

10 November 2020

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

The purpose of this circular is to draw your attention to the Child Safe Standards and let you know that the Safe Ministry Board is looking into how they can be further implemented in our churches. Once the Safe Ministry Board has made recommendations these will be communicated to you.

Introduction

Based on their research and findings, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended 10 Child Safe Standards to be implemented by organisations working with children. The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) is now seeking to support organisations (including religious organisations) to implement these standards, which are likely to become mandatory through the passing of legislation by the NSW Government in mid-2021.

Summary of the 10 Child Safe Standards

The standards work together to emphasise the importance of adopting multiple strategies to address child safety and avoiding an over-reliance on any one strategy. Each standard is included below together with a brief explanation on what each of them is about.

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture

This standard is about creating a culture of child safety across all levels of an organisation to ensure that organisations prioritise child safety in what they say and do and above institutional reputation.

Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

This standard seeks to ensure that:

- Children are encouraged to speak up and are believed.
- Children are able to express their views and are provided with opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Children are informed and educated in age appropriate ways about their rights and about sex and abuse.

Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved

This standard emphasises organisations being actively engaged with families and communities to support children and being open and transparent about their processes, governance and behavioural expectations particularly concerning child safety.

Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

This standard requires organisations to respect diversity and uphold equity to ensure that more vulnerable children are not put at greater risk. Organisations need to actively anticipate children's diverse circumstances and respond effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities (e.g. children with disabilities, children from CALD backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children).

Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported

The aim of this standard is for organisations to attract, recruit, supervise and support staff to keep children safe. Organisations need to have proper recruitment, induction, training and screening processes in place and provide ongoing supervision and training in child safety.

Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused

According to this standard organisations need to have a child focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families to ensure that children are the priority when responding to complaints of abuse. Complaints must be taken seriously and responded to promptly and the organisation must meet reporting, privacy and employment obligations.

Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

This standard seeks for people working with children within an organisation to receive training on child maltreatment, particularly abuse that occurs in organisations (including how to prevent it, identify it and respond to it) as well as training about the organisation's child safe practices and protection strategies.

Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

This standard requires risks to children in physical and online environments to be identified and minimised. The online environment should be used in accordance with the organisation's code of conduct and relevant policies.

Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

This standard encourages organisations to continuously improve their child safe practices through regular review, including being informed by analysis of complaints to identify causes and systemic failures.

Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe

According to this standard policies and procedures should address the child safe standards and be accessible and easy to understand. Policies should be developed and informed by best practice models, understood and implemented by staff and championed by leaders.

A comprehensive outline of the standards and their core components can be found at <https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources/child-safe-standards>

What does this mean for our churches?

The good news is that in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney we have been working towards making our churches safer places for children and vulnerable people over a number of years. We are already implementing the Child Safe Standards in a variety of ways in our churches and in our Diocese through many of our existing Safe Ministry policies, procedures and practices. For example:

- By those working with children undertaking Safe Ministry Training (standards 7 and 5)
- By parishes adopting and complying with the Safe Ministry Blueprint documents (standard 10)
- By policy documents and child safe resources being easily accessible and available on the Safe Ministry website (standard 10)
- Through the Diocese developing new resources in response to COVID-19 regarding conducting ministry online (Standard 8)

Even though there are many ways in which the Diocese is already upholding the child safe standards there is room to continually review and improve how the standards are being implemented (Standard 9). Rather than overwhelming our parishes by seeking to 'reinvent the wheel' the Safe Ministry Board is looking at how to build on what we already do and is considering whether new resources are needed.

Some of the steps already being taken in response to the Child Safe Standards include:

- Reviewing the Safe Ministry Board Ordinance to update its functions and membership requirements to include, for example, a children's champion.
- Introduction of the Junior Safe Ministry Training course to train and equip young people serving in ministry to children in our churches and to provide them with the opportunity to provide feedback in this critical area.
- Updating Safe Ministry Training (which will be available in 2021).
- Updating the Safe Ministry Blueprint documents (which will be available in 2021).
- Contributing to wider work being done across the faith based sector in this area, for example, by contributing to the OCG's Implementation Guide for Faith Organisations which can be found at: <https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources/child-safe-resources/child-safe-standards>.

Resources

If you would like to know more or want to start thinking about how to implement the Child Safe Standards in your own church or organisational context there are a number of resources, in addition to the guides already referenced above, that you might be interested to look at:

- The [Safe Ministry Website](#) and the [Safe Ministry Training Website](#) are regularly updated with articles and resources.
- NCCA Safe Church Program has a new [Resource Hub](#) relating to all the Standards.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission [Organisational self-assessment tool](#).
- The [Australian Childhood Foundation](#) have some free downloadable posters and resources concerning child safety and children's rights.
- The Office of the Children's Guardian has a [Child Safe Standards Survey](#).
- NSW & ACT Baptist [Safe Church Health Check](#).

Opportunity for consultation and feedback

If you have ideas or suggestions to provide to the Safe Ministry Board as it considers the Child Safe Standards and how our churches might be better equipped to engage in child safe practices or if there are things you are already doing in your church in this area that you would like to share please let us know by emailing us on psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au.



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