, malicious or vexatious allegation can cause for the person accused. We will take whatever steps are possible to address these difficulties.
- We are willing to know the full extent of the problem of abuse and the causes of such behaviour within the church. We will strive to be aware of our legal responsibilities and obligations in relation to prevention, reporting and processing requirements and seek to meet them at all times.
- We acknowledge that we have had to make changes in the way that we relate to children and young people and others, as a result, some good things have been lost, however we will bear this loss to ensure as far as possible that the vulnerable are safe.
- We will ensure as far as possible that all people in positions of authority within the church and/or working with children and young people are aware of the appropriate standard of conduct and boundaries. We require those who work on behalf of the church to indicate their agreement with this policy statement and work towards providing an environment that prevents abuse.
- We believe that churches ought to be places of safety and refuge for children, young people and others, where they should be and feel safe from any threat when on church property or involved in activities operated by the church, or accessing services provided by the church. We believe that the church should be a place where people can disclose abuse and have it dealt with effectively.
- We will establish a prevention strategy that includes screening, sound recruitment and selection procedures, clear boundaries, risk identification and management, education, support, supervision and training.
- We acknowledge that the age of consent for sexual activity is determined by legislation. However, we are mindful that this must be read in the light of our moral and spiritual responsibility. All people in a position of authority within the church, be it real or perceived, paid or unpaid, have a moral and spiritual responsibility towards those over whom they have authority. In this situation it is never appropriate to take part in sexual activity of any kind, regardless of the person's age. We affirm that sexual behaviour belongs in a marriage relationship only and that in this context it is a good gift of God.

- All allegations will be notified to the appropriate external authorities, overseen by the Safe Church Unit (SCU), investigated thoroughly and determined as described in Safe Church - PCV.
- Irrespective of any other action that may be taken by authorities outside the church, the church reserves the right to exercise its powers according to the Code of Discipline and Safe Church - PCV wherever this action is deemed necessary.

Notes

Safe Church Code of Conduct

Read through the Safe Church Code of Conduct below.

The following constitutes the church's Code of Conduct for behaviour for a person in a position of authority within the church:

1. As a person in a position of authority within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You should avoid situations where you are vulnerable to temptation or where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of this Code of Conduct. You will make yourself familiar with the provisions of Safe Church - PCV.
2. You must not fail to take action to prevent to the best of your ability and report as required any of the following:
 - child abuse,
 - a child or young person at risk of significant harm,
 - reportable conduct,
 - sexual misconduct, and/or
 - conduct that breaches the Safe Church - PCV Code of Conduct.
3. Sexualised behaviour is any behaviour that may reasonably be perceived to be of a sexual nature according to the standards of the time by the person to whom it is directed. Sexualised behaviour is only permitted as set out in the Word of God. Except with one's own marriage partner, all sexualised behaviour is forbidden. If you are not married you must abstain from all sexual or sexualised behaviour.
4. You must not engage in or condone any behaviour that could be considered to be:
 - child abuse,
 - putting a child or young person at risk of significant harm,
 - reportable conduct, and/or
 - conduct that breaches this Safe Church - PCV Code of Conduct.
5. You must not engage in or condone any behaviour that could be considered to be sexual misconduct, understanding that sexual misconduct is contact or invitation, via any means, of a sexual nature which is inconsistent with the integrity of a person in a position of authority within the church. Sexual misconduct includes any behaviour that could be reasonably considered to be sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, coercion or grooming of an adult or a child or young person.
6. Sexual exploitation refers to any form of sexualised behaviour with an adult, child or young person, whether or not there is consent and regardless of who initiated the behaviour, where that

behaviour is contrary to the Word of God. Therefore, you will not among other things engage in or condone any of the following:

- behaviour or a pattern of behaviour aimed at the involvement of others in sexual acts, including but not limited to coercion or grooming behaviour,
 - sexualised behaviour with a person below the age of consent,
 - sexualised behaviour with a person with whom there is a supervisory, pastoral care, or counselling relationship,
 - the production, distribution, possession of or accessing of pornographic material of any kind,
 - taking advantage of the conscious or unconscious use of sexually provocative behaviour that some victims of abuse display,
 - engaging the services of a prostitute, or soliciting or providing such services,
 - visiting, without legitimate reason, a brothel or any place maintained for the abuse-of-sex industry,
 - viewing or reading, in print or otherwise, material of a sexually explicit nature, except for a legitimate purpose,
 - participating in sexually explicit conversation via social media, chat rooms, gaming or any other means, and
 - asking, without legitimate reason, any questions about the intimate details of a person's sexual life or providing details of your own sexual life.
7. Sexual harassment means unwelcome sexualised behaviour, whether intended or not, in relation to an adult, child or young person where that person reasonably feels in all circumstances offended, belittled or threatened. Such behaviour may consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time. Therefore, you will not, among other things engage in or condone:
- implicit or explicit demands or suggestions for sexual activities,
 - making any gesture, action or comment of a sexual nature to a person or about a person in their presence,
 - making jokes containing sexual references or innuendo using any form of communication,
 - exposure to any form of sexually explicit or suggestive material, including but not limited to pornography of any kind,
 - physical contact that is inappropriate to the situation or uncomfortable or confusing for the receiver, including kissing, hugging, touching, pinching, patting or aggressive physical conduct,
 - touching any sexual part of the body, including the "only kidding" or accidental occasions of sexual touch,
 - generating or participating in inappropriate personal correspondence (including electronic communication) in respect of sexual or romantic feelings or in breach of the Code of Conduct,
 - inappropriate giving of gifts, including those of a sexual, suggestive or romantic nature that is in breach of the Code of Conduct,
 - inappropriate or unnecessary discussion of, or inquiry about, personal matters of a sexual nature,
 - inappropriate intrusion of personal space or physical privacy, including being alone in a bedroom or bathroom or allowing inappropriate exposure during activities that require dressing or changing clothes,
 - voyeurism, and
 - persistent following or stalking.
8. Coercion or grooming behaviour refers to physical or psychological actions intrinsic to initiating or hiding abusive behaviour, which involves the manipulative cultivation of relationships with vulnerable adults, children and/or young people, their carers and others in authority. You will not exhibit any behaviour that could be considered to be coercion or grooming behaviour.
9. With regard to children and young people:

- You will not visit a child or young person in their own home unless a parent is present or you visit with another person in a position of authority within the church with parental permission.
 - You will not conduct a camp or other activity involving overnight accommodation without appropriate “camp parents” (ideally a married couple over the age of 25 years, of known maturity and Christian commitment) approved by the supervising body.
 - You will not provide any form of accommodation for any reason where there is not strict segregation by sex, with the exception of married couples and families. Supervision of children and/or young people must be provided by a person of the same sex.
 - You will ensure that any activity involving children and/or young people is open to observation by parents and other adults with a legitimate interest
10. With regard to adults, children and young people:
- You will not condone or participate in bullying behaviour, where bullying is the repeated seeking out or targeting of an adult, child or young person to cause them distress and humiliation or to exploit them, including but not limited to exclusion from a peer group, intimidation and extortion.
 - You will not participate in or allow nude swimming or other such activities.
 - You will not participate in or allow initiations and secret ceremonies.
11. With regard to adults, children and young people, either the Presbytery or Session may make temporary variations in respect to the details of the following. These temporary variations will be formally recorded by the Presbytery or Session and will be made on a restricted basis for individuals in specific circumstances for a specific period of time. Where no temporary variation is formally recorded, the following will apply without change:
- You will take care to ensure an appropriate balance of transparency and confidentiality so that the private concerns of others are not disclosed or revealed improperly. In ordinary circumstances, when you are providing pastoral care to, or working with members of the opposite sex, you will strive to do so in an environment that allows visual surveillance and, where reasonable, have other people within hearing distance.
 - You will not allow a child to sleep in close proximity to an adult, other than a parent or guardian, unless there is a significant separation, and privacy of all parties is respected.
 - You will not allow an adult to share accommodation with one child or young person only unless they are a parent or guardian of that child or young person.
 - You will not drive a child or young person unaccompanied.

Where specified provisions cannot be followed in an emergency, the circumstances of the emergency and the actions taken should be reported to and approved by the supervising body. Where the actions taken are not approved they will be considered to be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Any breaches of this Code of Conduct for any reason will be reported to the appropriate supervising body as soon as possible. The supervising body will then report the matter to the Safe Church Unit (SCU).

All organisations in Victoria that work with children are required by law to comply with the Victorian Child Safe Standards. Under the Child Safe Standards organisations must take a clear stance against racism and **the PCV, in accordance with the Word of God (see, for example, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11-15 and Romans 15:7), has zero tolerance for racism.** The PCV is committed to address any instances of racism towards children with appropriate consequences and will consider and respond to each instance with seriousness and gravity. **Complaints of racism against children under 18 are to be made to the Session of each church or the Safe Church Unit.**

Notes

The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct:

- Build on the existing abuse prevention and response culture within the PCV
- Are designed to be understood and lived out within the PCV to the glory of God
- Support our witness to God's love and saving power through Jesus Christ by taking the issue of abuse within the church seriously
- Enable leaders and those who work with children to be even better equipped to fulfil the Great Commission:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

National Safe Ministry Framework

In addition, the Presbyterian Church of Australia has adopted a National Safe Ministry Framework (NSMF) for itself. Safe Church PCV also conforms so far as possible (bearing in mind the particular state-based requirements of Victorian state child safety legislation) to the NSMF. The NSMF aims to "advance God's glory, protect children from harm, help the Church to maintain a good relationship with outsiders, and guide potential offenders away from the destructive paths of sin." (Introduction, NSMF). In your own time, please read through the NSMF principles at Appendix B.

Why do we undertake Safe Church Basic Training?

- Familiarise PCV employees and volunteers with the Safe Church Policy, Code of Conduct and relevant Victorian laws, in order that the responsibilities and obligations placed upon them are clear
- Increase awareness and understanding of the nature, signs and symptoms of abuse and how to respond appropriately
- Assist in further development of, and, commitment to, best practice in safe ministry in the PCV
- Raise awareness of the Safe Church Unit as the place to report concerns and/or known cases of abuse to ensure the PCV is compliant with Victorian Government legislation & the Victorian Child Safe Standards (VCSS)
- Learn what, when and how to report abuse in the PCV

It is important to note that the General Assembly of the PCV initiated Safe Church training in 2013 as a self-imposed program, building upon the foundation of Breaking the Silence (the previous abuse prevention and response policy and procedure). The PCV recognised that intentional abuse prevention and response training was essential for the denomination. Coincidentally, the Victorian State Government announced that child abuse prevention and response training would become mandatory from 1 January 2017 under the VCSS for all organisations working with children. The initiation of Safe Church training prior to this meant that the PCV was well-placed to demonstrate compliance with both community and government expectations in this critical area of church life.

The Role of the Safe Church Unit (SCU)

The SCU is responsible for the implementation of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct across the whole of the PCV. Implementation includes providing the following services to the congregations, sessions, presbyteries, organisations and General Assembly of the PCV:

- assistance to congregations/organisations in matters of compliance
- education and training in Safe Church matters
- information and guidance in Safe Church procedures and practice
- website provision
- assisting and resourcing the Church in response to concerns/allegations and in compliance with the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme
- screening for those who work with children within the denomination
- Safe Church record keeping
- support, information, advice and referrals for Safe Church matters
- establishment of compliance auditing throughout the denomination
- best practice advice for safe ministry in the PCV
- Liaison between the PCV and relevant State government authorities and agencies in regard to Safe Church matters

The SCU is a resource for the PCV and can be contacted by anyone at any time with questions, concerns or complaints in relation to abuse.

2. Recognising and Reporting Abuse

At the end of this section you should have better understanding of:

- What abuse is (relating to both adults and children)
- How to recognise the signs of child abuse
- What to do and say when a person discloses abuse – the **Abuse Disclosure Process**
- Victorian Mandatory Reporting obligations
- What and how to report
- The Victorian laws relating to grooming, sexting, and the handling of child abuse by organisations such as churches

This section of Basic Training contains material which may be distressing for some people. If you are distressed or would like to talk to someone more about this you should contact one of your church leaders. You are also very welcome to contact the SCU who can recommend Christian counsellors for you to speak with.

Introduction

Understanding Abuse

Abuse is a complex issue that seriously impacts a person's wellbeing. Abuse often occurs in environments where trust is involved, where a person in position of trust and/or authority misuses their position to harm another. Often the recipient of the abuse is vulnerable in some way, whether due to their personal circumstances (for example, their age or gender) or because in the relationship the abuser is in a position of power or authority.

Abuse means to treat someone with cruelty or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly. It also means to misuse something (for example, sex) to bad effect or for a bad purpose. For example, sexuality expressed between a man and a woman in marriage is a right and godly thing while sexuality expressed between an adult and a child is a wrong and ungodly thing. In effect it means to cause harm.

Abuse can occur in any of the following forms: physical, sexual, emotional/mental and, mainly in the case of adults, financial.

Abuse in the church is a serious concern and it is the responsibility of leaders and all those who work with children (who are by their age particularly vulnerable) to do everything possible to prevent and/or minimise the risk of abuse.

Notes

Reporting Child Abuse

Firstly, why focus particularly on child abuse?

The sad and distressing history of child abuse in institutions such as churches is now widely known. In Australia State and Federal government have now responded to this history in order to minimise further risk of abuse to children. As a result Victorian government legislation requires all organisations that work with children to train their personnel in child abuse detection, prevention and response. Thus, the PCV is required by law to ensure all leaders and those who work with children are educated and trained in this particular area. This is why the Safe Church Basic Training especially focuses on the subject of child abuse.

Mandatory Reporting - Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) Victoria

The Victorian Parliament, on September 10th 2019, passed amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act*, which mean that people in religious ministries are added to the list of mandated reporters to Child Protection Services.

The legislation states that a:

"person in religious ministry means a person appointed, ordained or otherwise recognised as a religious or spiritual leader in a religious institution;"

The law makes it mandatory for ministers and other appointed religious leaders to report child abuse, including when it is revealed to them during a confession. Under the law, ministers and religious leaders face up to three years' jail if they don't report child physical and sexual abuse allegations. This law was supported by both the Government and the Opposition.

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

There is no significant change for the PCV brought about by this legislation as under 'Failure to Disclose' and the existing Safe Church PCV reporting protocols, PCV personnel have essentially operated as mandatory reporters regardless.

Liberty to report

Any person has the liberty to report directly to external agencies and the Safe Church Unit any allegations or matters of suspicion of risk of sexual abuse or harm, noting that the purpose of reporting to the Safe Church Unit is to ensure that the Church can take action promptly to protect children.

If a report is made first by a PCV volunteer or employee to the external authorities, a second, follow up report must be then made to the Safe Church Unit - **0499 090 449**

Any questions about this may be directed to the Safe Church Unit.

In Summary:

- Under Victorian law all employees and volunteers of the PCV are understood to be Mandatory Reporters of child physical and sexual abuse
- The Presbyterian Church of Victoria has zero tolerance for child abuse
- The Safe Church Unit reports child abuse to the relevant external authorities, as per the law of Victoria

How to recognise the signs of child abuse

The following chart gives **examples** of possible indicators of child abuse. Note it is not an exhaustive list - for a more detailed list of indicators see www.safechurchpcv.org.au Note that the presence or absence of any indicators listed does not necessarily mean the child is or is not experiencing abuse.

Form of Abuse	Possible Indicators
Sexual abuse	Verbally reports or discloses sexual abuse , aggressive, overt sexual behaviour, age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual acts, wary of physical contact (especially with an adult), physical signs of injuries (generally to the genital area), poor self-esteem, poor peer relations, inappropriate expressions of friendship between a child and an adult, self-harm
Physical abuse	Verbally reports or discloses physical abuse , unexplained welts, bruises, burns, fractures, lacerations, abrasions, head injuries, appears frightened of carer, seeks affection from any adult with no discrimination, extreme aggression or withdrawal or other behavioural extremes, complaints of soreness or injuries
Emotional Abuse	Verbally reports or discloses emotional maltreatment , speech disorders, lags in physical development or failure to thrive, attempted suicide, low self-esteem, toileting problems, apathetic, withdrawn, habit disorders (such as rocking, biting, sucking)
Neglect	Verbally reports there is no carer/parent at home or a consistent lack of supervision consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress, chronically unclean, unattended physical problems, medical or dental needs, underweight, developmental delays, begs or steals food

*For information on Carer indicators see www.safechurchpcv.org.au/children

What to do and say when a child discloses abuse

It is possible for any person in the church, whether in a position of authority or not, to have a child disclose abuse. In such circumstances it is extremely important that the situation is not compromised in any way. The following **Abuse Disclosure Process** is intended to assist if a child discloses abuse to someone in the church.

What to do if a child discloses abuse – Abuse Disclosure Process

1. Listen, listen, listen...and do not add anything.
2. When listening to a child **remember**:
 - that children often talk about difficult or painful things in a roundabout way
 - that children need assurance from adults that it is OK to talk about upsetting things
 - children often feel ashamed and frightened and find it hard to find the right words to explain
 - being observant will help you pick up non-verbal clues about what is wrong
 - a child may drop hints when something is wrong, for example, "I don't like so and so. Do you like him/her?"
3. Tell the child, "You are not to blame".
4. Do not press the child for information or push the child to reveal the details of the abuse. Do not ask leading questions, rather listen carefully and if possible take notes.

5. Reassure the child, “You are right to tell and I take what you say very seriously.”
6. Tell the child that you and the church are there to help and you will be telling the Safe Church Unit what has been said so that the child can receive help.
7. Do not promise not to tell anyone else. Rather, say “There are people who can help you and I will tell them.”
8. Finish on a positive note and tell the child “I am pleased you told me this. You are not alone.”

If you consider that the child is in immediate danger call the Victoria Police on 000. Stay with the child and then call the SCU 0499 090 449.

If there is no immediate danger then as soon as possible after the disclosure make handwritten notes of exactly what the child said and the date and time of the meeting. Once this has been done **contact to SCU to report – 0499 090 449.**

Remember, when a person (adult or child) discloses abuse this is a situation when you cannot promise to keep the information to yourself. Instead, you could say something like:

“I’m glad that you have told me that is happening.”

“You won’t be on your own during this – we will help you.”

“I can’t promise not to tell anyone but I can promise to help you.”

“I will tell you what I will do. I will talk to [you might mention a co-leader here] and they will help us know what to do next. That may mean talking to some other people in the church, like the Safe Church Unit. Let’s take it one step at a time, OK? And we will do this together.”

Reflection Question:

Have you ever been in a situation where you have been told something and then asked not to tell anyone else? What will you remind yourself of, if a child discloses abuse and asks you not to tell?

What and how to report – Relating to Children

In terms of reporting known or suspected child abuse the section entitled “How to recognise the signs of child abuse” sets out the kind of behaviours and/or disclosures that must be reported.

When thinking about whether or not certain signs indicate the presence of abuse the following points are useful to remember:

- Some “one-off” signs are clearly reportable straight away. For example, **a child disclosing abuse must be reported as soon as possible.**
- It may take time to build up an overall picture of a child who is potentially being abused as the signs may be infrequent at first but as you get to know the child better through the course of ministry you may see more and more signs that lead you to have real concerns. In other words, some behaviour on its own or as a one-off event may not indicate abuse is occurring however **a pattern of such behaviours emerging over time** clearly indicates that your concerns should be reported.
- It is better to report concerns and discuss the situation confidentially rather than leave things be. It may be that your concerns are unfounded or explainable and no further action is necessary **however** the risk of leaving things too long is high when a child’s safety and well-being is at stake.

- There may be a situation where you witness behaviour by an adult to a child that is clearly abusive or where a child discloses information to you and you reasonably believe they are in immediate danger. In this instance always report and if necessary call the police to intervene in a potentially dangerous situation.
- It is always sensible to involve another leader from your church or ministry group in discussing the situation and reporting. Churches and organisations may have protocols around this, for example in youth ministry a junior leader who has concerns about a child would need to discuss this with the senior leader and then the report to the SCU may be made. Remember however not to discuss the situation any more widely and to maintain confidentiality appropriately.

Always report any known or suspected child abuse to the Safe Church Unit by telephoning 0499 090 449. Personnel in the PCV are always able to make a report directly to the Victoria Police or Child Protection first if they so wish however afterwards the Safe Church Unit must be notified of the case and the report made. Remember – PCV volunteers and employees are Mandatory Reporters in Victoria.

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Church must comply with the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme. For details on what constitutes 'Reportable Conduct' and how to make a report please see Appendix A, at the end of the booklet.

Scenario Workgroups

We now break into workgroups for approximately 10 minutes to discuss a specific scenario and how we might respond in a real life situation. You will be referring to the **Abuse Disclosure Process** on pages 13-14.

Grooming Behaviour

Grooming behaviour concerns predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a person for sexual activity at a later time. It involves the manipulative cultivation of relationships with vulnerable adults, children, carers and others in authority.

Grooming behaviour is a pattern of behaviour aimed at engaging an adult or child as a precursor to abuse. The behaviour can include:

- persuading the person that a “special” relationship exists through spending inappropriate time with them OR persistently attempting to have “legitimate” time alone with the person
- inappropriately giving gifts
- showing special favours to them but not others, allowing them to overstep rules etc.
- testing of boundaries, such as undressing in front of them, allowing them to sit on the lap, talking about sex, “accidental” touching of genitals, asking them to touch the groomer first etc.

These behaviours may not indicate a risk if occurring in isolation but if there is a **pattern** of behaviour occurring it may indicate grooming.

Abusers often cultivate relationships with children and use grooming behaviour to prepare them for the abuse. This can be done in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

- Identifying children who are emotionally needy.
- Identifying children who seem alone or apart from their peer group or who are excluded by peers.

- Establishing a relationship with the child's family to gain trust.
- Touching the child in the presence of the family to get the child and the family used to the behaviour.
- Initiating contact in situations where no other adult is present or setting up situations where this is the case.
- Setting a child apart from peers and/or siblings as "special".
- Establishing a "peer" or "buddy" relationship with them.

Grooming now commonly takes place electronically. Offenders seek out their victims by using internet chat facilities, and they can also carry on "conversations" with the child via smart phone apps, email or SMS that are not observable to adults.

Often, the grooming process will continue for months before there is any physical contact. Part of the process is also to construct secrecy with the child. The offender will:

- Make the child fearful that he or she will be in trouble if their activities together are discovered.
- Tell the child that touching between them is good; their relationship is special.
- Tell the child there will be consequences if they report behaviour (i.e., "We no longer can be friends", "Your family will hate you", etc.).

The offender works constantly to secure compliance while escalating sexual behaviour over time.

Grooming behaviour may include, among other things, actions that could be considered to be sexual exploitation. Grooming is a criminal offence in Victoria and as such is reportable.

When suspicious of possible grooming, the key is to look for patterns of behaviour in both the suspected perpetrator and the child that would suggest grooming is occurring. Also, look for power differences present in the suspected relationship and ask yourself if the suspected perpetrator has gone out of their way to gain your trust, or has behaved in exemplary ways to reassure you of their "good intentions".

Our responsibility as a church is to ensure as far as possible that the children in our care are safe. We should encourage parents to hold us accountable, to watch what we do. We should encourage each other to maintain appropriate boundaries.

What prevents people from reporting concerns, or suspected or known child abuse?

- Fear of doing something wrong or making the situation worse.
- Fear of exposing the child to further abuse by telling someone else.
- Fear of being culpable if it turns out the child is not a victim of abuse.
- Fear of coping emotionally with the situation

It is better to speak up than stay silent – a child's welfare is paramount
Remember – reporters are protected under the provisions of the Victorian law

Victorian laws relating to grooming, sexting, and the handling of child abuse by organisations such as churches

In addition to the Mandatory Reporting legislation, the following laws are applicable.

The following information is sourced from <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au>

Grooming is a criminal offence

The Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014, which commenced in Victoria on 9 April 2014, introduces the offence of Grooming for sexual conduct with a child under the age of 16 years. This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child.

The offence applies where an adult communicates, by words or conduct, with a child under the age of 16 years or with a person who has care, supervision or authority for the child with intention of facilitating the child's involvement in sexual conduct, either with the groomer or another adult. It does not necessarily involve any sexual activity or discussion or sexual activity – it may only involve establishing a relationship with the child, parent or carer for the purpose of facilitating sexual activity at a later time.

Sexting laws

Unsolicited sexting, sharing unwanted "intimate images" and even threatening to distribute such images is now illegal in Victoria under laws designed to protect digital privacy.

The sexting laws create two offences for "distribution of an intimate image" and "threat to distribute an intimate image" deemed to be "against community standards of acceptable conduct".

The laws apply to images of adults who have not consented to pictures being shared, and to the distribution of images of anyone under the age of 18.

The offence for distribution carries a penalty of up to two years in prison and the offence of threatening to distribute carries a penalty of up to one year in prison.

However, the laws also have protections for young people to ensure that 'non-exploitative sexting' – which basically means consensual sending and receiving of sexually explicit images - does not result in people under the age of 18 being placed on the sex offenders register.

Failure to disclose offence

Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. Accordingly, a criminal offence exists in Victoria that imposes a clear legal duty upon all adults to report information about child sexual abuse to police or Child Protection.

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child has an obligation to report that information to police or Child Protection. Failure to disclose the information to the authorities is a criminal offence.

Failure to protect offence: Failure to protect a child from abuse – organisations

A criminal offence exists in Victoria for failing to protect a child from criminal sexual abuse. The offence applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the care, supervision or authority of an organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence by an adult associated with that organisation. The person in a position of authority will be guilty if they knew of the risk of abuse and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.

Organisational Statutory duty of care – risk of child abuse

A statutory duty of care has been created under the *Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2017* (see Part XIII of Wrongs Act 1958) to ensure there is a clear legal duty placed on organisations to take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of child abuse, perpetrated by organisational representatives. This means a child abuse survivor (plaintiff) will have a clear cause of action when commencing legal proceedings against an organisation for the sexual and/or physical abuse of a child. It is then up to the organisation to prove that it took reasonable precautions to prevent the abuse.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards

All organisations in Victoria that work with children are required by law to comply with the Victorian Child Safe Standards. Under the Child Safe Standards organisations must take a clear stance against racism and the PCV, in accordance with the Word of God (see, for example, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11-15 and Romans 15:7), has zero tolerance for racism. The PCV is committed to address any instances of racism towards children with appropriate consequences and will consider and respond to each instance with seriousness and gravity. Complaints of racism against children under 18 are to be made to the Session of each church or the Safe Church Unit.

The PCV complies with the Standards – for more detail about the Standards visit <https://www.childsafestandards.org.au>

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme – See Appendix A at the end of this booklet. Make sure you read this Appendix in your own time.

Abuse between Adults

Safe Church PCV also applies to abuse of adults in the PCV.

It is possible for any of the following to occur:

- You become aware of an abusive situation relating to an adult – including any **Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS)** misconduct.
- An adult discloses they are experiencing and/or have experienced abuse.
- An adult confesses to abuse.

*In the context of adult related Safe Church issues, conduct or behaviour within the PCV that is classified as criminal under the Victorian Crimes Act (1958) or relating to the RCS **must be reported**.*

If a person is in immediate danger always contact Victoria Police and then contact the SCU to report. If there is no immediate danger but an allegation or evidence is brought that indicates a criminal act has occurred then contact Victoria Police and the SCU. If in doubt or unsure about contacting police then call the SCU in the first instance. The SCU can then follow up as necessary with reporting to police.

The following **must be reported to SCU**:

- Indecent assault
- Sexual assault (including sex offences against children)
- Rape

- Threatening or enacting violence (including within Domestic and Family Violence)
- Assaults (including in a Domestic and Family Violence situation)
- Stalking
- Grooming
- Illegal sexting (sexting between an adult and a child)
- Accessing and/or disseminating online child abuse material
- Disclosure and/or allegations or complaints of previous misconduct with children (including as discovered through due diligence/reference checks and/or screening processes) – whether or not this occurred within the PCV or another organisation
- ‘Reportable Conduct’ (as defined within the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme) by any employee or volunteer working for the PCV
- Sexual harassment
- Conduct, behaviour or speech that is sexually threatening or inappropriate
- Domestic and Family Violence and Abuse

Where there is uncertainty if a concern is reportable contact the SCU for advice.

The following list provides examples of what kind of other conduct and/or behaviour may be reported or be the subject of complaints to the SCU. Note this is not a definitive list but rather indicative. Contact the SCU for further clarification or to discuss any concerns or complaints.

Adult behaviour that **may** be reported to the SCU:

- Bullying
- Inappropriate relationships
- Misuse or abuse of authority
- Professional misconduct
- Spiritual abuse

*In situations where you become aware of abuse it is extremely important that you do not compromise the situation in any way. The **Abuse Disclosure Process** for adult-related abuse situations is intended to ensure that we hear the allegation and take appropriate immediate action to ensure the safety of those involved without compromising the evidence.*

Domestic and Family Violence

The presence of Domestic or Family Violence in a marriage or a family falls short of the abundant life God promises us in Christ. It deprives victims of the peace, comfort, safety and joy that God intends for marriage and family.

Where it exists in the body of Christ it undermines the truth and love of the Gospel, with devastating effect on the victims, those who love and care for them and the witness of Christ in both the Church and the world.

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria is firmly opposed to all forms of Domestic and Family Violence. Husbands are specifically told “...Love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph.5:25) and are warned, to love their “...wives and not be harsh with them...” and to live with them “...in an understanding way” (Col. 3:19; 1Pet. 3:7).

Therefore, any attempt to twist the biblical teaching to tacitly sanction domestic violence or abuse is a gross perversion of the Bible's teaching. Domestic and Family Violence is repugnant to God and an anathema to the biblical model of sacrificial love and service.

The *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008* has the following explanation of family violence:

“Family violence is any behaviour that in any way controls or dominates a family member and causes them to feel fear for their own, or other family member's safety or well-being.

It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic abuse and any behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour.”

A violent family member may use several forms of abuse and violence over time. An ongoing pattern of control, intimidation and fear is the most usual pattern of family violence that police respond to.

Family violence where there are children in the household is child abuse. Abuse where there are children involved must follow child protection procedures as the priority is the protection of children and their need to live and grow in a safe home.

The Safe Church Unit assists the Church in responding to and preventing family violence and abuse in our denomination. The PCV Safe Church Domestic and Family Violence Response booklet is available from the Safe Church Unit. Contact the Safe Church Facilitator to **report any Domestic or Family Violence concern**.

What to do if an adult discloses abuse – Abuse Disclosure Process

- Listen, listen, listen...and do not add anything.
- As far as possible, only ascertain the gist of the allegation. Obtain appropriate details while being aware that at this early stage it is not appropriate to probe too deeply. Ask what can be done to make them feel safe.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Provide details of what you will do now – namely, support them and contact the SCU.
- Document what was said and report – to the Victoria Police if it is urgent or to the SCU immediately – 0499 090 449.

Some things to remember:

- Do not compromise the situation by making comments, giving advice or adding to the allegations.
- Do not make a judgement about whether you think an allegation is true at this early stage.
- Follow the process outlined in the above steps.
- Do not be under the misapprehension that by treating an allegation with compassion you are prejudicing the rights of an alleged offender. This is not the case.

Notes

3. Wise Leadership

At the end of this section you should know:

- About the power, authority and responsibility that comes with leadership and responsible roles
- The importance of only appointing leaders and workers with children who are suitable to this type of role
- The Safe Church Volunteer Approval Process
- What boundaries are and how they work

Power, authority and responsibility

After washing his disciples feet Jesus said,

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” John 13: 13-17

In Matthew 20: 25-28 Jesus said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Reflection

Thinking about the model of leadership demonstrated by Jesus what stands out to you?

Now think about how you use your authority or responsibility in your role within the church:

- Do I show servant leadership?
- Do I respect those I serve and those in authority over me?
- Do I allow and encourage others to hold me accountable?
- Do I act with integrity in everything I do?
- Do I obey the law and uphold church laws and requirements?
- Am I motivated to lead and serve by love for God and love for others?

In the church positions of leadership and responsibility also hold the power to influence others for God. In the eyes of those under their authority, leaders may be seen as representing God’s authority. Leaders and those with responsible roles in the church must understand that people place high levels of trust in them and also are more likely to accept what they do and say rather than question it. With this trust and authority comes great responsibility to lead and serve in a Christlike way.

Availability versus Suitability

Recent history in Australian churches has shown that as a type of institution churches are especially vulnerable to being infiltrated by perpetrators of child abuse. Christians understand God's redemptive power and transforming love and are keen to embrace people who come seeking to know Jesus Christ. Often Christians are by nature trusting of others. In the past Christians have sometimes valued availability to serve and lead over suitability. The results in particular for children in some churches were disastrous.

The PCV expects that appointed leaders and those who work with children in the denomination are chosen due to their suitability to fill a particular role rather than their mere availability.

The Safe Church Volunteer Approval Process

It is unlawful for a person to commence working with children in the PCV in any capacity without first undergoing the Volunteer Approval Process.

Safe Church builds upon the previous PCV policy and procedure known as 'Breaking the Silence' by implementing the Volunteer Approval Process. The aim of the process is to screen all new personnel seeking to work with children in the denomination to ensure that the risk of appointing an unsuitable person is minimised to a larger extent. The process also ensures the PCV is compliant with the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Details of the process are available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au The process is administered ideally by the Safe Church Representative (SCR) in each congregation or organisation or, failing the appointment of a SCR, by the session or supervising body.

If you are wishing to encourage an adult to work with children or an adult expresses a desire to join in a ministry to children you need to be aware that this process exists and that no new adult workers with children are exempt from this process.

Sometimes junior (under 18) leaders or helpers may be involved with ministry to children. In this situation they do not need to follow the process **however** they must be supervised at all times and never left alone with children in their care. Again – think about the suitability of such a junior leader to work with children.

Children who have grown up in a PCV church, including those who have served as a junior leader or helper in the church, must undergo the Volunteer Approval Process if they wish to work with children in the church after they have turned 18 (i.e. as an adult). There is no exemption under the law from this required process, even for these people.

PCV Church Transfer Registration Form

Sometimes a person who is authorised to work with children in one PCV church moves from one PCV church to another and seeks to work with children in the new church. When this occurs the Safe Church Representative in the new church is to give the person a copy of the PCV Church Transfer Registration Form to complete and return to the Safe Church Representative. The form is available at

www.safechurchpcv.org.au/forms or contact the Safe Church Compliance & Administration Officer for a paper copy to be posted.

Boundaries

In a culture which celebrates the absence of boundaries as individual freedom, it is sometimes difficult to recall the value of boundaries in our lives and in particular, in our ministry or teaching. But without boundaries, we cannot really be in relationships. With boundaries, we develop trust in relationships and minimise the potential to cause harm...boundaries are a gift...that gives shape to our relationships... M.Fortune, *Boundaries 201, 2012*, p. 5

In the Safe Church context the **Safe Church Code of Conduct** is the clear expression of the boundaries that all leaders and those in responsible roles, including those people who work with children, are expected to adhere to.

While this topic is familiar to many people it is always helpful to remind ourselves of the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries in ministry. In particular we are mindful that it is not only the person we directly minister to who needs appropriate boundaries, it is also the perception of others that is important here. We undermine our ministry and our witness when we overstep boundaries.

Remember:

- Wise leadership means understanding and practising boundaries in ministry.
- Wise practice in working with children means practising boundaries in ministry.
- It is not the responsibility of the children under 18 who we minister to, to maintain appropriate boundaries. Leaders and those who work with children must actively maintain appropriate boundaries, rather than passively assuming they are known and practised by everyone, including the children.
- We always apply boundaries with Christ-like care.
- When setting or reinforcing boundaries we never embarrass or humiliate any person we are ministering to who has, accidentally or otherwise, overstepped a boundary with us.
- If a person we are ministering to who has, accidentally or otherwise, overstepped a boundary with us, we need to deliberately reinforce the boundary again with the person and immediately inform a senior leader of this situation – confidentially – so there is transparency and accountability in place immediately.
- Ask another leader or the senior leader to minister to that person, instead of you, in the case where a person you minister to (such as a youth group child) forms a “crush” on you or expresses behaviour or words that they have romantic feeling for you.
- Read and follow the Online and Smart Phone Usage Guidelines in this booklet and on the Resources page of the website for help should a boundary be breached via electronic communication
- All leaders, people in positions of authority and responsibility and those who work with children under 18 are expected to act in accordance with the Safe Church Code of Conduct at all times

4. Wise Practices

At the end of this section you should better understand the “T.A.P.” principle and

- Wise ministry practices with children
- Online and Smart Phone Guidelines
- The value of regular communication
- Preventative thinking/approaches in ministry
- How cultural and social diversity may impact ministry

The intention of this section of Basic Training is to highlight the importance of **preventative strategies in terms of abuse within the church**, with both adults and children. In this section we start with a general principle that applies to all ministries and then we move on to some specific practices in children’s ministry.

Keep the following scriptures in mind as you go through this material:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17

[Jesus said] "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Luke 18:16

Think “T.A.P.”

The principle applied here when thinking about how and what we practice in ministry:

T	Transparency	We want to act in such a way that we are open and transparent
A	Accountability	We are accountable to God, our church leaders & the people we minister to
P	Preparation	We think through issues before they might arise & plan accordingly

- **You must faithfully observe all reasonable directions of the Session/Church in regard to your ministry and this forms part of being accountable in your role**
- **There are many resources for you relating to the following material and other relevant ministry practices, located at the website on the Resources page**
- **Remember to read through the material here in your own time**
- **If you have any questions or cannot find the ministry practice information you require on the website, please contact the Safe Church Unit for help, via phone or email**

Wise ministry practices with children

The following general information is relevant here:

- It is important that all activities of the children’s ministry are open to appropriate, authorised observation by the Minister and the Session. Parents are always welcome to stay with their children in ministry time should this be necessary.

- If you are training up younger leaders, it is important to pastorally care for them. When delegating tasks to them, it is important to work alongside with them in the organising and implementing of the specific tasks.
- If providing food as part of the ministry activities you must ascertain whether any participants are allergic/ sensitive to any specific foods. Leaders must have an accurate list of children with allergies and ensure that these children do not eat or drink food that they are allergic to. If necessary, separate options may need to be provided for these individuals.
- Having a first aid kit for the ministry team is essential. Always familiarise leaders with the location of the First Aid kit and ensure that the First Aid kit contains everything it should and any medications (such as Ventolin inhalers) are within expiry dates. At least one leader should be qualified in basic First Aid.

The following practices are highly recommended:

- All doors to rooms where ministry to children occurs should have large glass windows in them so the room is visible to those passing by. If this is not the case then leave the door open during ministry activities.
- Some children's ministries will require having two adults in the room with children during ministry at all times, for example, always schedule two people to be on crèche duty. In cases where Sunday School classes have one teacher and the class is in their own room make sure the door is either kept open at all times OR alternatively make sure the door has a glass window in it to enable visibility.
- When people under 18 are assisting as junior leaders or helpers in ministry to children always have them rostered on with an adult leader.
- No matter what size group of children the ministry has there must always be enough leaders to cope with any accidents and/or critical incidents that may happen. A good guide is a minimum of 2 adult leaders for all ministry programs and a ratio of 1 adult to 10 children.
- Using a 'Sign In-Sign Out' form is best practice for ministry to children under 5, for example when operating a crèche during a church service. www.safechurchpcv.org.au has downloadable forms that can be used by congregations.

Toileting Children

Why do we get so concerned about toilet protocols? There are two main reasons:

- when children need the toilet during ministry time they have to leave the main group and so be away from the safety of this
- in terms of a space in which child predators may have opportunity to act, toilets provide a location that is often empty, can be secured by closing a door and also provide a cover story for the predator should they be found there with a child.

This is why we need to have wise protocols for toileting children and make sure these are communicated clearly to leaders and volunteers who work with children, to parents and to children themselves.

Indeed, one of the most frequently asked Safe Church-related questions relates to toileting of children during church ministries. It is a difficult question to give a blanket answer for as each church has different physical environs and in some churches the toilets may be in the church hall while in others the toilets may be in a separate building or tucked away down the side of the church property and far from where others are congregating.

Each church needs to consider the physical location of their toilets first and then form the protocols from there. For example, in some churches ministry to children takes place in a church hall with toilets and all the children are there together. If a child needs the toilet in that circumstance they do not have to leave the building and this means that with older children a leader would not have to be sent with them, so long as the children go in pairs.

Here are some ideas that are used in churches relating to toileting, ordered by age:

For babies, infants and toddlers in crèche:

Ask parents to ensure that their children have been toileted or had nappies changed before being signed in.

Let parents know that nappies will not be changed by leaders or volunteers. Instead, the child's parent will be called to attend to their child in the event that their nappy needs changing. An easy way of doing this is to text the parent asking them to come to crèche to attend to their child.

Use of a Sign-in-Sign-out sheet in crèche and early childhood ministries allows parents to leave their mobile phone number so they can be texted if needed. This can also be helpful with other issues such as a child being sick or being very unsettled.

For Pre-school and younger primary school aged children:

With pre-schoolers and younger primary aged children they need to be taken by an adult leader or volunteer in the ministry and again always take them in pairs.

The adult must check the inside of the cubicle first to ensure it is safe for the child.

The child should be encouraged to manage him/herself to the fullest possible extent, according to ability.

The adult is to wait outside the door of the cubicle and only assist the child if required.

When a leader or volunteer is needed to assist in the toileting of a child, they then inform another leader or volunteer upon their returning to the main group.

For older primary aged children and teens:

Always send the children in pairs.

Be mindful of when the children left for the toilet and if they seem to have been gone longer than seems reasonable ask another leader to either investigate for you or supervise your group while you go and check to see if the children are ok.

Finally:

A good idea is to communicate clearly via a notice to parents about how you manage toileting in your ministry at the beginning of each year and include a consent form for parents to sign saying they consent to this. If parents don't consent then it is their responsibility to toilet their own child and this needs to be made clear to them.

Child Protection General Protocols

Wise ministry to children also means having everyone who works with children familiar with child protection protocols in terms of voicing concerns of reporting of known or suspected child abuse:

These protocols do not replace the Safe Church Policy or Code of Conduct. Rather they are intended to provide helpful general protective protocol advice.

- Do not allow yourself to be in any area alone with a child under 18. Always have another team member, leader or the parent with you.
- If a child has questions for you during the ministry events, ask another team member to remain in the room while you talk to them.
- If a child is distressed and needs to be consoled, it is best practice with older children and teens particularly that a person of the same gender does the consoling. Ensure that another team member is either with you or nearby (within sight) at all times, and use your discretion when speaking and comforting the child. With very young children they will often gravitate towards a “mum”-like person, or indeed there may only be women involved in the children’s ministry. Obviously in this situation the advice concerning being of the same gender as the child does not apply here.
- If a child discloses information to you regarding any kind of abuse or neglect, or you have concerns about these issues in relation to a child you must pass on this information to the ministry leader and then to the Safe Church Unit. However, be careful not to reveal this confidence to any other person.
- If a child discloses information to you regarding any kind of abuse or behaviour by a team member or the ministry leader which breaches the Safe Church Code of Conduct contact the Safe Church Unit – 0499 090 449.

Remember – you are a Mandatory Reporter of child physical and sexual abuse under Victorian law

Other Wise Ministry Practices:

There are several resources about Wise Ministry Practices in other aspects of your ministry available at the Resources page at www.safechurchpcv.org.au:

- Visiting people in the course of your ministry – see the Guidelines for Visiting Ministries
- Facility Hire advice for Sessions and Presbyteries
- Supply Preachers Safe Church Requirements
- External Short Term Missions Compliance Requirements

Reflection – to complete in your own time

What practices in your ministry could be improved in the light of the T.A.P. principle and the Wise Practices information above?

Online and Smart Phone Usage Guidelines

For people in ministry roles

The following guidelines are provided to the PCV to assist Sessions in compliance with Victorian Child Safe Standard 9 – **Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.** In line with Victorian child safety legislation, where the phrase “young person” or “young people” is used, it is always defined as a person or people under 18 years of age.

As part of compliance, Sessions are required to adopt the following Safe Church Online and smart phone usage guidelines as their policy and procedures for leaders and volunteers in children's ministry in their church OR develop and adopt their own church specific equivalent policy and procedures relating to children's ministry and interactions with children which are conducted electronically. Once adopted, these guidelines are then required to be communicated to the relevant leaders and volunteers in the church. These guidelines are also contained in the Safe Church Basic Training booklet.

In cases where ministry outcomes are in part effected through the use of social media then it is recommended that particular practice guidelines pertaining to that ministry are developed by Session and clearly communicated to the leaders. The SCU is available for assistance in establishing such particular guidelines.

Safe Church

The Safe Church Code of Conduct states at point 1: “As a person in a position of authority within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You should avoid situations where you are vulnerable to temptation or where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of this Code of Conduct. You will make yourself familiar with the provisions of Safe Church - PCV.”

This point has application to your use of all electronic communications as a person of authority or person working with young people in the PCV.

Basic Principles

There are three basic principles when having any type of conversation with a young person:

- 1) Remember God is listening:
 - The ‘God test’ – is this conversation honouring God?
 - The ‘parent test’ – if this young person’s parents were listening/reading this, would they feel comfortable with this conversation?
- 2) Seek transparency in conversations with young people and do not converse where you can’t be observed by others.
- 3) Don’t get in deeper than you can handle – if issues arise that are greater than your ability or in an area of your weakness refer the young person to others who are better equipped to deal with it. When in doubt, ask for help.

Online and smart phone communications can create an intense, relational situation because of the ease of access, the comfort of distance and its unobserved nature. A relationship can be developed far more quickly than was possible before online communication was common. Therefore, the church considers talking with young people online and via smart phone to be exactly the same as talking to them face to face. **The same code of conduct for leaders interacting with young people face to face applies to all types of online and smart phone communication.**

Specific conduct guidelines:

Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/blogs/websites

If your church ministry or organisation establishes any of the above social media platforms as a method of communication within the group this is the best place for leaders to converse with members of the group as all conversations may be held in public. Ensure there is no option for private conversations to take place on this facility.

Best practice is for leaders not to be individual friends on social media with young people within the church or organisation. This is due to the risks inherent in private relationships which may develop over social media. These risks affect both young people and leaders.

However, it is recognised that leaders may be individual friends on social media with young people where the relationship is pre-existing or established via other connections, for example they may be related or may have formed the friendship via knowing each other external to the leader/group member relationship. In circumstances where leaders are individual friends with young people on social media leaders are at all times to adhere to the basic principles above.

SMS Text messaging/emails

Best practice is to only use the above methods of communication as a “one-way” avenue for communicating within the group. Make it clear to all members of the group that while SMS texts/emails will be used for communication leaders will not reply individually to any response from group members, unless a matter of urgency arises and in every case, with a fellow leader copied in on the reply. Give parents the option of always being copied in on any communication from the ministry or organisation leaders and add those parents to the contacts list.

When sending group emails always remember to send any email to yourself first and put all contacts into the blind copy (BCC) field to ensure you do not distribute email addresses without permission. Always copy in fellow leaders. Follow the same privacy protocols if using SMS texts to do mass communication within the group.

Zoom or other group meeting software

If Zoom or other group meeting software is to be used for online ministry to people under 18 years of age, Sessions must authorise the commencement of this ministry and instruct that the safety of children and young people is prioritised in the implementation of the ministry. There must always be two adult leaders present in every online ministry event with children and/or young people. This is as much to protect our leaders as to protect our children.

Every meeting with children and/or young people must have a password to prevent non-authorized, uninvited participants joining the meeting. Use a meeting password to ensure the meeting is secure.

Enable the “waiting room” facility so that the meeting host can check the identity of each person wishing to enter the meeting and be confident that only invited attendees are admitted to the meeting.

If using break-out rooms for smaller groups with children and young people, there must be two adult leaders in each break-out room.

Whichever platform is used in ministry to children and young people, there must be a disabling of the direct messaging/chat facility so that all interactions are transparent to all users. The platform must not be a “public” event on the internet and instead must be by invite only, sent by the meeting host/administrator/moderator, directly to the parent of the child’s email, so that parents can choose whether or not their child participates in this ministry.

It is essential that parents of children participating in the online ministry are provided with information about:

- the platform being used for the ministry
- who will be leading the ministry
- who will be monitoring the ministry (this must be two leaders as a minimum)
- who parents can contact if they have any questions or concerns (for example, how to contact Session and/or SCU if parents wish to raise a concern)
- that the ministry will be conducted in accordance with the Safe Church Policy, Code of Conduct and in compliance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards
- that the ministry has a strict “no cyber bullying” rule and any child found to be engaging in inappropriate or bullying conduct within the ministry will be removed from access to the ministry
- that it is recommended that the child access the ministry in an open part of their home for maximum safety.

A copy of the Online and Smart Phone Usage Guidelines must be provided to parents.

Parents of children participating in the online ministry must provide permission for their child to do so, either via email or letter to the Session and Ministry Leader(s). A recommended permission slip for use is available at :

www.safechurchpcv.org.au/forms

Ministry leaders must read and implement the Safe Church Online and Smart Phone Usage Guidelines.

Ministry leaders must ensure that a clear “no cyber bullying” message is conveyed to the children participating and inform them that as the ministry has a strict “no cyber bullying” rule, any child found to be engaging in inappropriate or bullying conduct within the ministry will be removed from access to the ministry and their parents informed.

Children must be advised that they are only to use their first name for their profile (unless parents give permission otherwise).

Session may decide to record online ministry. Any recordings made during the ministry must never be posted to the internet. Recordings must be stored securely, in case any concerns are raised at a later date. If recordings are to be made in the ministry then the documented permission of parents of children

under 18 years of age and any adult participants must be obtained. Permission provided by an email (which is also stored in case it is needed at a later date) to the ministry leader is sufficient.

Phone/Skype/FaceTime/Messaging Apps/In-game messaging

In the main seek to avoid where possible individual contact with young people via online and smart phone communication. Aim to have 100% of communication to young people via group communication. Should a need arise to use phone/Skype/FaceTime you should be accountable – always get parental permission **before** you talk with a young person over the phone and tell a co-leader that you are conversing with a young person by phone. If using Skype or FaceTime again always get parental permission **before** you talk with a young person using this facility. Ensure both you and the young person are using this form of communication in an open area where people can see you or there are others present, e.g. not alone in your room.

Do not use messaging apps or in-game messaging to communicate individually with children or people under your pastoral care in your Church role.

In the case where an inappropriate message or image is sent to a leader by a child or a person under pastoral care/leadership via any online or smart phone communication, whether publicly or privately, the leader should not reply under any circumstances. Do not delete the image or message. The leader must immediately notify the ministry or organisation leader that this has occurred. The ministry or organisation leader may then contact the SCU for advice on how to proceed.

Cyber bullying and image based abuse

Sadly, there is an increase in the prevalence of cyber bullying and image based abuse targeting both adults and children in Australia, mostly via social media. Both State and Federal parliaments have begun to address this societal problem through legislation and the provision of assistance to Australians via the Office of e-safety – www.esafety.gov.au

If you become aware of cyber bullying or image based abuse within the church context visit www.esafety.gov.au and contact SCU for assistance and reporting.

This information is available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au/resources

General Advice:

- Online and smart phone communications breed relationship that feels like a deeper level of intimacy than would occur in normal communication between people, in less time than it would take face-to-face
- This is why online and smart phone communication has significant potential risk involved for all users in a ministry setting
- People can find themselves “getting in deeper” than they intended and struggle to exercise self-control or healthy boundaries when they engage in online and smart phone communications with people the minister to
- It is not unusual for people to find they have over-stepped appropriate boundaries almost without realising
- Don’t be embarrassed if this happens to you – simply stop, do not delete the messages or images but instead seek help from a trusted senior leader and speak up sooner rather than later about what has happened
- Remember – there are sexting laws in Victoria which make certain types of electronic communication criminal – don’t be unaware of this!
- Adhering to these guidelines will help minimise risk
- Always seek transparency in online and smart phone activities
- Practice online and smart phone behaviour that demonstrates a true witness to the Christian faith
- In ministry, as much as possible, adopt an approach that uses electronic communication as a ‘broadcast’ communication tool to a group rather than an individual
- If a situation develops online that you need advice or guidance about **call the Safe Church Unit 0499 090 449**

Application point:

If you heard a child or young person talk about messages or images sent from an adult that make you concerned about grooming or illegal sexting what should you do next?

Remember

The SCU can always be contacted to discuss or report concerns and is here as a resource for you.

The value of good communication

Clear communication helps prevent abuse because everyone involved is clear on how the ministry operates. Keeping parents informed and providing leaders with information is an important part of making ministry safe. Indeed, it is better to “over-communicate” than assume other people know what you know.

- Sending a general letter to parents/carers at the start of each year is a great way to begin. The letter might include information about who the leaders are, pick up and drop off arrangements, the aim of the ministry, some information about what activities/events are planned and also state that the ministry operates within the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct.
- It is important that people within the church know they can speak up with any concerns they have about abuse. Making sure the Safe Church brochures (Policy, Code of Conduct and Contact flyer) are prominently displayed at church is a good start. Also communicating that anyone can call the SCU with concerns is helpful.
- Providing parents/carers with regular information about activities will allow for them to make informed decisions about their children. A newsletter (either paper or via email) or use of a website such as an open blog or open Facebook page can improve communication. Whatever means you use always ensure parents are aware of it and can access it too. If using a website where comments can be made remember a leader must moderate this which will involve regular checking of the website (daily).
- Attendance lists, registration and permission forms and sign-in-sign-out sheets are essential for events such as kids’ clubs, holiday clubs, camps and off-site events.

Clearly communicate with parents how toileting of very young children and school aged children is managed.

Preventative thinking/approaches

The following section deals with areas that require clear thinking about how to minister in such a way as to prevent abuse of both adults and children in the church. It also deals with preventative measures you can take to avoid a possible negative outcome in ministry in general. As you will see reading through, boundaries and accountability are critical tools when it comes to preventative thinking/approaches.

The first section deals with behaviour (pastoral care, discipline and physical contact) and the second section deals with practical considerations (transport, medication, food, activities).

While some of this material may not be directly relevant to you it is worthwhile to take the time to read and think about the material as there may be principles and practices that may be applied to your specific area of leadership and/or ministry.

Preventative thinking/approaches - Behaviour

Pastoral Care – See the **Guidelines for Visiting Ministries** at www.safechurchpcv.org.au

In safe and effective pastoral care, where appropriate boundaries are held in place by the person in authority, people can expect:

- attentive listening and responses, where there is understanding and empathy and the focus remains on the individual's needs and the needs of the position of authority within the church are excluded,
- quality care, where if a conflict of interest arises or if there is an issue outside the expertise of the person in the position of authority within the church, that person will seek outside assistance,
- confidentiality, where the person has control over the information they disclose and it is not communicated in any way to anyone without their consent, and
- no sexualised behaviour, where if the person seeks or initiates sexual interest or contact the person in authority explains with care and sensitivity why this is not possible.

Providing pastoral care is a very important part of what we do as God's church. People in positions of leadership should be prepared and willing to provide pastoral care in an appropriate way. Sometimes this can be difficult.

For example, maintaining appropriate boundaries can be difficult when pastoral care develops into a personal relationship, and **if this happens it is up to the person in a position of authority within the church to ensure that these boundaries are not crossed.**

It goes beyond difficult and becomes dangerous when pastoral care moves towards romance or intimacy. In this instance it is the responsibility of the person in a position of authority within the church to remove themselves from the situation immediately. This may mean finding someone else to provide pastoral care and/or changing the relationship to remove the inherent power imbalances.

It may be possible to address the power imbalances and role difference in order to establish a new basis for two people in a romantic relationship. However, it involves ending the pastoral care or leadership relationship with integrity and beginning again on an equal footing. It is always advisable to make sure this is as open as possible and that the person in a position of authority within the church establishes some form of accountability with the supervising body.

It is even more difficult where the pastoral care has involved counselling in relation to personal issues and those in the position of authority within the church should proceed with caution and take significant time and measures to make sure that they are not abusing their position of power. This should involve a clear and public recognition that the relationship has changed*.

**Adapted from Why does he hug me so tightly? Sexual Abuse in Ministerial Relationships, YWCA Melbourne, The Stegley Foundation, 1986*

Discipline

If you work with children or young people you need to have a strategy in place for how you will maintain good behaviour in your group. Working with kids is a great joy. It can also be a great challenge at times. Just like their leaders, children and young people have different personalities, different struggles, different needs and different ways of coping. Sometimes this can result in behaviour that is difficult to manage in a group setting. However, if you don't manage it well then both the child and all those around him or her may be distracted and find it difficult to learn what you have to teach them.

If you work with children or young people, think about setting expectations, anticipating challenging behaviours, planning, discipline, some do's and don'ts and communication. A good idea is for all people who work with children and the ministry leaders to meet together and discuss these issues as a group so a united approach occurs.

Physical Contact

Another area where you may need to think about your personal boundaries and preventing a possible negative outcome is that of physical contact. Sadly, some leaders within churches have heard the discussion about boundaries and have reacted by removing all touch. A better approach would be to learn about boundaries and modify behaviours to ensure that the bad and confusing touches are removed and the good touch remains.

What is appropriate touch? Within a church there are hundreds of interactions between people, some of which involve touch. So what guidelines can help those in authority within a church work out whether or not to touch someone? The Code of Conduct provides some guidelines, specifically about when touch is not permitted.

The Code of Conduct still uses words like "appropriate" in relation to touch in these circumstances because every situation, just like every person, is different. Working on understanding the boundaries, learning to recognise the difference between the touch that most people would consider appropriate and touch that is inappropriate, is what the Code of Conduct is about.

Within the bounds of the Code of Conduct, there is the ability for leaders to touch those under their care for pastoral, medical, instructional and safety reasons. Appropriate touch is something that leaders must learn.

Here are some hints to help you work out if touch in a specific situation is appropriate:

- Does it cross a boundary set out in the Code of Conduct? If it does, don't do it.
- Consider if the person is particularly vulnerable for some reason and modify your touch to make it safer.
- Consider the person's cultural background and what may or may not be considered appropriate in that culture.
- Don't assume that someone wants to be touched. Just because you would in a situation doesn't mean that they do.
- You could use an open hand on the top third of someone's back to comfort. Alternatively you could gently pat their lower arm if you are sitting side by side. Don't put your hand on someone's knee or around a woman's upper arm.
- If in doubt, ask. Seeking permission from someone before you touch then is the best way to work out if it is OK. For example, "I can see you are distressed. Would you mind if I put my

arm around you?” A hug from the side is always more appropriate in these situations than a hug from the front.

- If you need to touch someone for medical, instructional or safety reasons, let them know beforehand.
- If a particular activity involves touch, for example at a youth group activity where a particular game or activity needs to be demonstrated, ask for a volunteer. Be explicit about where you will be touching, for example, around the waist.
- When accidents happen, apologise immediately and make sure that someone in authority knows what happened so that your actions are visible and you are accountable.

Preventative thinking/approaches – Practical Considerations

Transport

The Code of Conduct states that “You will not drive a child or young person unaccompanied.” This is not intended to stop you doing ministry with children or young people. It is intended to make you stop and think about how you do it so that the risks associated with driving children and young people unaccompanied are minimised. You need to think about how this affects your ministry activities.

There are some practical things to think about before you provide transport of any kind:

- There must never be more passengers in the car than there are functioning seat belts.
- All vehicles used must be registered and in good working order.
- All drivers must be licensed. Legal restrictions on P-plate drivers must be adhered to.
- All drivers must be aware of their responsibilities to provide safe transport and take every precaution to ensure that their passengers are safe.

First Aid

The complete First Aid resources (including advice and incident reporting forms) are available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au on the Resources and Forms page. The following is included in the training as a basic introduction. Please visit the website for more information.

- Every church must have at least one suitably stocked and up-to-date first aid kit on-site.
- Some churches will require more than one kit, due to the number of buildings on-site.
- First Aid kits must be stored in an easily accessible and clearly identified area, out of reach of children.

The Board (or relevant supervising body) of each church must designate a person who will ensure the First Aid kit(s) are up to date. This includes:

- Monitoring the use of First Aid equipment and replacing any items used as soon as possible.
- Completing regular checks after the First Aid kit is used to guarantee the kit is stocked with all necessary First Aid supplies. Even if the kit is not used it should be checked on a monthly basis to guarantee all products are within the expiry date.
- Checking that First Aid items are in the correct and original condition (no seals are broken).

Medication

During activities it is not uncommon that a child or young person may have a mild complaint such as a headache and request a non-prescription medication e.g. paracetamol. These non-prescription medications should only be given when the child or young person's parent / carer has given permission, either on a registration form or verbally following a phone call at the time. It is always wise to make a phone call at the time even if you do have written permission, as parents like to know when their child is not feeling well.

In some instances you may have a child or young person attending an event or a programme who needs to use prescription medication. In these instances the parent / carer must provide clear written instructions. The medication must be kept in a secure location. Medication should always be administered by a senior leader in the presence of another leader. Both leaders must check the written instructions, make a note on the instructions of when the medication was administered, sign and print their names on the instructions. A copy of these instructions must be kept by the church.

In some instances you may have a person attending an activity who has a chronic illness such as diabetes, epilepsy, allergies or anaphylaxis. In all instances where a person may require emergency medical treatment or first aid, all appropriate leaders should be informed and aware of what is required. If necessary, a first aid plan and emergency management plan should be provided by the person's doctor.

If you feel that your leaders are not adequately equipped to deal with a situation that requires them to administer medication or first aid, you must take steps to ensure that alternative measures are taken. These may include finding additional leaders, having a qualified first aid office or asking the parent/ carer to remain on the premises. You should contact the SCU if you have a particular concern.

Food

If you provide food as part of your ministry activity you need to think about food safety. Food can be dangerous if it is not handled, prepared and stored correctly. Food borne illnesses are unpleasant at best and food allergies can be fatal. Children are particularly vulnerable.

Have a list of all children with allergies who attend children's or youth ministries. Never allow a child with an allergy or known medical condition that prevents their consumption of certain food types (e.g. celiac disease) to be given food they are not allowed to consume. Visit the Forms page of the website for relevant children's ministry registration forms where this and other vital information can be recorded by parents and provided to the ministry leader.

Food regulations are governed by local government and you will need to consult your local Council for any special requirements.

Activities

You must assess the activities you run, as well as where you run them, to make sure that they are safe. This can depend upon who your leaders are and the type of activity you are running, as well as the ages of the participants.

When you run an activity of any kind there is always the potential for an accident or incident to occur. An accident or incident is where someone is injured on church property or during an event

that the church is running. Accidents are those things that are unexpected. Incidents are an act that harms someone, such as bullying or fighting.

If leaders are prepared and know what to do in the event of an accident or incident then it is possible that the harm caused can be reduced.

You must have:

- A leader with a first aid certificate or similar qualifications.
- A well-stocked first aid kit.
- Access to a mobile phone and good mobile coverage (check before leaving).
- Access to contact information about parents / carers should they need to be contacted in an emergency.

Remember to use permission forms – see the Forms page on the website

Risk Assessment for child abuse

The Safe Church Unit has completed a risk assessment for the risk of child abuse within the denomination as a whole, based on the risk management and mitigations undertaken via the work of the Safe Church Unit at the denominational level. There is a Risk Assessment tool available for local churches to undertake a risk assessment for the risk of child abuse within the local church and its children's ministries. The tool is available from the Resources page at www.safechurchpcv.org.au Contact the Safe Church Unit with any enquiries.

How cultural and social diversity may impact ministry – including ministry to children under 18

Be mindful of diversity. We live in a socially and culturally diverse society. People will come into programmes within our church with a variety of cultural norms and expectations. You may come across diversity needs associated with:

- country of origin and language
- religion
- values
- past experiences
- customs and culture
- social-economic background
- disabilities
- denominational expectations

Resources about wise ministry practices in relation to the above are found at the Resources page at www.safechurchpcv.org.au

Take the time to educate yourself about any specific diversity needs within your church and the people you minister to. Speak to the relevant senior leader about any specific questions you may have about the kinds of needs and issues that arise from having a culturally and/or socially diverse congregation or organisation. It is better to be proactive and informed about social and cultural

differences so you can minister in a Christ-like loving and inclusive manner, in accordance with Scripture, than to assume that social and cultural diversity has no impact on your ministry.

Child safe Christian ministry to Aboriginal children within the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, within the context of Victorian Child Safe Standard 1 – Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

As Christians, we thank God as creator, owner and sustainer of all of us and this land we live on. We recognize the Aboriginal peoples of Australia as the first inhabitants of this nation. As we commit to moving forward together, we acknowledge their living culture and care for country: this place in which we all live, work and play. The PCV welcomes all Aboriginal children to our Church and our ministries to children. Under God, we commit to building a brighter future together, as together we seek to know Christ and make him known. In this we are especially mindful of Psalm 133:1: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

We understand that:

- There is great cultural diversity across the many nations of Aboriginal people in Australia. Hence, local initiatives by organisations are especially helpful to make sure the organisation is welcoming and safe for the Aboriginal children and families who reside in that particular locality.
- Cultural safety means that Aboriginal children are included; treated fairly; respected; are free to talk about, and have acknowledged, their differences and culture; have access to speaking their mother tongue and have a right to visit country learn about their history, culture and language.
- Organisations which are empathetic, understanding and conscious of the importance of culture, language, and history to Aboriginal children, are important to ensuring that Aboriginal children are culturally safe in the organisation.

As Christians, the PCV recognises the uniqueness of each child as a person made in the image of God, with unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are safely expressed and lived out within the unity of the Church in Christ Jesus.

The PCV recognises that Aboriginal families who participate in the children’s ministries of the PCV will be doing so as people who firstly find their identity in Christ Jesus and who also identify as Aboriginal, or who are seeking to find out more about Christianity:

- John 1:12
- 1 Corinthians 12:27
- Galatians 3:27-28

The PCV is committed to actively supporting and facilitating Aboriginal children to be welcomed; included; treated fairly; respected; encouraged to participate in the children’s ministries; and, be free to talk about, and have acknowledged, their differences and culture, within the PCV. As part of this commitment, Sessions in individual PCV churches may choose to also implement local initiatives and strategies as they see fit, in order to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children.

Making people welcome and practising hospitality to all (including Aboriginal children) is a key biblical value:

- Matthew 25: 42-46
- 1 Timothy 5:10
- Titus 1:8
- 1 Peter 4:9
- Romans 12:13
- Hebrews 13:2
- Galatians 6:10
- Exodus 22:21
- Exodus 23:9
- Leviticus 19:33-34

Racism towards children is unbiblical, sinful and will not be tolerated in the PCV.

- In Galatians 3:28 we are told that regardless of race, *“all are one in Christ Jesus”*.
- In Colossians 3:11-15 the Bible says, *“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”*
- Romans 15:7 says, *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*

The PCV is committed to address any instances of racism towards children with appropriate consequences and will consider and respond to each instance with seriousness and gravity. Complaints of racism against children under 18 are to be made to the Session of each church or the Safe Church Unit.

Child safe Christian ministry to adults and children living with disability

Our foundation is always the Word of God - we know from the Word that each person has been made in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-28) and is unique and precious to God (Psalm 139: 13-14), regardless of ability and personal circumstances. We recognise that each person with disability is different and experiences their disability differently. Romans 15:7 says, *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*

We want our ministries in the PCV to be a place where adults and children living with disability can participate in a safe environment. For this reason, in your ministry practice it is important that you take the time to read and implement the wise safe ministry practices relating to safe inclusion of adults and children living with disability which are available at the Wise Ministry Practices section of the Resources page at www.safechurchpcv.org.au

Finally:

Safe Church is not about stopping good ministry. It's about providing a safe place for all of God's people. Safe for children. Safe for young people. Safe for adults of all ages. And safe for you.



The **Safe Church** logo shows how we build a safe church for everyone:

- Our foundation is Scripture
- The walls are the Safe Church Policy, Code of Conduct and legal compliance with government requirements
- The roof is provided by implementing wise ministry practices in all we do
- Finally, in everything we do we want to honour God and bring Him glory, as He is head over all

Appendix A – The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme – Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Commences 1 January 2018 for all religious organisations in Victoria

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme legislation states at Part 2 16B (1) (a) that “the protection of children is the paramount consideration in the context of abuse or employee misconduct involving a child”. [“employee” is defined as both paid and volunteer workers in the organisation]

The PCV must comply with the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS). This means that any historical and current child abuse allegations relating to employees and volunteers who work for the Church must be reported by the Head of Entity (this is the Clerk of the General Assembly for the purposes of the RCS) to the Commission for Children and Young People.

The Church must also provide evidence to the Commission for Children and Young People of a legislative-compliant investigation and appropriate response to the allegation(s).

There are five types of ‘reportable conduct’:

- sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- significant neglect of a child.

For more details, please see the Commission for Children and Young People information sheet “What is reportable conduct?” – at www.cyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/What-is-reportable-conduct.pdf

The RCS is further evidence of the seriousness with which the State and community of Victoria treat the safety of children from abuse. The RCS forms part of a concerted effort to build a culture of child safety in Victoria across all organisations that have children in them. The main emphasis of the RCS is to ensure that all organisations are clear about their reporting duties, risk assessment and risk management.

Please contact the Safe Church Unit with any RCS concerns or allegations -phone 0499 090 449.

Alternatively **anyone may report directly to the Commission for Children and Young People** - phone: (03) 8601 5281 – and then advise the Safe Church Unit of the report – phone 0499 090 449.

Appendix B - National Safe Ministry Framework Principles

Fundamental Conviction

We remember at all times that we are representing the Lord Jesus Christ in all our conduct and we will, accordingly, strive to refrain from any action that is contrary to Scripture or a law of the land consistent with Scripture or which violates the requirements of biblical ethics, striving to ensure that all our conduct is motivated by love for God and a desire to commend him and to promote his glory.

Statement of Commitment

The Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) is committed to ensuring that a safe environment is established and maintained for all persons associated with the Church and for those accessing its services, especially children. The Church requires all paid employees and all volunteers serving within it to create an environment that will help people flourish and cause no harm particularly harm arising from emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; or neglect.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia recognises its obligation to

1. Ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children (being persons under the age of 18) involved in its activities.
2. Implement policies and procedures to safeguard children from child abuse or harm including emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or neglect.
3. Refuse to tolerate any behaviour that might result in child abuse or harm.

Values

Love and compassion

The Presbyterian Church of Australia, and its State Churches, is bound by the example of the love and compassion of Jesus Christ in his ministry.

Service to others

The unique nature of servanthood, which Jesus Christ demonstrated to his disciples and which they then encouraged Christians to display, is the foundation of the Safe Ministry Principles.

Humility

Jesus spoke of himself as being a servant of others and not one who came to be served. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, encourages us not to live with a selfish purpose, but with humility, thinking of others as better than ourselves. As people chosen by God to serve him in obedience, we are to live as those who watch out for what is good for others rather than watching out for our own good.

Gentleness

Paul urges the early Church to let their gentleness show in their treatment of all people.

Nurture and protection

As a Church we are to nurture and protect children. This responsibility rests on everyone involved in church life.

Respect

The Safe Ministry Principles seek to inform the Church and create a culture which promotes respectful relationships and maintains an ongoing safe environment free of abuse of children. Whilst this responsibility rests immediately with leaders and those involved in ministry to children, it is also a shared responsibility of the whole Church.

Christian faith and practice

Those serving in leadership and working directly with children and young people, accept a position of trust which places on them a commitment to carry out their role in accord with the Doctrine and Christian values of the Church.

Consistency and integrity

Breaches of the Safe Ministry Protocols by any person, regardless of position, are taken seriously and may result in the questioning of that persons' capacity to continue to serve, as well as the implementation of boundaries deemed necessary to protect children.

Accountability

The Church can be one of the few places where an Offender or Person of Concern, as a recipient of God's love and grace, can find a Christian welcome, Scriptural teaching and encouragement to grow in Christ. However, participation in the life of a Christian church or organisation is not a guarantee of Christlike behaviour nor a guarantee against repeating past sinful behaviour that has been abusive and caused harm. Therefore, the Church must communicate clear expectations and firm boundaries with transparency and accountability in relation to an Offender or Person of Concern who participates in the life of the Church. This helps to ensure that the Church is safe for children.

Foundational Principles

In our aim to create a safe environment and in our quest to ensure that children are protected from abuse and harm, the following principles must guide the behaviour expected of all persons involved in ministry-related activities:

- Become familiar with and act in accordance with the National Safe Ministry Framework [...] and any Code of Conduct and specific Procedures established by the relevant State Church [this is enacted in the PCV via Safe Church PCV training, the Safe Church Policy, Procedure & Practice Manual and the content at www.safechurchpcv.org.au]
- Understand that perpetration of any physical, psychological or emotional harm or neglect, or sexual abuse or exploitation is unacceptable, that it will be treated seriously and sensitively, and that it must be reported in accordance with the Church's Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedures [this is enacted in the PCV via the Victorian mandatory reporting law which applies to religious ministers, elders, officers, employees and volunteers]
- In all aspects of personal life and relationships and at all times, strive to act according to the highest standards, demonstrating courtesy, consideration and good judgement
- Treat all people with respect and dignity regardless of age, culture, gender, religious affiliation, personal circumstances or any other point of differentiation
- Accept and exercise the duty of care appropriate for each and all participants
- In accord with Scripture, engage only in lawful activity and never assist persons engaged in illegal activities
- Strive to carry out all relevant roles in accordance with the doctrines and values of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

- Respect the authority of leaders and act in accordance with reasonable directions
- Only engage in actions and activities that are appropriate for children where ministry-related activities involve children
- Complete any and all training required by the Church in relation to ministry roles; and
- Create and maintain appropriate resources for use and training in ministry.

As the application of these National Principles in specific situations requires interpretation, those involved in ministry must seek advice if placed in a position of uncertainty. [In the PCV, seek advice from the Safe Church Unit]