



Responding to concerns

PRO-SMO-02

Purpose

This document provides guidance to councils and committees of the church for responding to concerns in relation to ministry with children and conducting subsequent performance improvement processes. This is a process by which they may ensure that, within their jurisdiction, concerns relating to the performance of individuals engaged in ministry with children are handled in a respectful, reasonable manner and are ethical and consistent.

The Church values the contribution of its members and this should be reflected in the way this process is conducted. Central to ministering safely with children, as a community of faith, is our commitment to providing safe environments which are consistent with the Church's vision, mission and ministry with children within the Queensland Synod. We commit to a set of standards which emphasise our collective responsibilities to behave in ways which reflect these standards. The three core elements of the [Safe Ministry with Children policy](#) include:

A Positive Culture: in which individuals are welcome to participate and feel included in ministry and mission and feel confident to raise even small concerns.

Environments: that reduce opportunities for abuse - physical, social, spiritual and emotional – to provide environments that are safe.

Systems: policies, processes and tools which are robust and accessible.

For those working in children's ministry, participation is conditional on adhering to the code of conduct. This code sets out the boundaries of appropriate and acceptable behaviour. Regardless of position, all individuals are required to maintain safety by behaving appropriately and are empowered but also compelled by this policy and code of conduct to interrupt and report any concerns, breaches or suspected breaches. When issues arise, either with performance or behaviour, appropriate process are to be undertaken, as outlined in this procedure.

Scope

This procedure applies to concerns in relation to ministry with children within the bounds of the Synod of Queensland as part of the children's ministries of Uniting Church congregations and faith communities. This includes matters involving the abilities and performance of volunteers, helpers and leaders of children's activities and programs.

References to 'council' throughout this document encompasses the various councils and committees overseeing safe ministry with children.

The church council is responsible for:

- oversight of all activities within the congregation, including those involving children;
- Responding to and addressing concerns about the:
 - performance of leaders and helpers within the congregation setting;
 - safety of children's programs and activities within the congregation setting.

For faith communities, the Presbytery council is responsible for ensuring these undertakings are completed.

Exclusions:

This procedure does not apply to agencies, regulated businesses, colleges and schools of the church. These entities are required to ensure they comply with their statutory obligations and to maintain policy, process and resources relating to child protection and safety which are specific to their context.

Synod and Presbytery committees responsible for the oversight of ministry agents in accordance with the Regulations of the Uniting Church may refer to this procedure as appropriate.



Principles

- The safety and wellbeing of the child is always the priority
- All members, volunteers and leaders are treated fairly and consistently
- Concerns and incidents are investigated thoroughly, in line with policies and processes
- Decision-making processes are well informed
- Mandatory reporting obligations are met in line with the requirements for ministry agents and lay workers

Responding well to concerns and / or complaints

Concerns and complaints provide an opportunity to strengthen understanding, improve our services and build rapport. When people's expectations are not met, they may complain to one another, or directly to you. Concerns and complaints may range from feedback about 'how to do it better' to emotional demands for explanation and action. The three-step process to responding well provides guidance to help you remain respectful, maintain rapport and ensure appropriate action.

1. Acknowledge and apologise

- 1.1. **Thank** the person for taking the time to raise the issue that's concerning them.
- 1.2. Offer an **apology**, before moving on to ask further questions ('*I'm sorry that xyz happened*').

2. Ask and listen

- 2.1. Ask open **questions** to clarify that you understand what the person is telling you. To assist the communication, it may be helpful to acknowledge facts, thoughts, emotions and wants. This can be done by asking questions like 'what happened?', 'what thoughts do you have about it?', 'how are you feeling about it?' and 'what would you like to see happen?'
- 2.2. Listen – don't interrupt, argue, justify or make promises. Pay attention to what the person is telling you and use **open** questions to clarify your understanding of what is being said.

3. Act

- 3.1. Explain **what** actions you will take next, being mindful of any mandatory reporting processes. Focus on what you can do, for example, 'I will check on ...'; 'I will speak to ...'; 'I will take you to...'; 'I will arrange...'. (See actions to take section below)
- 3.2. Plan a time to report back to them, and whether this timing is acceptable for them for example '... and I'll get back to you about it on Wednesday, how does that sound?'
- 3.3. Follow up. Act quickly and keep the person informed about the actions that have taken place (see below for more **detail**).

Actions to take

4. To address concerns about repeated boundary violations, knowledge or reasonable suspicion of grooming behaviour, harm and abuse to children,

- 4.1. Persons must be stood aside from child related duties pending the outcome of due process;
- 4.2. These matters are to be reported to the appropriate statutory authorities and bodies within the church, as outlined in mandatory reporting obligations for ministry agents and lay workers must be met, and



4.3. After reporting, care must be taken to cooperate with authorities in such matters.

5. To address concerns about unsafe programs or activities, the risk assessment in Planning Safe Programs must be reviewed and or reassessed.

Storage and sharing of documents

6. Storage of documents

- 6.1. All records must be kept in the relevant personnel file for the period of the position.
- 6.2. All records and reports concerning suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse of children must be kept indefinitely

7. Sharing of information

- 7.1. The person should also retain a copy of the documentation given to them.
- 7.2. A copy of all records and reports concerning suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse of children must be provided to the Associate General Secretary pursuant to recommendation 16.58 of the Royal Commission’s report regarding maintaining a central register.
- 7.3. All records must be made available upon request from Statutory Authorities.

Disagreement, grievance, resolution and appeal rights

8. If the person disagrees with any aspect of the way the process was conducted

- 8.1. They may lodge a grievance in accordance with the Complaints Allegations policy (POL-0003).
- 8.2. They should be encouraged to speak to their immediate supervisor, church council chair, minister, cultural advisor or presbytery chairperson for advice.

Related documents

- Safe Ministry with Children policy
- Privacy Policy
- Overseeing safe ministry with children process
- Mandatory reporting process for lay workers process
- Mandatory reporting process for ministry agents process
- Complaints and allegations statement template form
- Performance improvement process
- Performance management discussion record form
- Performance improvement plan form
- Planning safe Programs process
- Hazard/incident report form
- Hazard/incident register form
- Glossary of terms

Revisions

Document number		PRO-SMO-02			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
1.1	03/09/2019	ED Risk and Assurance	01.09.2019	ED Risk and Assurance	Safe Church, Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review		01.09.2020			

THIS DOCUMENT IS UNCONTROLLED WHEN PRINTED.