



Overseeing safe ministry with children a guide for committees and councils

PRO-SMC-01_v1.0

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Related documents:

Safe Ministry with Children policy POL-SMC-01
Privacy policy POL-0001
Others as noted below

Purpose

The church council is responsible for the oversight of all activities with children within the congregation, and will oversee a local structure which is appropriate for the congregation size, taking into account availability of suitable leaders, local need and demographic. Synod and presbytery committees with oversight of events for children are considered to have the same obligations as those described for church councils. References to church council throughout this document refer also to committees. *The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* (the Act) and the *Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011* (the Regulation) has certain requirements relating to these activities. [Overseeing safe ministry with children](#) is a guide to assist with the implementation of the policy and is intended to support church councils working through their obligations under the Act. There may be additional requirements depending upon the activities undertaken by the church council.



Adopting the policy annually

To comply with the Act, each church council is required to annually formally adopt (or reaffirm) the Queensland Synod Safe Ministry with Children policy and processes, and to record a statement of commitment in church council meeting minutes. Here is some suggested wording:

“The <congregation name> Uniting Church is committed to providing safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained and commits itself to the care, protection and safety of all people, particularly those who are vulnerable. We commit to ongoing compliance with requirements of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 and the Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011, and adopt the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod Safe Ministry with Children Policy. We will ensure the implementation of procedures and resources to assist our congregation to meet and demonstrate its responsibilities under the Act.”

This meets the requirements of the Act to have a statement of commitment to the safety and protection of children, and a child and youth risk management strategy which is reviewed annually. In addition, you must ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of all activities and ministries within your jurisdiction.

Blue cards

The church council will ensure that all people working or volunteering with children, or making decisions involving activities mainly directed at or mainly involving children, including church council members, hold a current and valid blue card, unless a particular legal exemption applies. Church council members who do not wish to apply for a blue card, or are ineligible for a blue card, must abstain from discussions and voting on all matters related to ministry with children.

Congregations not conducting any activities specifically for or with children should formally minute the decision so that it can be articulated if required. Here is some suggested wording for a statement of no child-related activity:

“The church council resolves that the <congregation name> will not conduct ministry with children until further notice. Accordingly no church council member will be under statutory obligation to hold a blue card for the purpose of their office.”

For general instruction regarding blue cards see Blue card guidance notes.

Selecting and supporting leaders and helpers

Effective leadership in lay ministry roles relies on a healthy relationship with God, understanding of expectations, respect for policy, process and persons, and natural ability. The church council must ensure that people who work with children are screened, appointed, trained, supervised and supported to deliver the ministries associated with their appointment.

Screening of people includes working with children checks (blue cards), interviews and independent referee checks. Safe Ministry with Children training is to be undertaken prior to commencement of duties and at least every two years thereafter.

Volunteers, helpers and leaders should be recognised and thanked at least annually, to affirm their contribution to children’s ministry. This provides opportunities for the congregation to acknowledge this vital contribution and to offer prayerful support and encouragement.

Care and oversight of individuals who work with children is to be provided by the church council, their delegate or in the case of faith communities, the presbytery or their delegate. [New starter check-in](#) interviews (to be conducted four to six weeks after commencement) and [Annual review](#) processes provide an opportunity for feedback, discussion and support.

Other strategies to assist leaders and helpers to keep a balance between nurturing their own spiritual life and the demands of being in ministry may include regular devotional reading and reflection, meeting regularly with a spiritual director or mentor, and attending regular team meetings or retreats. Leaders and helpers should be encouraged to regularly attend a worship service within the congregation and to practice self-care.



Delegations of authority

The church council may formally delegate responsibility for various duties required to ensure compliance, for example to screen and appoint leaders and helpers, assess and approve activities and programs, and maintain registers and records. All such delegations must:

- be to individuals who have been screened and are appropriately skilled to complete the undertaking
- be in writing and acknowledged by the person receiving the delegation (copies of delegation and acknowledgement to be filed)
- be minuted in church council minutes.

All decisions made under delegation must be ratified by the church council at the first meeting following the decision, and the ratification minuted.

Assessing and approving activities and programs

As a foundation to safe ministry with children, the church council should consider and approve the curriculum to be taught within children's ministries to make sure it is appropriate. The church council is also responsible for the prior approval, oversight and documentation of all activities, and must ensure appropriate reporting of incidents and accidents.

Activity leaders are required to provide documentation of the planned activities to the church council (including risk management processes) making particular note of any high risk activity.

These activities and risk management plans must be assessed, approved and minuted at a church council meeting prior to the activity being undertaken, and the activity granted written permission to proceed. Prior endorsement of activities provides confirmation of proper processes and approvals in the event of an incident or injury and any subsequent insurance or legal action. Certain activities, particularly those that are considered high risk, may not be covered automatically under the church's insurance program. The Synod Support Services Risk and Insurance team can provide assistance and guidance in relation to insurance requirements, risk management and/or high risk activities.

Transport:

Church councils have a duty of care to ensure that individuals who are asked to provide transport as part of an organised church activity maintain a high standard of safety and care.

Drivers must use a registered, insured and roadworthy vehicle. They must hold a current and appropriate open driver's licence for the type of vehicle they are driving, and maintain a zero blood alcohol level so that activities involving children are drug, alcohol and cigarette free. Drivers must complete a [Driver information form](#) and be subject to the screening processes which apply if they are required to transport children. No fewer than two leaders must be present for all transportation of children. Learner drivers and red provisional drivers are not considered appropriate to transport children. Where there is no alternative, green provisional drivers may be considered by the church council. The church council should consider the maturity, ability and experience of the driver on a case-by-case basis.

Registers and records

All records must be collected, used and stored in accordance with the Synod Privacy Policy. Templates and tools are provided to assist with this function.

Records about people:

- Attendees:
 - Permissions and personal information about all children attending activities and programs must be completed, prior to the event. This provides details to inform the planning of activities to ensure appropriateness, access to emergency contact details of parents/care givers of all participants, and allows parents/care givers to dictate the parameters of their permissions, including photos/images. [Attendee information form](#) templates are provided. Completed forms should be kept on file, and parents are to inform leaders about changes to attendee information e.g. new allergies.
 - Access to emergency contact details of parents/care givers of all participants must be available to appropriate persons for all activities at the time of the activity.



- An attendance list is to be kept for all activities for children. Where appropriate, especially in the case of younger children, parents may be required to sign children in and out of the activity. Where transport of children is required, the attendance list must be checked to ensure that all people are accounted for prior to leaving a venue.
- Workers and volunteers:
 - All records about a worker or volunteer will be kept in the relevant personnel file. The position holder should retain a copy of any documentation.
 - Approval of appointments and training records must be minuted and records made available to Synod and/or statutory authority for audit and/or investigation purposes.
 - A [Register of workers](#) must be kept and blue card details recorded in accordance with the requirements of the regulating body, Blue Card Services, noting the nature of the person's role with children.
- Concerns and complaints about people:
 - The documents to be kept and shared in the event of suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse to children is outlined in [Complaints/allegations – CHILD](#).

Records about activities and programs:

- Approval of activities and programs must be minuted and records made available to the Synod and/or statutory authority for audit and/or investigation purposes.

Records about incidents, accidents, abuse and harm:

- An incident register must be maintained and kept indefinitely, and all known incidents recorded as soon as possible after the occurrence.
- All records and reports concerning suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse of children should be kept indefinitely.

Sharing of records:

- Unless otherwise required by law or policy, no records are to be shared with any person or organisation.
- Copies of reports relating to suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse of children are to be shared with statutory authorities and Synod office representatives as outlined in

[Complaints/allegations – CHILD](#).

- Copies of reports relating to personal injury, property damage, incidents and accidents are to be shared with statutory authorities and representatives as outlined in the Queensland Synod Insurance Handbook.

Property and equipment

Church property and equipment is to be maintained to a standard acceptable for the safe conduct of activities. Regular maintenance and cleaning are to be carried out, and hazards promptly rectified, in compliance with UCAQ Regulation 4.4.

Responding to incidents and emergencies

An emergency response plan must be prepared by the church council, outlining protocols in the event of an emergency or critical incident, including evacuation plans and the names and phone numbers of key contact persons. The plan must be made available to all people involved in the conduct of child-related activities. In the event of an emergency or critical incident, either on-site or off-site, the protocols must be followed.

A fully stocked and current first aid kit must be readily available for all activities. All activities require the presence of a leader or helper with a current first aid certificate. All first aid treatment must be documented on an incident report form. It is advisable to keep emergency contact numbers and the Poisons Information hotline number (131 126) with the first aid kit.

The process to be followed in the event of suspected or known grooming behaviour, harm or abuse to children is outlined in [Complaints/allegations – CHILD](#).

The process to be followed in the event of personal injury, or property damage claims, or incidents and accidents which could result in an insurance claim is outlined in the Queensland Synod Insurance Handbook.



Reporting requirements

Each congregation and faith community is included in annual reporting which allows us to:

- demonstrate compliance with legislation to statutory authorities
- evaluate the effectiveness of policy, processes and tools, and make changes if needed
- identify areas of excellence and areas where additional support is needed
- complete the statutory obligation for annual review of the child and youth risk management strategy.

As part of the annual review all congregations should submit a copy of their statement of commitment (adopting the policy). Congregations conducting activities for children should also submit:

- Register of workers
- Summary of activities/programs conducted throughout the year.

Congregations not conducting activities for children should submit:

- Statement of no child-related activity.

Where to find assistance

Synod Support Services

Abuse and harm hotline	1800 586 591	complaints@ucaqld.com.au
Safe Ministry (children) administrator	3377 9833	childsafes@ucaqld.com.au
Risk and Insurance	3377 9725	insurance@ucaqld.com.au
Human Resources	3377 9867	grant.weaver@ucaqld.com.au

Presbytery

Chairperson
Minister
Safe Ministry support

Congregation

Minister
Church council chair
Church council secretary



List of Safe Ministry with Children resources

Document ID	Document name
POL-SMC-01_v1.0	Safe Ministry with Children
PRO-SMC-01_v1.0	Overseeing safe ministry with children
TOO-SMC-01.1.01_v1.0	Selecting leaders and helpers
TOO-SMC-01.1.02_v1.0	Role descriptions
TOO-SMC-01.1.03_v1.0	Interviewing the applicant
TOO-SMC-01.1.04_v1.0	Checking with referees
TOO-SMC-01.1.05_v1.0	Letter of appointment
TOO-SMC-01.1.06_v1.0	Driver information form
TOO-SMC-01.1.07_v1.0	Statement of personal commitment
TOO-SMC-01.1.08_v1.0	New starter check-in, interview form
TOO-SMC-01.1.09_v1.0	Annual review, feedback and discussion form
TOO-SMC-01.1.10_v1.0	Liturgy
TOO-SMC-01.1.11_v1.0	Planning safe programs
TOO-SMC-01.1.12_v1.0	Attendee information form (short)
TOO-SMC-01.1.13_v1.0	Attendee information form (long)
TOO-SMC-01.1.14_v1.0	Attendance record
TOO-SMC-01.1.15_v1.0	Sign in/sign out attendance record
TOO-SMC-01.1.16_v1.0	Blue card guidance notes
TOO-SMC-01.1.17_v1.0	Register of workers (word)
TOO-SMC-01.1.18_v1.0	Register of workers (excel)
PRO-SMC-02_v1.0	Systems for handling concerns
TOO-SMC-02.1.01_v1.0	Performance discussion record (+ boundary issues)
TOO-SMC-02.1.02_v1.0	Performance improvement plan
TOO-SMC-02.1.03_v1.0	Complaints/allegations – CHILD
TOO-SMC-02.1.04_v1.0	Help for the helpers

Document Review History

Version Number	Date	Reason	Aurthor/reviewer	Approved
1.0	22.01.2016	Created to support Safe Ministry with Children policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Ministry (children) administrator • General counsel • Risk & Insurance manager • Human Resources manager 	Associate general secretary
Due	2201.2017	Review cycle – every year		