



Safe Ministry Blueprint For Youth Ministry Leaders

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

Safe Ministry Blueprints

Office of the Director of Safe Ministry Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

Introduction

Ministry to young people is vibrant and exciting work, and also greatly significant to the life of the church. Teaching youth about Jesus is kingdom work. It is a service to the young people, the church family, and to God himself that offers great opportunities, but also carries significant responsibilities for the wellbeing of the children and young people in our care. If we as a church take the teaching and leadership of children and young people 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 leaders involved in youth ministry, whether paid or unpaid. This includes youth group leaders, youth camp leaders etc.

For the purposes of this booklet, youth ministry refers to ministry to high school students, or otherwise teenagers under the age of 18. There is a separate booklet for leaders engaged in ministry to children up to and including Year 6.

References to children in this document are references to anyone under the age of 18 (unless otherwise indicated).

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This document was prepared in 2015 by the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry for the Safe Ministry Board with assistance from Anglican Youthworks. It was updated in 2021 and 2022 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 young people

Young people have rights

Young people 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 young-person specific.

Leaders are responsible

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

Abuse is power misused

Leaders have authority over young people 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 Youth Ministry Leader

It is your role to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of the young people in your care:

- ensuring that you satisfy the screening and training requirements; and
- complying with the Code of Conduct and guidelines 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.

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/resource-docs/>),
- 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/faithfulness-in-service-code-of-conduct/>).

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, youth group leaders, crèche helpers, SRE teachers etc.

Safe Ministry training became the responsibility of the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry 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 *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.

4. 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>.

5. Code of Conduct for Youth 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 youth ministry

A youth 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.

Those at greatest risk of child abuse in ministry are undoubtedly teenagers. This is because youth ministry more easily allows for the possibility of one-to-one unsupervised contact. This is why there should always be more than one adult leader present and efforts made to limit the opportunity for any leader to engage in one-to-one activity with a child away from the

presence of other adults.

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.

6. Guidelines for Youth Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for youth 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 youth, as well the issue of meeting up with children or youth 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 and youth ministry events.

Never Alone

Leaders should not be alone with a child or young person 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 and youth ministry should not be allowed access to children and youth.

a. Physical safety of young people

One of the ways that we can protect young people 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:

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?

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?
- Is the heating safe to use near children
- 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 events with youth would be 1:10 (one leader for every 10 youth) 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 the Year 7 and 8 youth off-site to do indoor rock climbing, it would be appropriate to reduce the ratio to 1:6 (one leader for every 6 youth). This is to account for the high-risk nature of the activity and the fact that it is off-site.

c. Appropriateness of activities

Leaders should thoughtfully consider what message young people 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 youth being harmed, leaders should give careful consideration to any activities or games that require young people to act alone or in pairs independent of leaders.

Leaders are to review in their entirety any DVDs, YouTube clips, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics that they intend to show to young people. For youth, leaders should make sure that any elements containing violence, sexual activity, nudity, drug use, coarse language or questionable lifestyle are appropriate for the intended audience. Care is to be exercised if a TV show, film or computer game has been recommended by the Office of Film and Literature Classification as unsuitable for youth of a particular age (e.g. PG, M or MA classifications). MA rated material will rarely be suitable, and material rated M may or may not be suitable with parental consent. If in doubt, seek the advice of a supervisor or colleague.

d. Parental consent

Young people 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 youth attending children's and youth 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/resource-docs>

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

When events involve 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

Communication via mail, e.g., birthday cards or letters of encouragement, is acceptable when done with parental knowledge. However, for most young people in our society today, electronic communications are a part of daily life and a key way of engaging socially. New social media platforms and apps are being developed every day, and no one policy can hope to keep up with the ever-changing landscape. Rather than attempting to create a comprehensive policy for use in parishes, there are 10 key principles to guide leaders in their communication with young people.

TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

1. ABOVE REPROACH

Communications should always be above reproach, both in terms of the content and the way it is communicated. Leaders should ask themselves: if this communication were to be made known to all of church, would they consider it to be appropriate? Leaders ought to be sensitive to the impact of the words and images used, to avoid offence or miscommunication. They must never use flirtatious, sexually suggestive, explicit or offensive language or images. Leaders ought also to be conscious of how things might look. They should be careful that the circumstances of their communication do not suggest that their relationship with a young person is inappropriate by, for example, communicating regularly or late at night. Even if a leader's motives are pure, misunderstandings can arise.

2. IN PERSON IS BEST

Face-to-face interactions are the best way to build relationships with youth. Leaders should not use electronic communications for matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged or that require a back-and-forth conversation. In those cases, it's much better to have a conversation in person. If a young person initiates a pastoral conversation with a leader using electronic communications, the leader should ask if they can talk about it with the young person the next time they see them.

3. BE TRANSPARENT

Be aware that those who wish to abuse young people may try to cultivate secretive or exclusive relationships through electronic communications. That is why it is so important for leaders to be transparent in all communications. Leaders should aim to keep communications public and brief. Long or intense conversations by electronic means should be avoided. If a young person initiates a conversation like that, leaders should consider how to redirect it to a more transparent forum or include other people in the conversation. That might mean talking face to face or including another leader in the communication with the young person's permission. At the very least, the leader should let their ministry leader know so that nothing is going on in secret. Leaders should also keep any emails, text messages or conversation threads with youth, in case an accusation is ever made or a misunderstanding arises.

4. DON'T INITIATE SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDSHIPS

There is a power imbalance that exists between leaders and the youth they are ministering to. That power imbalance might make it difficult for a young person to say 'no'

TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

when a leader initiates a friendship on social media by, for example, sending a Facebook friend request or following them on Instagram. For that reason, it is best for a leader not to initiate, though a leader might choose to accept if the young person initiates a friendship.

5. SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Wherever possible, leaders should communicate electronically with groups rather than individuals. The best practice when sending emails or text messages is to include multiple youth or another leader in the message. When using social media for ministry purposes, closed groups should be used where possible (for example, Facebook) and youth should be directed to the group rather than to a leader's individual account if possible.

6. BUILD UP THE CHURCH

When posting on social media, leaders should think carefully about the impact of what is being communicated on the entire church community (including children, youth and the vulnerable). It is important to remember that leaders are often seen as representing the church. Leaders ought to consider how they can build up the church community, and avoid being divisive, showing favouritism or making others feel excluded or inferior.

7. RESPECT OTHERS

Leaders should be careful to observe confidentiality and privacy in electronic communications, for example, not publishing the names, contact details or other personal information of people online.

8. BE TRUTHFUL

A leader should never hide their identity or pretend to be someone else. Electronic communications that seek to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else should not be used in ministry in any circumstances.

9. KNOW THE DIGITAL TERRAIN

When using social media, leaders should be aware of and comply with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to using it in ministry.

10. REPORTING ONLINE ABUSE

TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Laws regarding mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children and youth apply equally to the digital world.

AND FINALLY, USE COMMON SENSE!

There may be exceptional circumstances that arise from time to time, and common sense might dictate that a leader deviates from their usual practice when it comes to electronic communications. In those situations, leaders must be transparent and above reproach and, where possible, should seek advice from their ministry leader.

Recommendations about the sort of contact that is likely to be appropriate at different ages:

Type of contact	Years 7–9 Students	Years 10–12 Students
Phone calls	To be avoided. Preferable to speak with the parent first and ask permission to speak with the young person.	Reasonable phone contact for ministry purposes permissible. Long conversations to be avoided.
Text messages	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
Email	For logistical purposes and encouragement	For logistical purposes and encouragement
Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, etc)	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
Video calls/ conferencing	Only with parental knowledge and in a group setting not one to one.	Inform parents (where possible) and only meet online 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.

Maximise transparency

- Only communicate with children online at the regularly programmed times e.g. Friday night youth group.
- Let parents and carers know when and how you will be interacting online with their children and what rules are in place. Ensure parents are fully informed for high school 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.

Social Media

- Youth group members, their friends and parents should be directed to the **church or youth group's official social media account** (not the individual leader's personal account).
- The official account should be administered by two or more leaders, ideally at least one of each gender, to ensure greater transparency in communication and to moderate the content.
- Do not use social media platforms in leader to youth interactions that delete posts, messages, images or comments or that allow for anonymity.

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, youth 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.

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

j. Photographs and videos

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

Do not photograph any young person who has asked not to be photographed.

Photos of youth 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 youth online. Privacy is of utmost importance and care should be taken to protect young people 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 Years 7-9

It is not appropriate for a youth leader to meet socially with youth in Years 7-9 without written or verbal permission from parents and without discussing it with the Head of the Youth Ministry (or ministry supervisor). This type of meeting is best done in groups rather than one-to-one, and should be with youth of the same gender.

Guidelines for ministering to Years 10-12

Leaders may choose to meet casually with mixed groups of youth in Years 10-12 or in one-to-one meetings with members of the same gender. Any meetings should be in a public place and parents and the supervisor of the ministry should be aware of this contact outside of programmed events, including the location, duration and reason for the meeting. If a leader is proposing to do this, they must obtain parental permission and discuss it with the Head of Youth Ministry (or ministry supervisor) first.

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>.

7. Age-specific guidelines for ministering to youth

In addition to the general principles and guidelines set out in 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:

- Camping
- Youth Group
- Offsite activities

8. 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 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 Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (ODSM).

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 ODSM 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 ODSM who will deal with the NSW OCG on behalf of the head of the religious body and conduct an investigation when required.

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

Contact the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry 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.

10. 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 Office of the Director of Safe Ministry 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 Office of the Director of Safe Ministry 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 Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (ODSM), the ODSM 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 ODSM.

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 Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (<https://safeministry.org.au>). Alternatively, the person may contact the Anglican Abuse Report Line (1800 774 945).

11. 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, 2022

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/>

12. Contact details

Office of the Director of Safe Ministry

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

Director of Safe Ministry

Phone: (02) 9265 1514

Email: admin@safeministry.org.au

Anglican Abuse Report Line

Phone: 1800 774 945

Email: abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au

Feedback

Our aim is to support parishes and church workers to provide care and protection for everyone by building a culture of safe ministry.

Any feedback to help us review and improve is welcome. Please email your feedback to the address below

feedback@safeministry.org.au