



# Safe Ministry Blueprint For Heads of Children's Ministry

**Safe Ministry with Children  
and Other Vulnerable People**

**Safe Ministry Blueprints**

Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

## Introduction

Ministry to children is vibrant and exciting work, and also greatly significant to the life of the church. Teaching children about Jesus is kingdom work. It is a service to the children, the church family, and to God himself that offers great opportunities, but also carries significant responsibilities for the wellbeing of the children in our care. If we as a church take the teaching and leadership of children seriously then we must do all we can to provide an environment that is safe from any form of harm.

The Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney wants its ministries to be characterised by grace and forgiveness, not rules and regulations; but the Bible is concerned that leaders have a particularly high standard in their personal life. Unfortunately, not all Christian workers have protected children and young people in the past. This policy has been developed so that as far as possible, such crimes will not be committed in future in the context of our church ministries.

This booklet sets out the guidelines and Code of Conduct for the person with overall responsibility for children's ministry in the parish. The person with this role might be a paid Children's Minister, a volunteer children's ministry leader, an assistant minister or, by default, the Senior Minister.

Except where a particular age bracket is indicated, or a distinction is drawn between children and youth, references to children in this document are references to anyone under the age of 18.

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This document was prepared in 2015 by the Professional Standards Unit for the Safe Ministry Board with assistance from Anglican Youthworks. It was updated in 2021 to reflect current changes in the Diocese and in relevant NSW Legislation. This document outlines the requirements of the *Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020* that are relevant to safe ministry.

## 1. General principles for ministry with children

### **Children have rights**

Children have the right to be safe and well looked after when they are in our care. They have the right to be protected, listened to and their particular needs addressed in all church activities, whether mixed age or child specific.

### **Leaders are responsible**

All those exercising a pastoral ministry involving children in the church have responsibility for the safety and welfare of the children in their care.

### **Abuse is power misused**

Leaders have authority over children because of their positional power and because of their greater age, maturity, physical size and life experience. Abuse arises from the misuse of authority or power. Any form of abuse is always wrong.

## 2. The role of the Head of Children's Ministry

As the person with overall responsibility for children's ministry you must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of the children in your care. Those reasonable steps include:

- the careful selection of leaders and volunteers who have satisfied the screening and training requirements (and ensuring that you do not involve people who have not satisfied those requirements);
- making sure those persons are aware of the basic health and safety issues related to the physical environment where children's activities occur.
- making sure your children's ministry program complies with the core safe ministry policies contained in this booklet.

### 3. Selection and screening of leaders

Sadly, many children have been abused physically, sexually and emotionally by trusted members of their communities, including people in churches. As a result, there are requirements for people involved in any kind of work with children that leaders must comply with, both under NSW law and the Anglican Church's ordinances.

#### a. Legal requirements

Any person involved in **child-related work** (including all volunteers) must get a Working With Children Check clearance (subject to some exemptions). A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years and therefore child-related work includes ministry to youth. A church must verify the WWCC number with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian prior to engaging a person in child-related work to determine whether the person has been cleared or barred.

Compliance with these legal requirements is the responsibility of the senior minister, although this task can be delegated to the Safe Ministry Representative.

However, as the Head of Children's Ministry, you must make sure that verification of the leaders that you're responsible for has occurred.

A failure to undertake screening as required by law could lead to significant fines. It may also potentially form the basis of an action in negligence if a child is abused by a person in child-related work in the parish who does not have a WWCC but has a record that would have resulted in a bar had the WWCC been undertaken.

#### Working With Children Checks

##### What is a Working With Children Check?

The NSW Working with Children Check (WWCC) is a government screening process overseen by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. Anyone intending to work with children in NSW, including volunteers, must get a WWCC. The WWCC involves a criminal history check (including convictions, charges and juvenile records) and a review of findings of misconduct. The result is either a clearance to work with children for five years or a bar against working with children.

## Who needs a WWCC?

A Working With Children Check is a prerequisite for anyone in paid or voluntary **child-related work** in NSW.

“**Child-related work**” (including voluntary work) is:

- Providing services for under 18’s
- Where the work normally involves being face to face with children
- Where contact is more than incidental to the work

However the general meaning is subject to a number of exemptions (including workers who are under 18 years of age). For more about who is exempt from a WWCC see below.

The senior minister, any assistant ministers and lay ministers of a parish must have a WWCC clearance even if they do not have face to face contact with children personally, as they are deemed to be undertaking child-related work where there are children in a congregation of the parish.

Any and every person engaged in child-related work in a parish must either:

- hold a Working With Children Check clearance that has been verified with the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian and is not subject to a bar,
- have a current Working With Children Check application before the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian, or
- be subject to an exemption.

### b. Diocesan requirements

A person who wishes to undertake **ministry to children** must usually:

- Complete a **Safe Ministry Check** and submit this for assessment with the Senior Minister or his delegate (Safe Ministry Check forms can be downloaded from <https://safeministry.org.au/safe-ministry-check-information/> or parishes can register for the online system <https://safeministry.org.au/smc-church-registration/>),

- Obtain a **WWCC clearance** that must then be verified by the parish,
- Make a **formal application** for the children’s ministry position, including producing proof of identity documents and providing references (A sample application form is available at <https://safeministry.org.au/>),
- Undertake **Safe Ministry training** prior to undertaking ministry to children, followed by a Refresher course every three years, and
- Read, understand, and comply with **Faithfulness in Service** (available at <https://safeministry.org.au/>).

It is recommended that all volunteers are a member of a parish for at least 6 months before undertaking ministry to children in that parish. This provides time for a person’s character and suitability for such a role to be observed.

**Ministry to children** means a role that:

- Requires the person to hold a WWCC clearance; or
- Involves pastoral ministry which has direct, regular and not incidental contact with children; or
- Involves an overnight activity with children (e.g. camps) or the provision of personal care to children (such as changing clothes, toileting, washing); or
- Involves the supervision of a person engaged in ministry to children.

## Safe Ministry Assessments

### What is a Safe Ministry Assessment?

The Safe Ministry Assessment is a diocesan requirement prescribed by the *Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020* and is part of the diocesan response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Assessment involves the completion of a “Safe Ministry Check” form by the applicant followed by an assessment of the form by the Senior Minister or his nominee (authorised delegate). In particular cases, an accompanying interview may also be appropriate or necessary in order to clarify and explore responses given in the Safe Ministry Check before approval is given. For more information concerning the implementation of the Safe Ministry Assessment process in the parish please refer to the Safe Ministry [website](#).



Although an interview of the person applying is not required as part of the process it is encouraged as it creates an opportunity for the Senior Minister or his delegate to have a pastoral conversation with the applicant about godliness and holiness and to talk through any matters that the applicant may have found confronting when completing the form. Pastoral guidelines for the senior minister on how to assess the Safe Ministry Check are available on the Safe Ministry [website](#).

### **When must a person complete a Safe Ministry Assessment?**

All volunteer church workers (aged 13 years and over) serving in ministry to children in the Diocese need to have undertaken a Safe Ministry Assessment and been cleared to work with children **before** they undertake ministry to children. This requirement is in addition to the requirements that such persons hold a current WWCC clearance (if they are over 18 years of age) and regularly complete Safe Ministry Training.

### **c. Summary of Requirements for Selection and Screening of Leaders**

Because a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, ministry to children includes youth ministry roles. Examples of roles involving ministry to children include crèche leaders, Sunday School leaders, SRE teachers and youth group leaders.

Screening and training may vary for different ministries based on the legislative and diocesan requirements. The following table sets out the requirements for screening and training for children's ministry-related positions.

Ministry position	WWCC	Formal application	Safe Ministry training	Safe Ministry Check
Creche coordinator	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creche helper	✓	At the discretion of the senior minister	✓	✓ If regularly on the roster not helping as a one off
Sunday School coordinator or teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓
SRE teacher or helper	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mid-week kids club coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓	✓
Holiday kids program coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children's camp leader	✓	✓	✓	✓
Playgroup coordinator/leader	✓	✓	✓	✓
Playgroup helper (not formally appointed to a leadership position)	✓	X	X	X
Junior Leader in children's ministry aged 13-17	X You can apply for a WWCC at age 17yr 9mths	At the discretion of the senior minister	✓ Safe Ministry Junior leaders Training (or Safe Ministry Essentials for leaders aged 16 or 17 – at the discretion of the Senior Minister)	✓ Safe Ministry Check for volunteers aged 13-17 years

Ministry position	WWCC	Formal application	Safe Ministry training	Safe Ministry Check
Casual helpers who do not fulfil a leadership or teaching role in a children's or youth program and simply assist from time to time	✓	At the discretion of the senior minister	X	X
Volunteer assisting in an emergency (e.g. to prevent an increased risk to the safety of children on that occasion)	X if for not more than 5 consecutive working days	X	X	X
Parent or close relative of a child or youth, volunteering in a ministry group that their child is a member of or usually participates in	X though it is preferable that they have a WWCC clearance	At the discretion of the senior minister	✓	X If they are a regularly rostered helper it is preferable to do one
A visiting speaker or performer for a one-off occasion in the presence of other adults, volunteers serving food, wardens, Parish Councillors, Synod representatives, building caretakers, cleaners, administrators and bookkeepers	X	X	X	X

## 4. Safe Ministry training

Every person undertaking **ministry to children** must have completed Safe Ministry training within three years **prior** to their appointment and the Safe Ministry Refresher must be completed every three years thereafter.

**Ministry to children** means a role that:

- Requires the person to hold a WWCC clearance; or
- Involves pastoral ministry which has direct, regular and not incidental contact with children; or
- Involves an overnight activity with children (e.g. camps) or the provision of personal care to children (such as changing clothes, toileting, washing); or
- Involves the supervision of a person engaged in ministry to children.

Examples include Sunday School teachers, crèche helpers, SRE teachers etc.

Safe Ministry training became the responsibility of the Professional Standards Unit in 2017. It is available online or through face-to-face events at various locations throughout the year. For more information go to <https://safeministry.training/>

The Sydney Anglican Diocese is a Member and Training Provider for the National Council of Churches Australia (NCCA) Safe Church Program. For more information go to: <https://safeministry.training/>

The *Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020* makes it a requirement that all church workers (undertaking ministry to children) complete Safe Ministry Training prior to their appointment. The only exemption from this requirement is if the Archbishop (or his delegate) is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist and in such cases the training is to be completed within such other period specified by the Archbishop or his delegate, or if no period is specified, as soon as practicable.

## 5. Child Safe Standards

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended 10 child safe standards based on its findings, extensive research and consultation about what makes organisations child safe. The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian seeks to support organisations (including religious organisations) to implement these 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. By implementing the standards in our church ministries we can create and maintain a child safe culture. The 10 Child Safe Standards in extract are as follows:

1. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

The child safe standards inform our current safe ministry policies and practices and provide a framework for ongoing review and improvement. It is recommended that church leadership consider how the standards are being implemented specifically in their own parish and how to improve and develop child safe practices and culture. For more resources and information about the standards refer to the <https://safeministry.training/resources>.

## 6. Code of Conduct for Children's Ministry

The Code of Conduct is written to protect both the children in our churches, and leaders from situations where their integrity or actions might be questioned.

### Code of conduct for children's ministry

A children's ministry leader **must**:

- Never abuse people especially children or youth, nor cultivate relationships in order to initiate or hide abuse.
- Report to the appropriate authorities any behaviour that could be considered abusive. This includes speaking to the head ministry leader about behaviour by another leader.

- Never be alone with a child or young person in their ministry role where other adult leaders are not present.
- Never have children or young people to their home or visit children or young people in circumstances where no other adult is present, except with the permission of their parent or guardian.
- Never touch children or youth in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender, cultural background, context or personal circumstances.
- Never physically discipline a child or young person in the course of their ministry.
- Never make alcohol, cigarettes or illicit drugs available to children or youth.
- Never develop special relationships with particular children or youth that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any contact with children or youth that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).
- Never use electronic communication with children and young people in a manner inconsistent with the guidelines for appropriate use as set out in this Blueprint document when communicating with people under their leadership.
- Never become romantically involved with any participant in the youth or children's ministry where they are a leader.
- Never take unauthorised photos, movies or recordings of anyone, especially of a child or young person on church property or at church activities without church authorisation and the consent of the child's parents or guardians.
- Never view, possess, produce or distribute restricted material containing sexual acts or nudity; and never view, possess, produce or distribute any form of child pornography or child exploitation material.

There are good reasons for this code of conduct. Those who seek to abuse children may use group-based activities in order to gain the trust of a young person. Having gained that trust, they may then engage in one-to-one activities that offer an opportunity for abuse to occur, including sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse of a child often starts with something relatively minor but can then gradually build up to more involved behaviours through a process of grooming. Grooming is often characterised by secrecy.

A breach of this Code of Conduct may raise issues concerning a person's fitness to continue

as a leader. Leaders are to inform the senior minister or the Safe Ministry Representative if they observe another leader acting in a way that may be contrary to this Code of Conduct.

## 7. Guidelines for Children's Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for children's ministry activities, such as the supervision of activities and their appropriateness, the physical safety of those involved, the importance of parental consent, transportation and trips away, forms of communication with children, as well the issue of meeting up with children outside of programmed events. However, there are three golden rules that are relevant to all of the guidelines:

### **Two or More**

There should always be two leaders aged 18 years or over present for all children's ministry events.

### **Never Alone**

Leaders should not be alone with a child during an activity, and should make sure, as far as possible, that other leaders are not left alone with a child or young person.

### **Stranger Danger**

Leaders should be on the alert for people wandering around – a person unknown to the leaders or not part of the children's ministry should not be allowed access to children.

### a. Physical safety of children

One of the ways that we can protect children in our churches is to make sure that they are meeting in a physical environment that is appropriate and safe for them.

Consider particularly the suitability of the space, the safety of the space, and the safety measures in place, by asking the following questions (over the page):

### **Suitability of the space**

- Are toilet facilities available?
- Is the space appropriate for activities such as games and craft activities?
- Is the equipment being used suitable and appropriate for the ages of those using it? (this is a particularly pertinent question to ask if there is any climbing equipment)
- Is the floor non-slip and splinter-free?
- In regard to areas used by toddlers and pre-schoolers: Is the area fenced off or contained in a room?
- Is there a designated area for strollers that is available to be used for that purpose?

### **Safety of the space**

- Is the area to be used a safe distance from roads or traffic?
- Is the area far removed from places where people may engage in unsafe behaviour (such as smoking or drinking alcohol)?
- Is any glass installed at floor level safety glass?
- Are all child-height cupboards fitted with child-proof locks?
- Is the heating safe to use near children (i.e. is the source of heat removed away from small inquisitive fingers)?
- Are all electrical wiring, sockets and appliances regularly maintained and in a safe condition? Are all sockets child-proofed?
- In regard to areas that may be used for games and outside play, has the area been checked for items that may pose a potential hazard and such items safely removed (such as broken glass, or discarded needles)?
- Is all furniture in a safe condition and without risk of toppling onto a child (such as any stacks of chairs being at a low height)?

### **First aid and safety measures**

- Is there a fire extinguisher or fire blanket available on-site?
- Is there a specific person in the church who is responsible for checking the first aid kit regularly and replenishing it? Is there a well-stocked first aid kit at the activity site?
- Is there a specific person on-site who is trained in first aid?
- Are all leaders aware of the fire safety and evacuation procedures?



## b. Supervision of activities

An important part of providing a safe environment is making sure there are enough leaders present to adequately supervise the activities taking place.

The degree of supervision required will vary according to the nature and environment of the activity, the age and maturity of the children and the size of the group. In considering the number of leaders required, take into account:

- the age, number, ability and gender mix of the children, and
- the venue, time, duration and nature of the activity.

The suggested supervision ratios for low risk on-site church events would be: crèche and pre-schoolers 1:5 (one leader for every five children) and primary age 1:7 (one leader for every seven children), after the minimum requirement of 2 adult leaders is met.

Where the risks in the activity increase, the supervision should also increase. For example, if leaders were to take primary-aged children off-site to indoor rock climbing, it would be appropriate to reduce the ratio to 1:4 (one leader for every four children). This is to account for the high-risk nature of the activity and the fact that it is off-site.

Please note that a junior leader (under the age of 18) does not count as a leader for the purposes of supervision.

The head leader should clearly distinguish the different levels of responsibility between them and other supervisors and ensure that these differences are understood.

In the case of camps and similar activities, there should be at least one adult present who has first aid training.

## c. Appropriateness of activities

Leaders should thoughtfully consider what message children may learn from the way events are organised and conducted. Games or activities that could in any way emphasise gender, physical, intellectual or ethnic differences should be assessed for their appropriateness.

To minimise the possibility of children being harmed, leaders should give careful consideration to any activities or games that require children to act alone or in pairs

independent of leaders.

Leaders are to review in their entirety any DVDs, You Tube clips, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics that they intend to show to children. In assessing whether something is appropriate, leaders are to be governed by the age of the youngest child present.

Censorship ratings should be kept to G or PG for children up to Year 6, keeping in mind that some G or PG material may still not be appropriate due to the themes it contains

#### d. Parental consent

Children must not be taken away from church premises without the written consent of a parent or guardian. Parents must be kept informed of the place and timing of the event and where possible provided with contact details for the head ministry leader. If possible, it is recommended to include parents or guardians in a leadership team which includes leaders of both genders.

Parents or guardians should be asked for information about any physical needs (such as allergies), mental health needs (such as depression) or safety needs of the children attending children's ministry activities (see registration and permission forms below).

Leaders should never administer medications to a child or young person without the written consent of a parent or guardian.

#### e. Registration and permission forms

Parents should complete a form in which they give details of:

- names, addresses and phone numbers of child and parents,
- name and phone number of a contact person in an emergency situation,
- important medical information, e.g. allergies, disabilities, special diets,
- names of people allowed to collect the child (carefully note if there is a non-custodial parent to whom the child should never be handed over),
- permission for leaders to obtain medical treatment in an emergency. A sample permission form is available at <https://safeministry.org.au>

## f. Transportation

It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to arrange transportation to and from children's ministry events for their child, unless another specific arrangement is in place.

A child should not be driven anywhere by someone other than the parent for the purposes of a church activity without written permission from a parent or guardian.

When making transport arrangements, reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that:

- All drivers or operators are licensed (green Ps or above), responsible, experienced and are not impaired by alcohol or any other mind-altering or addictive substance, and
- All motor vehicles and other forms of transport used are registered, insured, safe and fitted with age appropriate child restraints or safety devices (e.g. seat belts, life jackets).

Leaders should avoid being alone with a child in a motor vehicle or driving a child home unaccompanied, even with parental permission. If such a situation is unavoidable, the leader should inform another leader of the trip and the reason for it.

## g. Trips away

It is not usually appropriate to have children under the age of Year 5 sleeping over at events. When events involve children aged Year 5 and above sleeping over, ensure that the sleeping accommodation (where possible) is:

- segregated between males and females,
- supervised by more than one person, preferably including a parent or guardian, and ensure (where possible) that those supervising the sleeping accommodation:
  - are of the same gender as the children being supervised, and
  - do not sleep in close personal proximity to a child unless they are a parent or guardian of the child.

Leaders should never share accommodation with only one child unless they are a parent or guardian of the child.

Venues should allow for the privacy of all parties to be respected, particularly when changing clothes, washing and toileting. If a leader needs to wash or toilet a child, they should tell another adult what they are doing.

## h. Communication

Leaders should take care that their communication with children is appropriate and above reproach. Be aware that those who wish to abuse children may use electronic communications to try to cultivate secretive or exclusive relationships.

Leaders should not contact children by email, mail, social media, video calls, using chatrooms or by any other form of electronic communication. Leaders should not call or text a child on the child's mobile phone.

All electronic communication must be with the child's parent or guardian. On the rare occasions when a leader might need to speak to a child on the phone for ministry purposes, the leader is to call the child's parent to explain why he or she is calling. Only then, with the parent's permission, should the leader speak with the child. The leader should be conscious of keeping the conversation with the child short.

Recommendations about the sort of contact that is likely to be appropriate with children:

Type of contact	Primary school Students
<b>Phone calls</b>	Only after speaking to parent then, if the parent gives permission, with the child and only for ministry purposes.
<b>Text messages</b>	X
<b>Email</b>	X
<b>Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, etc)</b>	X
<b>Video calls/ conferencing</b>	Only with parental permission and in a group setting, not one to one.

### i. Online Environments

Just as we do with physical gatherings we must ensure that online environments are safe and minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur (Standard 8 of the Child Safe Standards).

Many of the principles that govern how we conduct safe ministry face to face will apply to the online world as well, however there are some specific things to bear in mind.

## Video Conferencing

- **Video conferencing meetings should be run on church owned accounts (not the individual leader's personal account).**
- When meetings are run online through video conferencing platforms the same principles that apply to safe ministry in person will largely apply online. Two or more leaders should always be present during the meeting and where that is not possible the meeting should be recorded.
- As in the face to face gathering children need to be supervised by responsible leaders during online meetings. Disabling private chat functions and ensuring a leader is regularly checking in on any small group breakout rooms (or the like) will ensure that participants are not able to engage in inappropriate communication or conduct during the gathering.
- Only communicate with children online at the regularly programmed times e.g. Wednesday afternoon kid's club.
- Let parents and carers know when and how you will be interacting online with their children and what rules are in place. Get parental permission for primary aged children.
- Communicate expectations and rules about online interactions and meetings to the children in the group, including how leaders are to interact with them. In particular children should be aware that leaders should not be contacting them privately or arranging online gatherings other than the advertised usual times.

For more detailed [guidelines](#) and [permission note](#) templates go to <https://safeministry.org.au>

## j. Photographs and videos

Leaders should not take photos of children without parental consent and should only use photos in accordance with the purposes for which that consent was given.

Do not photograph any child who has asked not to be photographed.

Photos of children should focus on small groups rather than individuals:

- Do not identify in writing the people in the photograph, e.g. tagging on social media.
- All children must be appropriately dressed when photographed (e.g. not in swimsuits or pyjamas).

Embarrassing or offensive photos or videos must not be either taken or shared.

Parental permission must be sought before posting photographs or videos of children online. Privacy is of utmost importance and care should be taken to protect children from having their personal information being displayed on a social networking site or church website.

Generally, videos should only be used to showcase or advertise ministry-related events and activities.

When video of services or activities are distributed or streamed on the web or via other broadcast media, signs should be posted that indicate the service is being or will be broadcast.

If you engage a volunteer to take official photographs at a church event it should be clearly stated in writing the role and tasks of the photographer and that in undertaking these tasks the photographer assigns the rights of copyright in the photos to the wardens and minister to hold on behalf of the parish. This will prevent the photographs from being used in other publications and contexts without proper consent.

## k. Meeting outside programmed events

### **Guidelines for ministering to Year 6 and under**

It is not appropriate for leaders to meet up with children socially, unless it is in the context of socialising with the child's family or with parental permission.

For more detailed information and age specific guidelines concerning the matters raised in (h)-(k) above you can refer to the Social Contact Policy at <https://safeministry.org.au>.

## 8. Age-specific guidelines for ministering to children

In addition to the general principles and guidelines set out above, the Safe Ministry Guidelines document for specific age groups and ministry activities is available at <https://safeministry.org.au>. It covers the following topics:

- Ministry with 0-5 year olds
- Playtime/toddler groups
- Kids Club
- Sunday Children's Ministry
- Camping
- Offsite activities
- Holiday clubs and activities



## 9. Reporting Obligations regarding Child Abuse

Since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse the laws in NSW have been strengthened in a number of ways to ensure that child abuse is reported to the relevant authorities.

It is now a criminal offence for any adult in NSW who “*knows, believes or reasonably ought to know*” that a child has been physically or sexually abused to conceal such abuse by failing to report it to the authorities, subject to certain reasonable excuses (*Crimes Act 1900*). For more information concerning changes to the NSW Crimes Act please refer to the [parish circular](#) on the Safe Ministry website.

In addition to the criminal law there are two legislative schemes in NSW that also place obligations upon churches and/or church workers to report suspected child abuse or certain types of alleged conduct to the authorities, the mandatory reporting obligations under *Children and Young Person’s (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the Reportable Conduct Scheme under the *Children’s Guardian Act 2019*.

These two schemes aim to keep children safe, and we have obligations under both. The Mandatory Reporter scheme has a focus on reporting current concerns for the safety and welfare of children. The Reportable Conduct scheme has a focus on ensuring the suitability of leaders to work with children by addressing any risks that a leader may pose on the basis of *current or past conduct*.

### a. Mandatory Reporting - Children and Young Person’s (Care and Protection) Act 1998

Anyone who suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm must report it to the relevant authorities.

Any child abuse that a minister or leader becomes aware of must be reported to the relevant authorities. A person may become aware of abuse because they have observed indicators of abuse, another person has informed them of their concerns for a child or a child has disclosed to them that they are being abused.

In NSW persons in religious ministry or persons providing religion based activities to children (0-18yrs) are mandatory reporters, therefore any church worker (whether paid or voluntary) has a legal obligation to report, as soon as practicable, to the Department of Communities

and Justice (DCJ) the name of a child if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the child is at risk of significant harm.

A child or young person is “at risk of significant harm” if current concerns exist for the safety, welfare or well-being of the child or young person because of the presence, to a significant extent, of any one or more of the following circumstances:

- a. the child or young person’s basic physical or psychological needs are not being met (neglect) or are at risk of not being met,
- b. the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive necessary medical care,
- c. in the case of a child or young person who is required to attend school in accordance with the *Education Act 1990*—the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive an education in accordance with that Act,
- d. the child or young person has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated,
- e. the child or young person is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, the child or young person is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm, (domestic and family violence)
- f. a parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards the child or young person that the child or young person has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm, (emotional abuse)
- g. the child was the subject of a pre-natal report and the birth mother of the child did not engage successfully with support services to eliminate, or minimise to the lowest level reasonably practical, the risk factors that gave rise to the report.

It is mandatory to make a report if the child is 0 to 15 years and at risk of significant harm. It’s not mandatory to make a report if it is an unborn child, or a young person aged 16 to 17.

### **Mandatory Reporter Guide**

This guide can be used when you observe indicators of abuse or receive a disclosure of abuse to determine if a report should be made.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) has an online tool known as the [Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) (MRG) that anyone can use to help them assess whether a child

is suspected to be at Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) and to make a ROSH report. In any situation where you suspect a child may be at risk of significant harm and a report to DCJ may be required you are encouraged to use the MRG. The MRG leads the user through a series of questions and at the end generates a decision report outlining what to do next and can even assist the person to create an electronic report.

There are also a number of helpful articles and resources on the [DCJ website](#) that can assist mandatory reporters with topics such as:

- Deciding to make a report and using the MRG;
- Information needed to make a report; and
- Informing the family of a report.

## b. Reportable Conduct- Children’s Guardian Act 2019

The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires religious bodies to report the following things to the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG):

- Certain criminal convictions; or
- Allegations of certain types of conduct concerning a person who holds, or is required to hold, a Working with Children Check clearance for the purpose of engagement with the religious body. This means any leaders or church workers who are engaged in ministry to children.

There are strict timeframes for reporting. Notice of an allegation must be reported to the NSW OCG by the “head” of the religious body within 7 days of it becoming known and an investigation report (or interim report, if the investigation is not complete) must to be lodged with the NSW OCG after a further 30 calendar days.

### **Conduct that is Reportable.**

According to section 20 of the *Children’s Guardian Act 2019*, “reportable conduct” means the following conduct, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the conduct has been commenced or concluded:

- a. A sexual offence committed against or within the presence of a child;
- b. Sexual misconduct towards or in the presence of a child;
- c. Ill-treatment of a child;

- d. Neglect of a child;
- e. An assault against a child;
- f. An offence under section 43B or 316A of the *Crimes Act 1900* (Note: these sections refer to the criminal offences concerning failing to report abuse referenced above); or
- g. Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.

A “*reportable conviction*” is a criminal conviction or a finding of guilt from a court (even if it does not lead to conviction) of an offence involving reportable conduct.

### **Conduct that occurred outside the church context.**

Religious bodies must report allegations of reportable conduct and convictions even if the conduct or conviction is not connected to the activities of the church or the exercise of the person’s role in the organisation. However the person must be a current church worker to trigger the reporting obligation. Further definitions and explanation of what constitutes reportable conduct can be found in the *Children’s Guardian Act 2019*.

### **Obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme**

The Act imposes a legal obligation upon the head of the religious body to report relevant allegations and convictions to the NSW OCG within the stipulated timeframes. Employees (including volunteers) of the religious body also have a corresponding obligation to report their knowledge of any relevant allegations and convictions to the “head” of the religious body.

The Act defines “head” as being the chief executive officer or principal officer, however described. In our context this is the Rector (Parish) and the Archbishop (Diocese). While the identity of the head is important for determining who has reporting obligations under the Act, in practice all reportable allegations and convictions are investigated and dealt with by the Professional Standards Unit (PSU).

If you become aware of an allegation of conduct or a conviction that you think might be reportable you should report this to your senior minister, and then together contact the PSU immediately for further advice and so that the matter can be dealt with as soon as possible.

**Parishes should report relevant allegations and convictions to the PSU who will deal with the NSW OCG on behalf of the head of the religious body and conduct an investigation when required.**

## 11. Handling Disclosures of Child Abuse

If a child discloses abuse to someone, that person should:

- listen to their story,
- comfort the child if they are distressed,
- let the child know that they are glad they told them and that they did the right thing, and
- let the child know they are going to get help about what to do next and will get back to them.

Bear in mind that what may seem incredible could be true. Offenders may be cunning, secret and not immediately or obviously identifiable.

As soon as possible after the disclosure, the person to whom the disclosure was made must:

- a. write down the details of what was said, and
- b. report the information to the appropriate authorities.

a. **WRITE DOWN the details of what was said including details such as:**

- » *Who made the disclosure*
- » *Date, time and place of the disclosure*
- » *What the child said and any grounds for forming the belief that the abuse has occurred*
- » *What was said by the person to whom the disclosure was made*

The person to whom the disclosure was made should keep to the facts about what was said and refrain from expressing their opinion. This document must be signed and dated and kept in a secure place as it could be subpoenaed in court proceedings.

There is a sample reporting form available at <https://safeministry.org.au>.

For information about safe storage of documents go to <https://safeministry.org.au>

## Confidentiality

Any suspicion, knowledge or disclosure of abuse must be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Apart from reporting it to the relevant authorities, the information must not ordinarily be shared with anyone else. However it is appropriate and advisable to share the disclosure with your senior minister (unless of course the allegations are made about the senior minister).

### b. REPORT the information to the appropriate authorities

#### REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND DISCLOSURES

Issue or concern	Report to:
General Suspicions	<p><b>Head ministry leader – Church</b></p> <p><b>Principal – School</b></p>
Child or young person currently at risk of significant harm including where they are showing suicidal or self-harming behaviours.	<p><b>DCJ – Child Protection Helpline 132 111</b> If possible discuss with your head ministry leader or Senior Minister* first and use the Mandatory Reporter Guide.</p> <p><b>Police</b> Contact the police first if the situation requires emergency assistance.</p> <p><b>Professional Standards Unit</b> Contact the PSU where the alleged perpetrator is a church worker. **</p>
Knowledge of relevant criminal offences or possible allegations of reportable conduct	<p><b>Police</b></p> <p><b>Professional Standards Unit</b> (regarding a church worker)</p>
Child abuse by a church worker**	<p><b>Senior minister*/church worker’s employer</b></p> <p><b>Anglican Abuse Report line (PSU) (1800 77 49 45)</b></p> <p><b>Police</b></p>

Contact the Professional Standards Unit if you are unsure of what to do in any circumstance or if you are concerned that making a report would put a person's safety in jeopardy or where an allegation is regarding the senior minister.

In an emergency call 000.

*\*Do not report to the senior minister if the allegation is regarding the senior minister*

*\*\*A church worker includes a minister, any ministry volunteer or leader (e.g. Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, SRE teacher, organist, etc), warden, parish councillor, parish Synod representative.*

The person to whom a disclosure is made should not undertake an investigation, and should not disclose the allegations to the alleged offender at this initial stage.

## 12. After a report is made

### Confidentiality

Any suspicion, knowledge or disclosure of abuse must be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Apart from reporting it to the relevant authorities, the information must not ordinarily be shared with anyone else.

### Investigations by the relevant authority

The church or the leader's responsibility is to report any suspicion, knowledge or disclosure of abuse to the relevant authority. It is the responsibility of the relevant authority to carry out any investigation that may be required.

In some cases, a report will lead to an investigation by the Police or the Department of Communities and Justice or the Professional Standards Unit and the matter will be taken out of the hands of the parish. In other cases, there may be no action taken by the relevant authority (for example, because the complainant does not want to go through a criminal trial) and the parish will need to determine its response to the matter. In both cases, the Professional Standards Unit should always be consulted on how to proceed. For example, to consider if and when to disclose the allegation/report to the alleged offender.

### Pastoral care

A victim of abuse may require immediate specialist counselling or other support. When a report is made to the Professional Standards Unit, the Professional Standards Unit Chaplain can provide advice on care for victims and their families. Victims often need ongoing contact and support, and the senior minister should ensure that an appropriate person is appointed to follow up with them. Other members of the parish may also need specialist support. Trained Parish Support Teams are available to assist through the Professional Standards Unit.

If a leader informs the senior minister that a child has disclosed abuse to them, the senior minister should make sure that the above steps are taken with respect to the handling of the disclosure and reporting the abuse. He should also ensure that the leader is appropriately cared for and supported. The leader may need to debrief about how the experience has affected them.

### **Pastoral Care and Assistance Scheme**

A person who has experienced sexual abuse from a leader in the parish context in the Sydney Diocese may be able to access assistance through the Pastoral Care and Assistance Scheme.

The Diocese is committed to responding appropriately to allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct by any church worker. Persons making allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct are entitled to a compassionate and timely response. The Pastoral Care and Assistance Scheme is designed to enable those who have suffered abuse in the church context to receive appropriate pastoral care and financial assistance.

Further information is provided in the [Pastoral Care and Assistance Scheme booklets](#) available from the Professional Standards Unit (<https://safeministry.org.au>). Alternatively, the person may contact the Anglican Abuse Report Line (1800 774 945).



## 13. Key documents

### Safe Ministry Blueprint documents

- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for Churches*
- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for the Head of Youth Ministry*
- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for Youth Ministry Leaders*
- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for the Head of Children's Ministry*
- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for Children's Ministry Leaders*
- *Safe Ministry Blueprint for Parents and Church Members*

These documents are accessible from <https://safeministry.org.au/blueprints/>

### Faithfulness in Service, 2017

This document is accessible from <https://safeministry.org.au/faithfulness-in-service-code-of-conduct/>

Other helpful resources and information can be found in the following locations:

- <https://safeministry.org.au/resource-docs/>
- <https://safeministry.org.au/pastoral-care-and-assistance-scheme/>
- <https://safeministry.org.au/safety-plans/>
- <https://safeministry.org.au/safe-ministry-representatives/>
- <https://safeministry.org.au/safe-ministry-check-information/>
- <https://safeministry.org.au/safe-ministry-training/>

## 14. Contact details

### **Professional Standards Unit**

Website: <https://safeministry.org.au>

### **Director of the Professional Standards Unit**

Phone: (02) 9265 1514

Email: [psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au)

### **Anglican Abuse Report Line**

Phone: 1800 774 945

Email: [abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au)