



Frequently Asked Questions: Reporting Concerns

C/2.1.5.5

New Reporting Laws

New laws start 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.

General Information

Resources

Follow the [Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers](#), if you are worried about something that you have seen or heard. A copy of this document can be found at ucaqld.com.au on the Safe Ministry with Children webpage.

A [Reporting and Referral Guide](#) contains contact details of statutory authorities (police and Department of Child Safety) and support services in your region. A copy of the Reporting and Referral Guide is also available on the Safe Ministry with Children webpage

1. How do I protect privacy?

An individual's privacy can be protected by ensuring that any statements (written and oral) obtained are shared only with those who have a legitimate or legal reason to hold that knowledge in order to progress investigations. Refer to the [Privacy Policy](#) for more information.

2. Should I keep notes if I'm suspicious?

If something concerns you and you suspect inappropriate behaviour, it is important that you keep notes and speak with your ministry agent about those concerns. Make a note of your concerns and report them to your ministry agent straight away, respecting the privacy and dignity of all parties. You **must** make a report to the police in all cases where:

- sexual abuse or grooming has occurred,
- you suspect that sexual abuse or grooming has occurred,

Keep a copy of your notes and who you've spoken with in a secure location and discuss your concerns with your ministry agent. A copy of your notes may be required. If the concern is about your ministry agent or their family member, report your concern to your presbytery chairperson and the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer at the Synod office – safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au or 0491 491 227 or Complaints@ucaqld.com.au.

If your concern is about your presbytery chairperson or their family member, report your concern to the synod office – Phone 1800 586 591 or online via Complaints@ucaqld.com.au. You may also contact the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer.

Your ministry agent will help you to determine what to do next. Keep notes in the [template for complaints and allegations](#) for recording and reporting complaints and allegations.

3. Who do I report to?

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If you are a member of a congregation, parent, leader or helper in children's activities, you should report your concerns to the ministry agent. If the concern is about the ministry agent, you should report to the Presbytery Chairperson. Make a note of your concerns and report them to your ministry agent straight away, respecting the privacy and dignity of all parties. You **must** make a report to the police in all cases where:

- sexual abuse or grooming has occurred,
- you suspect that sexual abuse or grooming has occurred,

Keep a copy of your notes and who you've spoken with in a secure location.

4. What if something is not reportable, but I'm still concerned about it?

It is important that you make the church aware of anything you feel is important for them to know. In order to determine whether you should raise your concerns with the church you can speak with your ministry agent, or with your Presbytery Chairperson.

5. What should I do if I have a concern about the behaviour of my Minister or ministry agent?

If you have a concern about your ministry agent, you should discuss it with the Presbytery Chairperson.

6. What will happen when I report to the ministry agent or Presbytery Chairperson?

The Uniting Church in Australia's policies and procedures state that all ministry agents **must** report alleged criminal offences to the police and/or other statutory authorities. In some cases, the police will want a statement from you. Your ministry agent will offer pastoral support to you in such circumstances. That is, unless your concern is in relation to your ministry agent, in which case your Presbytery Chairperson will offer pastoral support to you.

7. Can I report directly to the police/Child Protection Investigation Unit if I want to?

All members of the public have a right to report any concerns of alleged criminal activity directly to the police and/or other statutory authorities. Should you decide to report your concerns directly to the police we simply ask that you notify the church so that the church can take all necessary steps needed to ensure the safety of all involved, until the police have completed their investigation.

8. Why does the church want to know about these matters?

By reporting matters of concern to the church, you are enabling the church to ensure that the appropriate authorities are notified and that measures are put in place to address any further risk to the safety of children or others.

Questions relevant to ministry agents

Resources

Ministry agents use the [Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents \(C/2.1.5.3\)](#) document which also contains information about referral services and reporting. A copy of this document can be found at ucaqld.com.au on the Safe Ministry with Children webpage.

9. What if something is not reportable, but I'm still concerned about it?

Speak with someone you know and trust (mentor/professional supervisor or Presbytery Chairperson/Minister) in order to determine whether you should raise your concerns with the church. You should also report important information to Crime Stoppers or child protection authorities.

10. Why would I report to Crime Stoppers?

In the past, important pieces of information have not been collected in a central place which would enable them to be joined up. If you check your information against the threshold test for reporting to the CPIU (police) but determine that it doesn't meet the threshold to report, it is important that you still report it to the Synod office and Crime Stoppers. Reporting the information is important so that records can be matched, and action taken if multiple sources identify significant concerns.

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11. Is there a list of important phone numbers for reporting these matters?

The reporting process contains a reporting and referrals section with contact details of statutory authorities (police and Department of Child Safety) and support services in your region. Ensure that local, relevant phone numbers are prominently displayed and appropriately distributed. Business cards and magnets with key emergency contact numbers are available with space to add your local numbers.

12. Do I need permission from parents to report my concerns to the Department of Child Safety or CPIU?

No, permission from the child or family to release information is not required. In cases where the parent or guardian is suspected of being the abuser, it is important to follow the instructions of police officers before speaking to the family. Usually a courtesy communication with the parent or guardian is warranted, informing them about what has happened and offering them support. However, if the police have provided you with advice, then it is important that you read through the [mandatory reporting process](#), and contact your Presbytery Chair or Presbytery Minister for advice or support, particularly if you will be speaking with the parent or guardian.

13. Do I need permission from parents to make a referral for support?

Yes. If a referral to a family support service is recommended, then consent from the family is required before making these referrals.

14. What support options are there for survivors or families who may need extra assistance?

There are many support options available for survivors of abuse and harm. If the survivor or family require some assistance and counselling, the reporting and referrals section of the [reporting process](#) contains details about referral points such as Family and Child Connect (FCC) a central referral point to link families and children to appropriate support services when the threshold for reporting to statutory authorities has not been reached.

15. How does the policy requirement for mandatory reporting align with the Regulations of the Uniting Church and the Code of Ethics requirements for referring concerns about sexual misconduct to the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee (SSMCC)?

The mandatory reporting policy requirement is consistent with Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (COE 8.3) requiring “Ministers to inform the appropriate council or officer of the church if the behaviour of any minister, lay employee or lay appointee could be considered as sexual misconduct (as defined in Regulation 5.6.2).” Regulation 5.6.7 (a) identifies that anyone who wishes to make a complaint of sexual misconduct may do so by making a complaint to the Chairperson of the presbytery, the Presbytery Minister, the Moderator, the Synod Secretary, or the Chairperson of the [Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee (SSMCC)]. Therefore, it is not necessarily the responsibility of the person making the complaint to ensure that the complaint is made to the SSMCC. However, in making the complaint to any of the named roles identified above, the SSMCC will be informed and involved, as outlined in the Code of Ethics (COE 8.4). By making reporting mandatory under Uniting Church policy, we are ensuring that concerns or complaints are reported in order that the church can deal with those concerns or complaints appropriately.



Revisions

Document number		C/2.1.5.5			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
3.0	30.06.2021	Manager, Risk and Compliance	30.06.2021	ED Risk and Assurance	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review		30.06.2026			