



Overseeing safe ministry with children

a guide for committees and councils

PRO-SMC-01_v2.0

Purpose

This document outlines specific obligations held by the councils and committees of the church in relation to safe ministry with children. The councils and committees of the church are responsible to ensure that, within their jurisdiction, all interaction with children including specific ministry with children is conducted in a safe and welcoming manner. This document outlines obligations under 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)* and is a guide to assist with the implementation of the Safe Ministry with Children policy. There may be additional specific requirements depending upon the activities undertaken. The Act and Regulation require that the Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy (Safe Ministry with Children) is adhered to in the conduct of all activities involving children as well as specific child focused ministries within your jurisdiction, and that records are available to evidence that.

The Final report and recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse informed the Australian Human Rights Commission's National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. At the time of writing, the National Principles have been recommended to the Council of Australian Governments and will ultimately become National Standards which must be adhered to and reported on. This is an emerging space, and the Church's response is in development. Councils should be fully conversant with the principles and actively promote a culture within their sphere which is mindful and engaging of the following Principles:

Principle 1: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Principle 2: Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Principle 3: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Principle 4: Diversity and inclusivity

Principle 5: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Principle 6: Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.

Principle 7: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Principle 8: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Principle 9: Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.

Principle 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

Scope

The church council is responsible for the oversight of all activities involving children 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 demographic.

Synod and presbytery committees with oversight of child related activities have the same obligations as those described for church councils.

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



Adopting the policy annually

Where child related activity is conducted, the Act and Regulation require a statement of commitment to the safety and protection of children, and a child and youth risk management strategy which is reviewed annually.

Safe Ministry with Children IS the Church's Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy and is annually reviewed by the Synod. Each 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. The following wording is an appropriate formal statement to this effect:

"The <congregation/Presbytery 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."

Congregations who do not conduct any activities specifically for or with children should formally minute the decision so that it can be articulated if required. The following wording is an appropriate formal statement to this effect:

"The church council resolves that the <congregation name> will not conduct specific ministry with children activity until further notice. Accordingly, no church council member will be under statutory obligation to hold a blue card for the purpose of their office." Note that this does not exempt the council from other obligations such as attendance at Safe Ministry with Children training because parents or guardians should be able to expect the same degree of understanding of Safe Ministry care at all Uniting Churches in Queensland.

Selecting and supporting leaders and helpers

The council must ensure that all people who work with children are screened, appointed, trained, supervised and supported to deliver the ministries associated with their appointment. Record of this process must be kept. The Safe Ministry with Children website provides processes and tools to assist with this practice.

1. Screening people who work with children

Screening includes working with children checks (blue cards), interviews and independent referee checks.

2. Blue Cards

The council will ensure that all people working or volunteering with children, or making decisions involving activities mainly directed at or mainly involving children, hold a current and valid blue card, unless a legal exemption applies. Council members themselves must hold blue cards because they are relevant decision takers. Council members who are ineligible for a blue card, or who do not hold a linked blue card must abstain from discussions or decision taking on all matters related to ministry with children or any activity involving children.

3. Training

Safe Ministry with Children training is to be undertaken prior to commencement of duties and at least every two years thereafter. All members of councils of the Church must complete Safe Ministry with Children training.

4. Support and supervision

Relevant 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 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.

Assessing and approving activities and programs

1. Prior approval

The council is responsible for the prior approval, oversight and documentation of all activities and must ensure appropriate reporting of incidents and accidents. Prior endorsement of activities evidences proper processes and approvals in the event of an incident, injury, or exposure to harm in the event of subsequent investigation or insurance or legal action.

The Safe Ministry with Children website has provided processes and tools to assist with this practice. These are linked at the foot of this document for your reference.

Activity leaders are required to provide documentation of the planned activities to the council, including the outcome of risk management assessments

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.

Any assessment of high risk must be referred to the Synod Risk Group for risk management advice.

2. Curriculum

As a foundation to safe ministry with children, the council should consider and approve the curriculum to be taught within children's ministries to make sure it aligns with the teachings of the Church.

3. Inclusion

The Church aims to provide welcoming environments where children and young people feel comfortable, safe and included. We aim to provide experiences which are free from discrimination, exclusion, bullying and abuse.

4. Transport

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 should not transport children. Where there is no alternative, green provisional drivers may be considered by the council.

The 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 on the Safe Ministry with Children website to assist with this function.

1. Storage and sharing of records

Records must be stored securely and shared in line with the Privacy policy and reporting protocols of the Church and requirements of Statutory Authorities.

Unless otherwise required by law or policy, no records are to be shared with any person or organisation.



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

2. Records about people – permissions and participant information

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 or 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 on the Safe Ministry with Children website.

Completed forms should be kept on file, and parents should be advised to inform leaders about changes to attendee information e.g. new allergies.

Access to emergency contact details of parents or care givers of all participants must be available to appropriate persons for all activities at the time of the activity.

3. Attendance lists

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.

4. Workers and volunteers

All records about a worker or volunteer will be kept in the relevant personnel file and a copy given to the position holder. The council must keep current records of screening, appointment, training, and support processes as well as linked blue cards and exemption cards.

- Approval of appointments must be minuted, and records kept by the council.
- 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.

5. Records about concerns and complaints about people

Documents relating to concerns, allegations or knowledge of abuse (including grooming) must be kept in perpetuity.

6. Records about incidents and accidents

An incident register must be maintained and kept indefinitely, and all known incidents recorded as soon as possible after the occurrence.

7. Investigations and audits

Records must be made available to Synod and statutory authorities for audit and/or investigation purposes when requested. Such records include, but are not limited to:

- Blue card records,
- Approval of appointments
- Training records
- Approval of activities and programs

As part of the annual review, all congregations must submit a copy of their statement of commitment (adopting the policy).

Congregations conducting activities for children must also submit their Register of Workers.

Congregations not conducting activities for children must also submit their statement of no child-related activity.



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.

The Synod website has provided processes and tools to assist with this practice.

Preparing for 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. The Synod website has provided processes and tools to assist with the development of an Emergency Response Plan.

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 grooming behaviour, harm or abuse to children is outlined in Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers and Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents.

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.

Where to find assistance – Synod Support Services

Name	Contact Details
Abuse and harm hotline	1800 586 591 or complaints@ucaqld.com.au
Safe Ministry, Legislative and Compliance Officer	3377 9833 or safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au
Synod Risk Group	3377 9953 or terry.selva@ucaqld.com.au
Insurance	3377 9725 or insurance@ucaqld.com.au
Human Resources	3377 9867 or hr@ucaqld.com.au

Where to find assistance – Presbytery

Name	Add Contact Details Here
Chairperson	
Minister	
Safe Ministry support	

Where to find assistance – Congregation

Name	Add Contact Details Here
Minister	
Church Council Chair	
Church Council Secretary	



Where to find the Safe Ministry with Children resources

Internet	Location
Queensland Synod website	https://ucaqld.com.au/synod-services/safe-ministry-with-children/

Definitions

Term	Meaning
All definitions	See Glossary of terms

Revisions

Document number		PRO-SMC-01_v2.0			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
1.0	22.01.2016	Associate General Secretary		Risk and Compliance	Safe Ministry (Children) administrator
2.0	19.11.2018	General Secretary	01.02.19	Risk and Compliance	Safe Ministry, Legislative & Compliance Officer
Next scheduled review		19.11.2019			