

These guidelines are designed for a Senior Minister or their Authorised Delegate to use in the situation where an adult volunteer Safe Ministry Check form is submitted and contains answers to the screening questions that warrant further discussion or clarification before that volunteer is cleared (or not) to work with children in the parish.

Given the sensitive nature of the Safe Ministry Questionnaire section of the Safe Ministry Check form, these guidelines should be used by a person with considerable pastoral ministry experience and training.

When a person answers 'yes' to any of these questions, it presents an opportunity for significant pastoral ministry to that person.

However, this guide is focussed on giving some hints and tips to enable the person processing the form to decide whether the applicant should be cleared or not.

The Safe Ministry Questionnaire

The Safe Ministry Check for adult volunteers asks a set of seven questions about the personal life of the applicant. These questions are designed to draw out any information which might result in having concerns about the suitability of the applicant to work with children.

The vast majority of applicants will answer 'no' to each of the questions, or will include information that helps explain a 'yes' answer to your satisfaction. But if any answers give you cause for concern, a confidential interview with the applicant will give you the opportunity to explore those matters further, minister positively to the applicant and help inform your decision to clear or not clear the applicant to work with children.

Here are the seven questions with some notes and tips that will help you be aware of types of answers that might be cause for concern:

- 1. Has your driver's licence ever been revoked or suspended?*
A 'yes' answer might prompt you to explore whether the applicant has a history of impulsive behaviour or poor self-control.
- 2. Has a child or dependent young person in your care ever been removed from your care by the authorities? (Eg. The Department of Family and Community Services, Department of Communities and Justice)*
A 'yes' answer should include some information about the removal and the reasons for it. If there is a suggestion that a removal was due to mistreatment of a child by the applicant (or allegations of that), a more

detailed conversation with the applicant would be warranted.

3. *Have you ever had an apprehended violence order, order for protection or the like issued against you as a result of allegations of violence, abuse, likely harm, harassment, or stalking etc.*

A 'yes' answer should include details of any such order and whether any further action was taken by the person taking out the order. It may be pertinent to ask whether any such order was breached by the applicant. It may be relevant whether this occurred prior to the applicant becoming a Christian.

4. *As far as you are aware have you ever had permission or authorisation to undertake paid or voluntary work with children or other vulnerable people refused, suspended or withdrawn in Australia or any other country? (Note. This would include having your WWCC cancelled, revoked or suspended)*

A 'Yes' answer will need to be accompanied by details of any such suspension. If it included the NSW WWCC, your church should be aware of such a withdrawal if the applicants WWCC has been verified by your Safe Ministry Rep.

Great care should be taken in clearing a person answering 'yes' to this to work with children in your church. Apart from other concerns, it may be unlawful or illegal to do so.

5. *As far as you are aware has anyone ever made allegations against you or accused you of child abuse?*

If answered 'yes' details should be included, and evidence sought of what happened to those allegations – eg: were they substantiated or were they dismissed as unfounded. Even if the latter, care should be taken in clearing the applicant to work with children. You may wish to make any clearance provisional on being supervised at all times when with children or take similar precautions.

6. *Have you ever engaged in any of the following conduct:*

- a. *Sexual conduct with someone who is/was under your care (such as a parishioner, client, patient, student, employee or subordinate) or who is/was under the age of consent?*

(Note. Sexual conduct includes through digital and/or online means such as "sexting"-sending intimate images)

- b. *Use, possession, production or distribution of child exploitation material?*

- c. *Substance abuse (including excessive alcohol consumption, or abuse of prescription, over-the-counter, recreational or illegal drugs)?*

Overall, a 'yes' response to any part of Q6 should be carefully and sensitively explored to help you decide whether the applicant should be cleared to work with children in your church.

Note that a) focusses on sexual conduct with someone who is/was under the age of consent. Exploration of other sexual conduct is not required or recommended in this context, however any such information volunteered by the applicant may be helpful to your decision-making process.

b) Child exploitation material is sometimes known as 'child pornography'. Any admission of involvement in this will need to be reported to the police due to its illegal nature. Any such admission may render the applicant unsuitable to work with children in your church, and the PSU should be notified.

c) If this is admitted to, some exploration of the nature and extent should be conducted, as well as the timing of such behaviour (eg: before or since conversation to Christianity).

7. *As far as you are aware have you ever been accused, charged or convicted of a criminal offence?*

(Note. Receiving a parking or speeding fine is not a criminal offence)

A 'yes' response here will require some sensitive exploration to ascertain the suitability of this person to work with children. An accusation of an offense may mean little or it may point to a significant issue in the applicant's life.

Conviction of some criminal offenses may require the applicant to agree to a [Safety Plan](#) being put in place.

It may also be relevant whether an accusation, charge or conviction took place before or after conversion to Christianity.

If you are uncertain about the significance of an answer to any of the questions above, assistance in assessing an applicant's response is available by contacting the [Parish Consultant](#) on the Safe Ministry Team.

Interview

In most instances where a question above has been answered 'yes', a confidential interview between you and applicant should be conducted. Some tips for conducting these follows.

Before the interview

- Organise an **appropriate time** to meet.
- Ensure you allocate **sufficient time**.
- **Familiarise** yourself with the applicant's responses and prepare how you might address incomplete answers or responses that raise concerns for you.
- **Pray** beforehand.

Note: It is important to delegate interviews with **female** applicants to a trusted, well-respected **female leader** in your staff team or congregation.

At the interview

- Be sure to **take detailed notes** during the interview – these will form part of the applicants SMC records to be stored indefinitely.
- This interview process may be confronting. To build trust, provide an **environment** where people feel safe and valued.
- Ensure that the applicant is put **at ease**. Thank the applicant for his/her willingness to complete the form.
- Ask the applicant **how they felt** completing the form.
- Outline **the purpose** of the form – using the introductory information as a guide.
- Move through the form – **from beginning to end** - addressing any answers which appear incomplete or answers that raise concerns.
- Interviewers need to be **active listeners**, taking the necessary time and not trying to rush the process.
- In the case of **incomplete answers**, seek the permission of the applicant to enquire further. If consent is given, invite the applicant to provide a fuller explanation of their response to the question.

- In the case of **answers which raise concerns**, seek the permission of the applicant to enquire further. If consent is given, invite the applicant to provide a fuller explanation of their response to the question to clarify any relevant details.
- **Disclosures about past conduct can sometimes reveal unresolved issues.** These issues should be acknowledged by the interviewer. Arrangements ought to be made to pastorally follow-up the matter/s at the direction of the Senior Minister.
- **Certain disclosures** about past conduct may jeopardise the applicant from proceeding, or continuing, to serve in children's and/or youth ministry. In such cases, the Senior Minister ought to seek the advice of the PSU at the earliest opportunity.

Concluding the interview

- **Express appreciation** to the applicant.
- **Explain** next steps to him/her.
- **Pray** with the applicant, whenever possible.
- **Edit** your interview notes into an appropriate format to be stored with your parish Safe Ministry Records

Some content provided by: Rev Mark Charleston, Rector Sylvania, Registered Psychologist (NSW)