



**VOYAGE CHURCH**  
WEB: [VOYAGE.CHURCH](http://VOYAGE.CHURCH)  
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# Safe Ministry Blueprint for Voyage Overall

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

## **Safe Ministry Blueprints**

*Used by Permission Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney*



## Introduction

Ministry to children and young people is vibrant and exciting work, and also greatly significant to the life of the church. Teaching children and youth about Jesus is kingdom work. It is a service to the children and youth, 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.

Voyage 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 of the wider church. This policy has been developed so that as far as possible, such crimes will not be committed in the context of Voyage church ministries.

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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## Chapter 1: Requirements



### 1.1 Responsibilities of the Lead Pastors

The lead pastors are ultimately responsible for making sure ministry conducted throughout the church is safe for children and young people. In order to faithfully execute their responsibilities with regard to safe ministry the lead pastors need to:

- a. **COMPLETE TRAINING** – The Lead Pastors must complete Safe Ministry training at the required intervals.

They must have satisfactorily completed Safe Ministry training within the last three years before beginning their work, or within three months of their commencing. They must complete the training every three years while they continue in that role.

- b. **IMPLEMENT and APPOINT** – The Lead Pastors must implement the Safe Ministry Policy and appoint a Safe Ministry Representative.

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*The Safe Ministry Policy states:*

*Voyage is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within its own community. To ensure the safety of children and vulnerable people in our communities, Voyage will –*

- *Carefully recruit and train church workers,*
- *Adopt and encourage safe ministry practices by its church workers,*
- *Respond promptly to each concern raised about the behaviour of its church workers*
- *Offer pastoral support to any person who has suffered abuse, and*
- *Provide supervision of and pastoral accountability (within the context of the ministries) to any person who is a member of Voyage and who is known to have abused a child or another vulnerable person.*

- c. **COMPLY** – The Lead Pastor/s must make sure Voyage complies with its obligations under the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* (NSW), namely, the NSW Working With Children Check requirements. The Safe Ministry Representative's job is to assist the Lead Pastors with implementing that compliance.



- d. **MEET** – They must meet regularly with the Safe Ministry Representative on at least an annual basis to review the implementation of the safe ministry policies in the church.
- e. **MONITOR** – They (with the Safe Ministry Representative) must monitor all basic health and safety issues in order to avoid obvious hazards on rented church property, particularly in rooms used by infants, pre-schoolers and primary age children.
- f. **REPORT** – Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, the lead pastor/s must report their suspicions to the appropriate authorities.

## 1.2 The Safe Ministry Representative

The Lead Pastors are required to appoint a Safe Ministry Representative. Although the ultimate responsibility for safe ministry lies with the Lead Pastors, they can delegate the day-to-day work of ensuring compliance with legal and Voyage church requirements to the Safe Ministry Representative.

### a. Appointment of the Safe Ministry Representative

A Safe Ministry Representative must:

- be 21 years or older,
- have completed Safe Ministry training within the last three years or within three months after their appointment (and every three years after that),
- hold a Working With Children Check clearance which has been verified with the Office of the Children's Guardian,
- have an email account (for administrative purposes),
- have good administrative skills, and
- be capable of maintaining a computer spreadsheet.

He or she must not be bankrupt or mentally ill, or otherwise incapable of acting in the capacity of Safe Ministry Representative.



An added help is if the Safe Ministry Representative has professional training or expertise in child protection issues (such as a teacher, children's worker, youth worker or a person with behavioural or social sciences qualifications and experience). And, it helps if the Representative is not a member of the staff or related to a member of the staff. Otherwise, a church member might feel uncomfortable speaking to the Safe Ministry Representative about concerns regarding a staff member. These are desirable, rather than required, things.

Upon the appointment of a Safe Ministry Representative, Voyage will promptly notify the church community via email, website and noticeboard. More information can be found at [www.voyage.church](http://www.voyage.church)

## b. The period of appointment

A Safe Ministry Representative holds their position for the period (if any) specified by the Lead Pastor/s in writing at the time of their appointment, until a successor is appointed or until they resign (whichever comes earlier).

The Lead Pastors may revoke the appointment of the Safe Ministry Representative as they think fit, and may appoint someone else to the role.

Where a Safe Ministry Representative has not, without just cause, satisfactorily completed Safe Ministry training within the last three years or within three months after their appointment, their appointment is revoked.

Where a Safe Ministry Representative ceases to hold a WWCC clearance or holds a clearance that becomes subject to an interim bar, their appointment is revoked.

## c. Duties of the Safe Ministry Representative

The responsibilities of the Safe Ministry Representative are to:

- i. **ASSIST THE LEAD PASTORS** to comply with the child protection screening requirements,
- ii. **KEEP RECORDS** of Working With Children Checks and Safe Ministry training,
- iii. **MONITOR AND REPORT** on safe ministry systems and practices for Voyage, and
- iv. **REPORT ANY ABUSE.**



## i. ASSIST THE LEAD PASTORS

The Lead Pastor is responsible for making sure that Voyage obeys the law in terms of NSW Working With Children Check (WWCC) requirements. The Safe Ministry Representative's role is to assist the Lead Pastor in carrying this out. The legal requirements are outlined further below.

## ii. KEEP RECORDS

The Safe Ministry Representative must keep records of all WWCC clearances and Safe Ministry training that has been completed by people engaged in child-related work in Voyage.

For every person in child-related work, the Safe Ministry Representative must keep the following records in a secure location (with a backup copy):

Personal details	Full name	John William Smith
	Date of birth	20/09/1989
	Ministry position	Youth group leader
Working with Children Check	WWCC number	WWC000XXE
	Start date in ministry position	04/02/2013
	Verification date	14/10/2014
	Verification outcome	Cleared
	Expiry date*	01/09/2019
	Paid or volunteer work	Volunteer
Safe Ministry Training	Date Safe Ministry Training or Refresher completed (keep all dates)	10/03/2013
	Date Refresher required*	10/03/2016
	Location of training	On line

*\* It is essential that the Safe Ministry Representative establish a reliable procedure to remind themselves of impending expiry dates of WWCC clearances and the dates that Refresher training is required so that they can follow up on those matters with the leaders.*

A template for record-keeping can be found at [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.safeministry.org.au).



### **iii. MONITOR AND REPORT**

The Safe Ministry Representative must monitor and report on safe ministry systems and practices in Voyage.

#### **MONITOR**

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.

Along with the Lead Pastor/s, the Safe Ministry Representative must monitor all basic health and safety issues in order to avoid obvious hazards on rented or owned church property, particularly in rooms used by infants, pre-schoolers and primary age children.

#### **PROVIDE AN ANNUAL REPORT**

The Safe Ministry Representative is to provide an annual report to the Lead Pastors that addresses current safe ministry policies and practices, and any suggested changes to improve the current practices. The aim of this is to ensure the safety of all children involved in the activities of Voyage. A template report can be found at [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.safeministry.org.au).

### **iv. REPORT ANY ABUSE**

The Safe Ministry Representative must ensure that any child abuse that they become aware of is reported to the relevant authorities. The Safe Ministry Representative 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 told them that they are being abused.



## 1.3 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 Voyage Safe Ministry Plan.

### 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. Voyage must verify the WWCC number with the 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 Lead Pastors, although this task can be delegated to the Safe Ministry Representative.

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 Voyage who has had not undergone a WWCC, but has a record that would have resulted in a bar had the WWCC been undertaken.





## b. Voyage Safe Ministry Plan requirements

A person who wishes to volunteer or work in a children's ministry position must actually:

- Obtain a WWCC clearance that must then be verified by Voyage,
- Make a formal application for the children's ministry position, providing references,
- Undertake Safe Ministry Training within 3 months of starting the children's ministry position, followed by a refresher course every three years, and
- Read, understand, and comply with the relevant Safe Ministry Blue Print and Pledge (Blueprints available at [www.voyage.church/child-protection](http://www.voyage.church/child-protection))

In addition, it is recommended that all volunteers are a member of Voyage for at least 6 months before entering into a children's ministry position. This provides time for a person's character and suitability for a children's ministry position to be observed.

A **children's ministry position** means any paid or unpaid position to which a person is appointed by or on behalf of the Lead Pastors or Heads of Children and Youth Ministry's that involves activities primarily related to, and physical or face-to-face contact with, children.

Because a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, a children's ministry position includes youth ministry roles. Examples of children's ministry positions include crèche leaders, Sunday School leaders and youth group leaders.

The Lead Pastor/s has the ultimate responsibility for appointing people to children's ministry positions, even though in practice that responsibility is often delegated to other leaders.

The screening and training requirements vary for particular ministry roles and circumstances, and depend on the different levels of risk. The following table sets out the requirements for screening and training for different ministry positions.



## People Matrix

ROLES	APPLICATION & ROLE DESCRIPTION	RECRUITMENT CHECK	WWCC	SAFE MINISTRY TRAINING	BLUE PRINT [CODE OF CONDUCT & POLICY]	PLEDGE	WHS INDUCTION
Lead Pastors	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Lead Pastors & Overall	✓	✓
Safe Ministry Representative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Safe Ministry Rep & Overall	✓	✓
Regular Preacher &/or Pastoral Care Leader	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
V Group Leader	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Youth & Children's Ministry church worker	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Youth Ministry Leaders	✓	✓
Youth & Children's Ministry church worker under 18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Youth Ministry Leaders	✓	✓
Youth/Children's Ministry Visiting speaker or performer for a one-off occasion in the presence of other adults.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ X	✓	✓
Youth/Children's Ministry serving food, building caretakers, cleaners, office & admin.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Children Play Area pack in & pack out of equipment only, no supervision	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Sunday Team Leader	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Musicians & Singers with no regular team members under the age of 18.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Musicians & Singers with regular team members under 18yrs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Sound & Slides with regular team members under 18yrs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
General Volunteer: pack in, Welcome, Host, Kitchen, Admin.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Social & Multimedia & Web	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓
Trust (Finance)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ Parents & Church Members	✓	✓

NOTE: Information used with permission from the Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney.  
 Modifications have been made to suit Voyage structures.



The Safe Ministry Representative must keep records for each leader with details of WWCC clearances and the completion of Safe Ministry training. He or she must also ensure that people are followed up when the time for their renewal is approaching. Unless the requirements are met and continue to be met, a person should not be permitted to continue in children's or youth ministry.

## c. 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 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"** generally means work involving activities primarily related to children (including - in the case of religious bodies - youth groups, youth camps, teaching children and child care) that involve physical or face-to-face contact with children. However the general meaning is subject to a number of exemptions (including workers who are under 18 years of age) and extensions (including the Lead Pastor/s, assistant pastor/s and leaders as they are deemed to be undertaking child-related work where there are children).

If the contact with children is not direct or face-to-face, or the role does not primarily relate to children it will not be child-related work (such as serving morning tea to children after Sunday School).

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

- Hold a Working With Childrens Check clearance that has been verified with the Office of the Children's Guardian and is not subject to a bar,
- Have a current Working With Childrens Check application before the Office of the Children's Guardian, or
- Be subject to an exemption.



## When must a person apply for a WWCC?

A person must apply for a WWCC and receive a clearance, or they must have a current application for a clearance with the Commission and have provided proof of identity *before engaging in any child-related work*.

## What is the process for obtaining a WWCC?

There are two steps in the process:

- (1) The worker** must apply for a WWCC clearance, and
- (2) Voyage** must verify that the worker has a WWCC clearance.

### Step 1: Applying for a clearance

The worker (employee or volunteer) must:

- Fill out an online application at [www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au), or call 02) 9286 7219 if internet access is not available.
- Receive their WWCC application number,
- Take the WWCC application number and proof of their identity to a NSW motor registry. There is no fee for volunteers, but if it is a paid position, an \$80 application fee is payable,
- The applicant will then receive a WWCC clearance or bar by email (or post if there is no email address).

Most application will be process with 24 hours.

### Step 2: Verification of the clearance

Voyage must verify that the worker has a WWCC clearance before engaging the worker in child-related work by:

- logging into their employee account at: [www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au), and,
- entering the following information:
  - the applicant's name,
  - date of birth, and
  - WWCC clearance number or application number.



## What is the result of a WWCC?

There are only two outcomes of a WWCC: a clearance or a bar. A clearance is valid for five years, and cleared applicants will be subject to ongoing monitoring. If an applicant is barred, it is an offence to engage the person in child-related work. If an applicant is barred, the Safe Ministry Representative is to immediately advise the Lead Pastor/s who must stop their involvement in all child-related work.

## What records must be kept?

For each worker in child-related work, Voyage must keep the following records (either electronic or hardcopy):

- Full name,
- Date of birth,
- WWCC number,
- Verification date (the date Voyage verified them),
- Verification outcome (clearance or bar),
- Expiry date (when the WWCC number expires), and
- Status of the worker (paid or volunteer).

## Who is exempt from needing a WWCC?

If a person is in child-related work but qualifies for one of the following exemptions, that person will not need a WWCC:

- (1) Workers in administrative, clerical, maintenance or ancillary roles not ordinarily involving contact with children for extended periods (such as a secretary or grounds-keeper),
- (2) Workers under the age of 18,  
*A person's date of birth should be verified from a reliable source of data, such as a birth certificate. A process should be established to alert the Safe Ministry Representative when the person is approaching their 18th birthday. A WWCC can be obtained once the person reaches 17 years and 9 months,*
- (3) Workers working for not more than a total of five working days in a calendar year if the work involves minimal direct contact with children or is supervised when children are present,  
*It is recommended that churches not rely on this exemption as a matter of course due to the difficulty of keeping accurate records and in demonstrating that the requirements of the exemption have been met,*



- (4) A visiting speaker or performer for a one-off occasion who will be in the presence of one or more adults,
- (5) Short-term emergencies where the engagement of the worker is necessary in the circumstances to prevent an increased risk to the safety of children and the engagement is not for more than five consecutive working days,

*This exemption could be relied upon in a situation where a regular volunteer gives late notice that they are unwell or otherwise unavailable, and it would jeopardise the safety of the children concerned to run the activity without having another leader or leaders present. The church cannot rely on the same person on more than five occasions.*

- (6) A parent or close relative of a child, when they volunteer in connection with an activity of which the child is a member or usually participates. A close relative means a sibling, grandparent, aunt or uncle, niece or nephew (or an equivalent step-relative).

*It is recommended that churches don't rely on this exemption as a matter of course, as the risk of engaging in child abuse is not diminished by a person being a parent or close relative of a child in the group.*

Voyage may find that the administration involved in keeping track of exemptions is more burdensome than adopting a simple policy that every person involved in child-related work must obtain a WWCC.

There is also a risk that the grounds on which a person qualifies for an exemption may change over time. Voyage could end up in a position where someone who is no longer entitled to an exemption is undertaking child-related work without a WWCC.

### **Are WWCC clearances portable?**

WWCC clearances are portable within the period that they are valid. Once a person has obtained a clearance they can quote the WWCC number to other churches or organisations with whom they undertake child-related work. However, each church/organisation will still need to independently verify the WWCC number before engaging the worker in child-related work.

### **What if the applicant is from outside of NSW?**

If the person is from interstate or overseas, Voyage should also consider obtaining a criminal record check from that state or country in addition to the WWCC. Voyage will need the person's permission in order to do so.

Further information regarding Working With Children Checks can be found on the Office of the Children's Guardian website: [www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/Working-with-children/working-with-children-check](http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/Working-with-children/working-with-children-check)



## 1.1 Safe Ministry training

Each and every person involved in a **children's ministry position** must have undertaken Safe Ministry training within the last three years, or within three months after their appointment. The Safe Ministry Refresher must be completed every three years thereafter.

In addition, the Lead Pastor and any assistant minister or leaders of Voyage must have satisfactorily completed Safe Ministry training within the last three years or within three months of commencing in their role and every three years thereafter while their role continues.

Safe Ministry provide a Junior Leaders training for those under the age of 16 however this is not available to churches outside of the Anglican denomination, therefore the adult training is required to be undertaken with the consent of their parent or guardian.

A **children's ministry position** means any paid or unpaid position to which a person is appointed by or on behalf of the Lead Pastor/s or the Leader of that Ministry Department that involves activities primarily related to, and physical or face-to-face contact with, children.

Examples include Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, crèche helpers, etc.

There is no need to insist on completion of Safe Ministry training for every person who helps out in a children's ministry position from time to time. Examples of people who would not ordinarily be expected to undergo training include:

- A teenager who helps the adult leaders of a primary school age children's program for a week in the school holidays as a one-off,
- Casual helpers who assist from time to time and do not fulfil a leadership or teaching role in a children's program, and
- Other volunteers who help out with programs for infants and young children (such as playgroups) but who have no program responsibility or teaching role.

*The table in "1.3 Selection and screening of leaders" gives guidance as to who is required to undertake Safe Ministry training.*

If a person has not, without just cause, completed Safe Ministry training, their appointment is revoked.

Lead Pastors should take into account the following matters in determining whether there is 'just cause' to waive the requirement to have undertaken the training within the specified time frame:

- Difficulties that arise in immediately undertaking the training when a person is first appointed, and
- Temporary delays in undertaking training due to short-term unavailability of training, or personal short-term difficulties in attending training.

As the Lead Pastor is the responsible person, specific decisions to waive Safe Ministry training will ultimately reflect on them.



## Chapter 2: Ministry with children and youth



### 2.1 General principles

#### **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.

**If the Lead Pastor/s become aware that an adult child worker (paid or unpaid) poses a risk of child abuse; by law they must remove that person from the position. Negligently failing to do so is a criminal act with a maximum penalty of 2 years in jail.**





## 2.2 Code of Conduct for Children's and Youth Ministry

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

A children's or youth ministry leader or worker **must**:

- **Never** abuse children or young people, or cultivate a relationship in order to initiate or cloak abuse of children or young people.
- **Never** abuse people especially children, youth, or other vulnerable people nor cultivate relationships in order to initiate or cloak abuse.
- **Report** to the appropriate authorities any behaviour that could be considered abusive.
- **Never** be alone with a child or young person in their ministry role where other adults are not present.
- **Never** have children or young people to their home, or visit children or young people in their home, when no other adult is present, and never meet privately with a child or young person outside of church activities, except with the permission of their parent or guardian.
- **Never** touch children, youth, or other vulnerable people in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender, cultural background, or personal circumstances.
- **Never** physically discipline anyone, especially a child, youth or other vulnerable 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, youth or other vulnerable people that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- **Never** engage in any contact with children, youth, or other vulnerable people that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).
- **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 a child or young person on church property or at church activities without church authorisation and the consent of their parents or guardians.
- **Never** view, possess, produce or distribute restricted material containing sexual acts or nudity without a legitimate purpose; 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 behaviors through a process of grooming. Grooming is often characterized 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 must always be more than one leader/church worker present, and that no opportunities present themselves for a leader/church worker 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 or church worker. **The Lead Pastor/s or the Safe Ministry Representative are to be informed if observations of another leader or church worker is acting in a way that may be contrary to this Code of Conduct.**



## 2.3 Guidelines for Children's and Youth Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for children's and 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 children and 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 must always be two leaders aged 18 years or over present for all children's and youth ministry events.

### **Never Alone**

Leaders must 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 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. Ideally it is preferable to be able to tick all the following boxes.



## **b. Supervision of activities**

### **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 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 preschoolers:**

- ☐ Is the area fenced off or contained in a room?
- ☐ Is there a designated area for strollers that are not in use?

### **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 well-stocked first aid kit at the activity 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 specific person on-site who is trained in first aid?
- ☐ Are all leaders aware of the fire safety and evacuation procedures?



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.

## Ratios

The suggested supervision ratios for low risk on-site events would be: crèche and preschoolers 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.

The suggested supervision ratio 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 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). Similarly, 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.

**Please note that a junior leader (under the age of 16) 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, youtube 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.

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 (eg, 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.

#### **d. Parental consent**

Children and youth 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. 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 and youth attending children's and youth ministry activities.

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 [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.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 vehicle and other forms of transport used are registered, insured, safe and fitted with age appropriate child restraints or safety device (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**

### **Guidelines for those ministering to children (primary school age and below)**

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.

### **Guidelines for those ministering to youth (high school age)**

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, there are 10 key principles to guide leaders and church workers in their communication with young people.

## **THE TEN**

### **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' 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**

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	Primary school Students	Years 7–9 Students	Years 10–12 Students
<b>Phonecalls</b>	Only after speaking to parent then, if the parent gives permission, with the child and only for ministry purposes.	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.
<b>Text messages</b>	X	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Email</b>	X	For logistical purposes and encouragement only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Social networking (Facebook, Instagram, etc)</b>	X	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
<b>Video calls/streaming and chat rooms</b>	X	Never	Never



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## **i. Photographs and videos**

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

Do not photograph any child or youth who has asked not to be photographed. Photos of children and youth should focus on small groups rather than individuals:

- Do not identify in writing the people in the photograph, eg tagging on Facebook.
- All children must be appropriately dressed when photographed (eg, 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 and youth online. Privacy is of utmost importance and care should be taken to protect children and youth 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 is 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.

## **j. 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.

### **Guidelines for ministering to Years 7-9**

It is never appropriate for a youth leader to meet socially with youth in Years 7-9 without written or verbal permission from parents and 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.



## 2.4 Age-specific guidelines for ministering to children

### a. Creche (0-2 years)

#### Health and Safety

Children should never leave the crèche area unless accompanied by the adult responsible for them. Be aware of issues of hygiene. If a child vomits or soils an area of the crèche, that area should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible. Toys and equipment should be cleaned regularly. Ensure that no furniture or other items could topple or drop onto a child.

#### Parents

Where parents are readily accessible, they should be asked to change nappies and undertake toileting. If parents are not available, experienced female leaders should carry out these tasks, but always with another child or leader present.

#### Physical Contact

Very young children are highly dependent on touch for their proper development. This means that in dealing with them, we must be very aware of their needs at particular ages and stages. Physical contact is primarily for the purpose of assisting or comforting a child for a short period of time. Leaders should not continue physical contact for longer than necessary to achieve this purpose. All physical contact should be in the open and able to be seen by others, for example, sitting on a leader's lap to be comforted should occur in view of others.

Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- Hand-holding to reassure or to guide,
- Offering open hugs (placing one arm around the child's shoulders) to welcome or comfort a child,
- Short periods of carrying, sitting on one's lap, rocking, rubbing or patting backs to comfort a child who is distressed,
- Sitting on one's lap to check discomfort or ill health,
- Sitting beside a leader to read a book,
- Necessary touching of genital areas while changing a nappy, and
- Appropriate touch to administer first aid or assist with personal hygiene, for example, changing clothes or blowing noses.

Inappropriate physical conduct for this age includes:

- Hitting or shaking
- Forceful grabbing or picking up, and
- Unnecessary touching of the genital areas.



## **b. Preschoolers (3-5 years)**

### **Health and Safety**

Parents & Guardians should observe their children at all times. Children should never leave the preschool area unless accompanied by the adult responsible for them.

Children of this age are generally toilet-trained and their parent or guardian should assist. If parents or guardians are not available, a leader/church worker should accompany a child to the toilet with another leader/church worker or child, but should assist the child only where necessary.

### **Physical Contact**

Except in circumstances of physical danger or medical emergency, children have the right to refuse touch. In general, physical contact should be initiated by the child or occur with their permission.

Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- open hug (with space between you) with the child's permission,
- placing arm around shoulder and giving a gentle squeeze from the side,
- patting backs,
- hand-holding to reassure or guide,
- sitting beside a leader to read a book,
- sitting on a female leader's lap to check discomfort or ill health,
- carrying for a short period to reassure if hurt or facilitate separation from a parent (providing the child wants to be held), and
- holding firmly across the upper arm to restrain or prevent injury.

Inappropriate physical contact includes:

- hitting or shaking,
- forceful grabbing or picking up,
- kissing or coaxing a child to kiss you,
- extended hugging or tickling, and
- touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimming costume.



## **c. Infants and primary age children (6-12 years)**

### **Health and Safety**

Procedures for the conclusion of the program must be clearly thought out and communicated to parents. Infants will generally need to be collected by parents. Will primary-aged children be dismissed or will they need to be supervised until parents collect them?

If Sunday School is held off-site, there should be clear guidelines and procedures to follow. The following issues need to be thought through:

- Are children taken there by parents or leaders?
- How are children collected?
- How is communication maintained between off-site groups and the main congregation?

### **Parents**

Parents should be kept informed of details of the ministry, including the names of leaders, current and future curriculum, and upcoming special events, etc.

Be considerate of parents by being careful about children's clothing, eg, wearing paint shirts when painting and avoiding extra rough games.

### **Physical Contact**

Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- Open hug (with space between you) with the child's permission or placing arm around shoulder and giving a gentle squeeze from the side,
- High fives, and
- Holding firmly across the upper arms to restrain or prevent injury.

Inappropriate physical conduct for this age includes:

- hitting or shaking,
- forceful grabbing,
- kissing or coaxing a child to kiss you,
- extended hugging or tickling,
- touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimming costume, and
- sitting children on a leader's lap.

## Chapter 3: Reporting abuse



### 3.1 Reporting child abuse

Any adult who suspects, on reasonable grounds, that a child or young person is at risk of neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse must report it to the relevant authorities.

It is an offence for an adult who knows; believes; or reasonably ought to know that a child abuse offence has been committed but conceals such abuse by failing to report it. The penalty for this offence is 2-5 years in jail depending on the seriousness of the abuse concealed.

Any child abuse that an adult 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 told them they are being abused.

Under NSW law, **all adults** have a legal obligation to report, as soon as practicable, to the relevant authorities the name of a child if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the child is at risk of significant harm.

Church workers or congregational members may prefer to report such matters to the Lead Pastor/s or Safe Ministry Representative to report on their behalf without fear that they will be prosecuted for failure to report the matter directly. In this case, giving the Lead Pastor or Safe Ministry Representative not just verbal details but in writing where possible so that an accurate report can be made.

It may be advisable, however, for such persons to follow up with those to whom they reported, to ensure that the matter has in fact been reported to the appropriate authority. If there is doubt or concern about how or whether it was reported, they should report it themselves.

The Act gives exemptions for not reporting with examples such as:

- the person believes on reasonable grounds that the matter is already known to the police or,
- the person has reported, or reasonably believes that the information has been reported by someone else, under:
  - *The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*; or the
  - *Ombudsman Act 1974*; or
- the person has reasonable grounds to fear for the safety of any person other than the offender if it was reported to police, or
- the information was obtained by a person when they were under 18 years of age, or
- the alleged victim was an adult at the time the information was obtained by the person and the person believes on reasonable grounds that the alleged victim does not want the information reported to police.



## **A Child 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’s or young person’s basic physical or psychological needs are not being met 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,  
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,
- c) the child or young person has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated,
- d) 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,
- e) 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,
- f) 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.

Note. Physical or sexual abuse may include an assault and can exist despite the fact that consent has been given.





**If a child discloses abuse or if abuse is observed/suspected or if a person has been informed of their concerns from another person regarding a child, that person should:**

- listen to their story,
- comfort the child if they are distressed,
- let the child know they're 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 or what was observed including such details as:**

- who made the disclosure,
- date, time and place,
- what was said by the person to whom the disclosure was made,
- what the child said, and
- any grounds for forming the belief that abuse has occurred.

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 could be subpoenaed in court proceedings.

There is a sample reporting form available at [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.safeministry.org.au).



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

## REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND DISCLOSURES

Issue or Concern	Report to:
General Suspicions	<b>Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b>
Child or young person currently at risk of significant harm	<p><b>FaCS (Family and Community Services)</b> If possible discuss with your Head Ministry Leader or Safe Ministry Representative first and use the Mandatory Reporters Guide <a href="https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg">https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg</a></p> <p><b>Police</b> Contact the police first if the situation requires emergency assistance.</p> <p><b>Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b> Where the alleged perpetrator is a church worker, congregational member or church attender.</p>
Knowledge of relevant criminal offences regarding a church worker, congregational member or church attender.	<p><b>Police</b></p> <p><b>Safe Ministry Representative** or Lead Pastor/s*</b></p>
Child abuse by a church worker, congregational member or church attender.	<p><b>Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b></p> <p><b>Police</b></p>

Contact the Safe Ministry Representative if you are unsure of what to do in any circumstance or where an allegation is regarding a Lead Pastor.

- *\*Do not report to the Lead Pastor if the allegation is regarding the Lead Pastor*
- *\*\*Do not report to the Safe Ministry Representative (SMR) if the allegation is regarding the SMR*

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.



## REPORTING SUSPECTED ADULT ABUSE AND DISCLOSURES

Anyone who suspects that a church worker, congregational member, or church attendee is engaging in sexual misconduct, abusive behaviour towards another adult or conduct that constitutes a serious breach of the Voyage Safe Ministry Blueprints and Training should report it to the appropriate authorities. Similarly, any criminal conduct or threat of harm should also be reported.

Issue or Concern	Report to:
Sexual abuse of an adult by a church worker, congregational member or church attendee.	<b>Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative** Police</b>
Other abusive behaviour e.g. physical violence, bullying	<b>Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b> Where the alleged perpetrator is a church worker
Criminal Conduct	<b>Police Safe Ministry Representative**</b>
Threat of harm to self or others	<b>Police, Ambulance, Mental health service (as required) Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b>
Other conduct by a church worker** (refer to the Blueprint which includes the code of conduct)	<b>Ministry Team/Department Leader Lead Pastor* or Safe Ministry Representative**</b>

- *\*Do not report to the Lead Pastor if the allegation is regarding the Lead Pastor*
- *\*\*Do not report to the Safe Ministry Representative (SMR) if the allegation is regarding the SMR*
- *\*\*\*A church worker includes a minister (pastor), any leader or ministry volunteer (eg, V Group Leader, Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, musician, etc.), visiting minister.*

Contact the Safe Ministry Representative if you are unsure of what to do in any circumstance or where an allegation is regarding a Lead Pastor.

### 3.3 Responding to abuse

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## **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 Police or Family and Community Services**

In some cases, a report will lead to an investigation by the Police or Family and Community Services and the matter will be taken out of the hands of the church. In other cases, there may be no action taken by the civil authorities (for example, because the complainant does not want to go through a criminal trial) and Voyage will need to determine its response to the matter. In both cases, legal advice should be consulted on how to proceed.

## **Pastoral care**

A victim of abuse may require immediate specialist counselling or other support in a compassionate and timely response. Victims often need ongoing contact and support and the Lead Pastor/s should ensure that an appropriate person is appointed to follow up with them. Other members of the church may also need specialist support.

If a leader informs the Lead Pastor or Safe Ministry Representative that a child has disclosed abuse to them, they should make sure that the above steps are taken. They 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.



## Chapter 4: Guidelines regarding persons of interest (POI).



Voyage is committed to actively ensuring that every person attending the church feels safe. At the same time, generally speaking, all people should be welcome to be a part of the church, including any referred to as persons of interest (POI). A POI is a person who has been convicted, accused, is reasonably suspected of or has admitted to child abuse or sexual offences.

While considering how to balance these two concerns, any church entity must have as its priority the protection of children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. POIs also need protection from the opportunity to commit offences and from false allegations.

POIs may take some time to fully realise the implications of their actions. If hasty assurance of restoration is offered before such realisation, there is the risk that proper boundaries will not be set around the POI. This can leave the POI without accountability or protection from himself or herself. The consequences of an offence, the potential for ongoing risk and future offence must be borne in mind together with the need to give an all-encompassing protection to church members.

Given the priority of the protection of children and other vulnerable persons, it is a necessary safeguard for all to impose restrictions on a person accused or suspected of child abuse, even though that person is innocent until proved guilty. If a level of certainty emerges that any accusation is false, vexatious or misconceived, the restrictions may be lifted. The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, through the Working with Children Checks, will also give guidance and direction on the suitability of a person to work with children if it has the relevant information concerning the allegations or criminal charges.

A person who has been convicted of a child abuse offence or a sexual offence (and indeed any Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 Schedule 2 offence), will automatically be barred from obtaining a Working With Children Check. Those who are unable to obtain a Working With Children Check clearance are prevented by law from being in any child-related position. This is not negotiable; but these persons may still be members of a congregation. Processes must be put in place to ensure that children are protected. These persons must have clear boundaries as to where they can go and what they can do in the church context and they must be supervised and held accountable.

Similarly, persons accused or suspected of child abuse, even if not convicted, need clear boundaries as to where they can go and what they can do in the church context. They too must be supervised and held accountable.



## **The Seven Step Process for Developing a POI Safety Plan**

This Seven Step Process must be undertaken in consultation with the Safe Ministry Representative and Lead Pastor/s, especially when it comes to steps 3, 4 and 5.

### **STEP 1: IDENTIFY POIs - Identifying persons who are potentially a risk**

All sources need to be carefully checked. No action should be based on rumour or innuendo. Inevitably, checking will ultimately require communication with the POI concerned. Upon enquiry being made and subject to the appropriate exercise of confidentiality and transparency, the POI will be informed that this information has been checked.

The sources of information as to who might pose a risk to children and therefore who might need to be supervised and held accountable can come from:

- the person themselves,
- friends or relatives of the person,
- a victim or a person who makes an allegation,
- friends or relatives of a victim or person who makes an allegation,
- public sources such as newspapers, other media or court reports,
- police, parole boards, community services or department of corrective services,
- private information from third parties,
- records kept by Voyage
- previous churches or “employers” of the offender or suspect,
- predecessor lead pastor/s, pastors, leaders, church workers or other members of staff.

### **STEP 2: BE PROACTIVE - Authority for dealing with cases where a risk is identified**

The Lead Pastors may remove POI's who hold a leadership or church worker role only after due process and for specified and proved causes as they have the power to appoint and remove all pastors, leaders and office- holders in the congregation.



Effectively the Lead Pastors are responsible, in consultation with Safe Ministry Representative for ensuring that POIs are supervised and held accountable. They must keep their eyes and ears open for any POIs. They must take responsibility for ensuring that enquiries are made with other sources if they have a concern.

### **STEP 3: ASSESS RISK - The unacceptable risk test**

No-one should be permitted to work with children and young people if there is an unacceptable risk that children may be abused.

As previously noted, people convicted of sex offences against children are prohibited by law from working with children. There will ordinarily be an unacceptable risk in other circumstances where, in relation to child sexual abuse or criminal sexual misconduct, there is a criminal charge which has yet to be dealt with, an accusation, allegation or complaint currently under consideration or an admission by the person concerned.

The situation is more difficult when there have merely been allegations in the past which have not been resolved, including situations where charges have been dropped or a person acquitted. Allegations of physical or emotional abuse of children in the past also need to be evaluated with awareness of the context. The assessment of risk in such a case will depend upon an evaluation of the seriousness of the allegation, the source of the allegation, the level of investigation of the allegation and what is known about how the complaint was resolved. Where there has been more than one unrelated complaint, there is reason for extra caution.

The Lead Pastors and Safe Ministry Representative should always be consulted before anyone about whom concerns have been raised is allowed to volunteer to help in a ministry involving children or youth. If there is conflict about whether the person should be involved in ministry with children and young people, then a determination about whether there is an unacceptable risk should be made by qualified persons from outside of Voyage.



Any such risk assessment may take into consideration a number of factors:

- whether there has been a finding about an allegation of abuse,
- the nature of any position (including non-child related position) in which the POI might be employed or engaged,
- the type of contact that any position has with children,
- the supervision which will be available,
- the nature and frequency of the event or events from which the report arose,
- whether there have been any other allegations or concerns about the person's conduct in relation to children,
- the circumstances in which an Apprehended Violence Order (where the protected person was a child) was taken out,
- requirement and conditions laid down in bail or parole orders,
- presence of victims in the congregation and the effect that the presence of the POI may have on those victims including the possibility that the POI needs to be asked to attend a different church,
- the level of understanding and willingness of the POI to cooperate regarding the requirement for the church to protect children and other vulnerable people, and
- any additional information which may be relevant in assessing risk.

A person who has either admitted to, or been found to have perpetrated, sexual abuse need not remain forever under a cloud in the ordinary life of the church. However, someone who is repentant for what they have done in the past will understand the need for child protection measures. There are many other ways in which someone can volunteer in the life of the church other than by working with children and young people.

## **STEP 4: SET BOUNDARIES**

A common characteristic of POIs is their failure to understand why their movements or activities in a church context should in any way be constrained. They will often minimize their past and be overly optimistic about their future. It is important to work with them pastorally to encourage them to see the mutual benefit in keeping them away from contact or potential contact with children. Children will be safe. Parents and the congregation will have confidence that children are protected. The POI will be protected from any opportunity to offend and the possibility of false allegations.





If a POI represents an unacceptable risk to the safety of children, he or she must not be involved in any positions of leadership or authority. He or she must not participate in any “up-front” activity including, but not limited to, greeting visitors at the door, taking up the collection, reading lessons or leading prayers. To allow such activity can suggest apparent endorsement which might be used by the POI to the disadvantage of children or other vulnerable persons. Any variation to this would only be after a lengthy period of treatment and upon advice from the treating practitioner, confirmed by appropriate professional advisors and the Voyage insurer if necessary.

The setting of boundaries for the POI should include a clear written statement of:

- Which services and activities he or she may and may not attend. In extreme cases of high risk, consideration should be given to complete exclusion from church activities altogether.
- The building and rooms into which the POI may go.
- The times the POI can be on church premises,
- Who the POI may associate with at church, and
- The supervision and accountability which has been put in place.

In the case of a POI who is subject to supervision, the Lead Pastor/s should write or cause to be written a clear record of the arrangement that has been agreed, called a Safety Plan. This should be signed and dated by the POI, the Lead Pastor, the Safe Ministry Representative and the mentors, as applicable.

The safety plan should include:

- acknowledgement of past conduct or allegations and consequent risk,
- acknowledgement of the need for others to be informed of the risk such as key leaders or parents if necessary,
- undertaking to participate in treatment,
- definition of boundaries,
- undertaking to abide by boundaries,
- nomination of mentor/s,
- statement (if relevant) as to the relationship between this Safety Plan and any supervision by the Probation and Parole Service,
- agreement to meet regularly with mentors,
- acknowledgment of consequences of failure to comply i.e. exclusion,
- undertaking to notify of attendance at or move to another church,
- permission from the POI for information to be passed on to another church in the case of transfer, and
- willingness to participate in reasonable restorative justice processes or counselling which may aid the healing of victims.

A Safety Plan template is available at [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.safeministry.org.au)

Complete and signed copies of all Safety Plans must be kept on file. Voyage should also consider contacting their insurer to meet their obligations.



In cases where the POI refuses to co-operate but remains a member of a congregation, a letter setting out boundaries, stating the consequences of a breach, identifying mentors and offering support should be provided to the POI in place of a signed Safety Plan. A copy of such a letter may need to be provided to Voyage insurance.

## **STEP 5: SUPERVISE/MENTOR**

There should be at least two persons who undertake the task of being mentors. Whilst the Lead Pastor/s can undertake the task, it is preferable to have other persons involved with the Lead Pastor/s acting as their supervisor.

Mentors need to:

- be recognized as appropriately gifted, experienced and respected,
- understand the nature of offenders
- understand the demanding and onerous nature of the task,
- be prepared and available to meet with the POI at least fortnightly,
- attend church services and activities at the same time as the person,
- be of an appropriate gender in relation to the POI, and,
- report regularly to the Lead Pastor/s on the progress of the POI.

It will be necessary to inform preferably in writing or orally (with notes kept of the interview) key leaders and (if considered necessary) parents of any perceived risk. There should be sufficient information provided so that it is clear what risks are involved. This should be carried out sensitively. Expressions such as “X is considered a risk to children” or “X has agreed to remain away from children” are preferable to “X is a paedophile”. If possible the consent of the POI should be obtained.

Mentors and other pastors and key leaders, should be aware of the boundaries that have been set and agreed upon. There should be a system in place to ensure that the POI is monitored at all times during church services and church activities.

## **STEP 6: REVIEW of supervision and support**

The Lead Pastor/s must ensure that at least every three months one of them meets with the POI being supervised and held accountable, the mentors and key leaders to ensure that the boundaries are being adhered to, the POI is coping and continuing in treatment and to get feedback as to any change in the level of risk.



Where there is a change in the level of risk because of the POI's re-offending or failure to comply with the Safety Plan there needs to be a careful re-evaluation, re-negotiation and variation of the boundaries and, if necessary, the Safety Plan. Any additional risk may constitute a further reasonable suspicion that a child is currently at risk of harm and therefore may require further reporting to Family and Community Services.

## **STEP 7: BE RESPONSIBLE**

Lead Pastors need to be committed to pass full details of the risk on to any other church or congregation to which the POI transfers.

The Police (and only the Police) have the capacity to apply to the Local Court for orders prohibiting certain offenders who pose a risk to the lives or sexual safety of children from engaging in specified conduct (*Child Protection (Offenders Prohibition Orders) Act 2004*).

This process should be considered where arrangements such as those set out above do not work. The Court has to be satisfied that there is reasonable cause to believe, having regard to the nature and pattern of conduct of the person, that the person poses a risk to the lives or sexual safety of one or more children, or children generally, and that the making of the order will reduce that risk. They must consider a number of factors and hear from the person against whom the orders are proposed to be made.



# Emergency Evacuation Procedure

In the case of an emergency evacuation: **STOP**

1. Team Leader calls: **STOP** and blows a whistle
2. Everyone stops and turns to face the Team Leader and **FOLLOWS** the team leader to the designated meeting area away from the building.
3. The last leader is to perform a quick check of the rooms and toilets, calling for anyone to leave the building and assisting anyone leaving the building to the designated meeting area.
4. The team leader is to call **000** emergency service while the other leaders checks everyone is at the designated area.
5. Everyone is to **STAY** at the designate meeting area away from the building until emergency services calls the all clear.



## Chapter 5: Key documents and contact details



### a. Key documents

The following documents are available at <http://www.voyage.church/child-protection>

#### **Voyage Safe Ministry Blueprints For:**

- Voyage Overall
- The Lead Pastor
- Safe Ministry Representative
- Children's Ministry
- Youth Ministry
- Parents and Church Members

#### **Other documents of the Voyage Safe Ministry Plan**

- Role Description
- Application Form
- Safe Ministry Pledge
- Safe Ministry Online Training <https://safeministry.training/>



## b. Contact details

### **Voyage Safe Ministry Representative**

- Phone: 0427 203 477
- Email: [smr@voyage.church](mailto:smr@voyage.church)

### **Family & Community Services and other Crisis Numbers**

- NSW Child Protection Helpline: 132 2111
- Mandatory Reporters Guide: [reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/](http://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/)
- Domestic Violence Line: 1800 656 463
- NSW Elder Abuse Helpline: 1800 628 221
- National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1800 880 052
- Disaster Welfare Services: 1800 018 444
- Mental Health Line NSW: 1800 011 511
- NSW Victims Access Line: 1800 633 063

### **Police**

- **Emergency Assistance: 000**
- Local Police: 6691 0799
- Crime Stoppers: 1800 333 000
- Police Assistance Line: 131 444

### **Other Services**

- Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) for WWCC: 02 9286 7219
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551 880
- Headspace – Youth Mental Health Foundation: 66 521 878  
(45 Little Street, Coffs Harbour)
- Lifeline: 131 114

### **Anglican Safe Ministry Team (Professional Standards Unit)**

- Director: 02 9265 1514
- Request protocol and other documents: 02 9265 1604
- Safe Ministry website: <https://safeministry.org.au>
- Safe Ministry training website: <https://safeministry.training>