



Safe Ministry with Children: Providing Safe Ministry

C/2.1

Purpose

The Safe Ministry with Children: Providing Safe Ministry Policy (SMC Policy) is the Queensland Synod's response to the requirement for regulated organisations to develop and implement a 'child and youth risk management strategy'. It supports the Church's vision, mission and ministry with children and vulnerable adults, within the Queensland Synod.

Legislative requirements

The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld) and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020 (Qld) define churches as 'regulated organisations' and all ministry agents and lay preachers are defined as 'religious representatives'. This legislation requires all regulated organisations to develop and implement a child and youth risk management strategy. This strategy needs to address eight (8) mandatory requirements and will help to create a safe and supportive environment for children:

1. A statement of commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm
2. A code of conduct for interacting with children
3. Written procedures for recruiting, selecting, training and managing staff and volunteers
4. Policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm, including reporting guidelines
5. A plan for managing breaches of your risk management strategy
6. Risk management plans for high risk activities and special events
7. Policies and procedures for managing compliance with the blue card system
8. Strategies for communication and support

The SMC Policy also aligns with the ten (10) National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and the Uniting Church in Australia's National Child Safe Policy Framework. To comply with the legislative framework, a child and youth risk management strategy must include eight minimum requirements. These requirements:

- a) address an organisation's **commitment** to creating a safe and supportive service environment
- b) strengthen an organisation's **capability** to provide such an environment
- c) assist an organisation to manage any particular **concerns** with respect to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are involved with the organisation, and
- d) promote the **consistency** of an organisation's approach to risk management, both within the organisation and with respect to compliance with the requirements under the Act.

New reporting Laws

New laws started on **5 July 2021** which target behaviour that ignores or hides the sexual abuse of children pursuant to the *Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020*. These new laws mean:

- all adults must report sexual offending against children to the police unless they have a reasonable excuse
- adults in an institutional setting (e.g. a school, church or sporting club) must protect children from the risk of a sexual offence being committed against them.



This policy, along with the associated tools and resources have each been updated to include the reporting responsibilities of all adults working or volunteering within the Queensland Synod. It is a mandatory requirement, that all adults **must** make a report to the police in all cases where:

- sexual abuse or grooming has occurred,
- it is suspected that sexual abuse or grooming has occurred

Scope

- (1) The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld) and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020 (Qld) define churches as 'regulated organisations'. The church council is responsible for the oversight of all activities involving children and vulnerable adults within the congregation and will oversee local arrangements which are appropriate for the congregation size, taking into account availability of suitable leaders, local need and demographics. Synod and presbytery committees with oversight of activities and programs for children and vulnerable adults, have the same obligations as those described for church councils.
- (2) However, for **congregations with a regulated business attached**, such as a childcare centre/ Outside School Hours , **there are additional** obligations, and the attached regulated business should also comply with the Synod requirements – of providing a Register of Workers, and a statement adopting the SMC Policy annually. This is due to the regulated organisation (eg the church council) having an oversight role for the regulated business (eg the childcare centre). For congregations with a regulated business attached, such as a childcare centre, the attached regulated business has additional obligations, and must also comply with the Synod requirements – of providing a Register of Workers, and a statement adopting the SMC Policy annually.
- (3) Exclusions: This procedure is not intended to apply to the agencies, regulated businesses, colleges and schools of the church. Those entities are not defined as 'regulated organisations' (churches) and are instead defined as 'regulated industries' or a 'regulated business' with obligations and regulations in that setting, with the exception stated in (2) above where additional obligations apply for the regulated business.

Synod requirements

Each year, the General Secretary asks Presbyteries to gather information from all congregations and presbyteries to demonstrate compliance with their obligations to provide a safe ministry environment for the children and vulnerable adults (including children, young people, adults with disabilities, the elderly, and adults and children exposed to domestic and family violence) whom they are ministering to. Systems are in place for managing breaches of the strategy, responding to concerns, and planning safe programs including high risk activities, and are covered in the SMC training modules. These systems include ongoing training and support for all volunteers, lay staff and ministry agents, including the requirement of all adults to report all sexual abuse and grooming, or all suspected sexual abuse and grooming to police.

The Annual Review procedure provides guidance and information about the reporting and collection of information. The obligations are detailed below:

1. all presbytery committees and church councils must formally adopt and enact the SMC Policy annually to meet the requirement of the Act and Regulation for a 'Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy'
2. a council resolution must be made if the congregation determines not to conduct child related activity
3. all people working and volunteering, including those people working and volunteering with children and vulnerable adults, must be screened, trained, sign a statement of personal commitment to safe ministry and must be approved by the presbytery committee or church council before commencing in a church role (paid or volunteer). This screening includes interviews, referee checks and the validation and linking of blue cards, with the information recorded in a Register of Volunteers (employee and volunteer register).



Revisions

Document number		C/2.1			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
5.0	30.08.2021	General Secretary	17.09.2021	Executive Director Strategic Resources and Assurance	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review		17.09.2023			