



SAFE MINISTRY with **children**

policy

a culture of shared guardianship

Preface

“Then Jesus took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” Mark 9:36-37

The Christian revelation orients us towards being a community in which we recognise the sacredness of every person amongst us, and the responsibility of the community to ensure that sacredness is honoured and protected.

We’ve been reviewing our policy and practices to do with safe ministry and this new policy has been developed and refined in order to build better practices in our lives that will enhance our capacity to show that sacredness in concrete ways. It will help ensure that in our ministry with children we are strongly aware of what we need to do to keep them safe, and set an environment in which they can experience the love of God toward them.

I encourage you to embrace this policy in the spirit of our call as the church to build communities of faith, hope and love that bear witness to the life of the promised Kingdom of God.

Rev David Baker
Moderator



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

1. Purpose

The Safe Ministry with Children Policy was approved in 2015 by the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod's Synod Standing Committee. Its primary purpose is to support the Church's vision, mission and ministry with children, and provides a set of standards which emphasise our collective responsibilities to provide a culture of shared guardianship, prevent reasonably foreseeable harm, and care for those who may be vulnerable to the risk of harm, injury or abuse. The three core elements which underpin the Church's approach to safe ministry include:

An extended network of guardianship: a culture in which individuals feel included in ministry and mission and are able to raise even small concerns

Environments that reduce opportunities for abuse: physical, social, spiritual and emotional environments that are safe

A system for handling concerns: processes that encourage participation and allow for small pieces of relevant information to be joined up.

The framework for this policy and its subsequent resources are informed by the requirements of:

[The Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening\) Act 2000 \(Qld\)](#) (the Act) and the [Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening Regulations 2011 \(Qld\)](#) (the Regulations)

[Workplace Health and Safety 2011 \(Qld\)](#)

[The Privacy Act 1988 \(Cth\)](#)

The [Uniting Church in Australia, National Child Safe Policy Framework \(2017\)](#)

Findings from the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#), particularly [Key Elements of Child Safe Organisations – Research Study Final Report](#)

Relevant and emerging research and literature reviews

Annual audits

The [Uniting Church Regulations](#), 2015 Edition (the regulations), culture and context.

This policy is to be read and implemented in conjunction with the process documents to ensure compliance with the standards to assist congregations and faith communities in meeting the insurance requirements for conducting safe activities. A suite of tools and forms is provided, to support congregations to implement the policy and processes. The use of these tools is optional, however congregations choosing to use alternate tools or forms are advised to ensure that they meet the minimum requirements for record keeping, i.e. similar to the tools provided.

2. What we believe

(Excerpt from *National Child Safe Policy Framework*, v.2, 2017 – Assembly)

The Uniting Church in Australia (the Church) believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the Uniting Church in Australia Commission on Women and Men in 1997). Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people, including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990, article 49) that States shall protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation.



2. What we believe

Children are gifts of God to be received, welcomed and to be cared for responsibly and justly. The Gospel also directs us to listen to and learn from children. In *On the Way Together* (1998) it is affirmed that “children in the Uniting Church in Australia are nurtured in Christian faith and discipleship, experiencing relationships which promote trust, cooperation, honesty, positive valuing of persons, responsibility and Christian service.” It adds that the church “affirms the value and the rights of children as human beings as it listens to, guides, protects, advocates for, and empowers children within its own communities and the wider community.”

Unfortunately not all children are protected from harm. Abuse occurs across all areas of society. Some adults will look to find opportunities to form special relationships with children which may become exploitative. Whilst children, parents and the Church should be aware of ‘stranger danger’, most people who sexually abuse children are known to the victim through family, friends, school, sports groups, church and other community-based activities.

The Uniting Church abhors the crime of child abuse. To know that innocent and trusting children have been preyed upon within the Church—which is devoted to the care, protection and well-being of the most vulnerable—is deeply distressing. We are committed to do everything we can to achieve justice for those who have been abused and to create an environment where children are safe.

Some children in the care of the Church have been subjected to a variety of forms of abuse. Abuse can be by an adult to a child or by one child to another. We know this through the experiences shared with us by those who have come forward in recent years and also through the experiences documented in the Senate inquiries into the treatment of Aboriginal children, children placed in children’s homes and other forms of care. We also know this from shared experiences of child migrants who came to Australia from the United Kingdom. We know this through the work of the Royal Commission and other state based inquiries. Abuse has occurred in agencies, schools, congregations and associated activities.

In our Apology to the Forgotten Australians (2004) we stated:

On behalf of the Uniting Church and our agencies, we apologise unreservedly for any physical, psychological or social harm that might have occurred. We deeply regret that some children were let down while in the care of the Uniting church and former Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. The recent Senate Inquiry into children in Institutional Care highlighted a number of cases where children suffered at the hands of caregivers. The inquiry painted a disturbing picture of life for many young people who lived in institutional care. The Uniting Church through its agencies managed a number of these facilities and we accept that sadly some did not provide the love, nurturing and care that the children in them so rightly deserved. The Inquiry highlighted the flaws in institutional care models and the need to ensure that they are never repeated.

The Uniting Church Values Statement issued by the Assembly Standing Committee (2013) affirms that we:

Will not hide from the truth, however painful it may be, and we will seek, with compassion and humility, to address whatever issues and challenges may emerge for us. We will say “sorry” to anyone who was neglected and abused when in our care and, in consultation with those so affected, actively seek for ways to make amends for what happened in the past and identify how we can best offer support into the future.

The Uniting Church has strong theological foundations to its commitment not to tolerate child abuse and to address the injustice of this abuse. Acknowledgement of wrongs is captured in the *Basis of Union*, which states that “The Uniting Church prays that through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life”. (*Basis of Union*, para.18)

3. Our Values

(Excerpt from *National Child Safe Policy Framework*, v.2, 2017 – Assembly)

The Uniting Church's values which apply to the care and protection of children include:

Compassion	We will deal with children compassionately and with an understanding of their vulnerabilities.
Respect	We respect the boundaries of professional relationships and respect the rights of every person to feel safe while in contact with our services.
Justice	We will seek justice for those who have been harmed.
Working together	We will work together to create a culture of individual and collective responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children and to create friendly, welcoming spaces for children.
Leading through learning	We will be leaders by undertaking a continuous improvement approach to the protection of children and to offering child friendly services.

4. Policy Statement

(Excerpt from *National Child Safe Policy Framework*, v.2, 2017 – Assembly)

All children who are involved in any of the Uniting Church's activities, services, events or programs have a right to feel and be safe. The Church is committed to provide safe environments where children are cared for, respected, nurtured and sustained.

Abuse thrives on secrecy. To prevent child abuse across the Church, we are committed to developing and maintaining an open and aware culture.

The Church commits itself to the creation and maintenance of a child safe culture to ensure the care, protection and safety of all children engaging with the Church in any of its entities.

We will do all in our power to safeguard children from all forms of abuse. The Church clearly affirms its commitment to upholding the law. This includes the requirement to report abuse.

5. Our commitments

(Excerpt from *National Child Safe Policy Framework*, v.2, 2017 – Assembly)

The Uniting Church embraces the Australian children's Commissioners and Guardians jointly endorsed principles for child safe organisations. In summary, they outline that key feature of a child safe organisation include:

- Taking preventative action, including having a child safe policy and ongoing review;
- Proactively working to raise awareness and implementing policies and procedures which ameliorate risk;
- Responding immediately where child safety concerns arise;
- Empowering all, including children, to participate. Ensuring children know who to talk to and that they feel comfortable in discussing that they do not feel safe;
- Fostering a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
- Respecting diversity in cultures and child rearing principles while keeping child safety paramount;



5. Our commitments

- Providing written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
- Engaging only the most suitable people to work with children and having high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development; and
- Reporting suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities, including police and other statutory authorities.

The Queensland Synod is committed to providing a safe environment for children by providing the Safe Ministry with Children policy so that the actions of entities within its scope will be consistent with the *National Child Safe Policy Framework* by ensuring that we:

- Provide an open environment
- Have clear codes of conduct
- Adopt clear procedures
- Recruit well
- Provide orientation and training
- Undertake strong planning and supervision
- Provide support
- Support, investigation and reporting
- Review and
- Keep good records

6 Scope

6.1

The policy applies to all people within the bounds of the Synod of Queensland conducting child-related activities as part of their ministries of Uniting Church congregations and faith communities, Presbyteries and Synod. This policy includes, but is not limited to child-related activities such as Sunday schools, youth groups, day camps, camps, children’s clubs, play groups, Advent and Easter events and Easter Madness.

6.2

Ministry agents: The obligations under the Act and Regulations including in relation to blue cards are to be upheld by Ministry Agents. Guidance notes to assist with the implementation of these obligations are provided.

The term “Ministry Agent” is defined under Regulation 2.2 of the Uniting Church in Australia Regulations (and used in the Code of Ethics of the Uniting Church) as a person engaged in one of the specified ministries: ministers (of the word and deacons); pastors; lay pastors; lay preachers; youth workers and community ministers. The ministries of Lay Pastor, Youth worker and community minister were closed for entry by Assembly some years ago. Anyone still operating in one of those now closed ministries is covered by the Safe Ministry with Children policy.

6.3

Exclusions: This policy is not intended to apply to the agencies, regulated businesses, colleges and schools of the church. These entities are required to ensure that 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. For the purposes of this policy, the term “regulated businesses” includes but are not limited to child care and outside school hours care programs. Congregations conducting regulated businesses must ensure statutory compliance in addition to compliance with any applicable church policy and process.



7 Roles and relationships

7.1

Councils of the Church with oversight responsibilities should ensure that this policy is implemented by entities within their oversight.

The Synod employs a range of people to assist and promote safe ministry with children in congregations and faith communities. The Safe Ministry (children) Administrator’s role is to inform, review, support and monitor the implementation of the policy and processes across the Synod. The Risk and Insurance team provide advice and guidance particularly in respect to managing risk, planning and responding to incidents. The Legal and Governance team provides guidance and response to matters with legal consequence and considers the steps necessary to ensure statutory compliance. The Human Resources team provides guidance with screening and engagement of all workers (paid and unpaid). Uniting Communications provides guidance and acts as designated spokesperson to respond to media enquiries.

7.2

Each presbytery is responsible under the regulations of the church (the regulations) to oversee the conduct of congregations, holding them to account. Each presbytery employs or engages people to assist and support congregations to conduct safe ministry with children.

7.3

The Safe Ministry with Children Reference Group comprised of representatives from each presbytery and Synod Support staff will act as the conduit for communication and quality assurance. This group shall facilitate the development of capacity for implementation and monitoring and participate in the annual review of the policy, processes and tools.

7.4

Each congregation, depending on context, may require a range of roles and functions to conduct safe ministry. 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. The role of the ministry agent is to provide pastoral care and guidance. In the event of a suspicion or knowledge of abuse to children, and boundary violations, the ministry agent is the appropriate person to receive reports. In the event that the report relates to the ministry agent, the presbytery chair person is the appropriate person to receive reports.

8. Accountabilities and expectations

8.1

Specific guidance relating to the oversight of child-related activity is provided in [Overseeing safe ministry with children](#).

Statement of commitment: To meet the requirements of the Act, each relevant presbytery committee and church council will annually adopt the safe ministry with children policy, thus meeting their statutory obligation to indicate their intention to live out their commitment to safe ministry with children. Where a council makes the decision to conduct no activities with/for children, the decision should be minuted and reviewed annually. In such instances, there is no requirement for Church Council members to hold a blue card for the purpose of their office, nor for blue card details to be maintained in the congregation’s Register of Workers.

8.2

Oversight of child-related activity: each relevant council will ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of all activities and ministries with/for children within their jurisdiction.

8.3

Delegations and documentation: the relevant council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities but ultimately remains responsible for ensuring accurate and correct documentation. All approvals and delegations of authority are to be minuted including the acknowledgement by the person receiving the delegation.

The relevant council is responsible to ensure that records of screening, blue cards, training and program approvals are kept. Registers, templates and guidance notes [are provided](#). Records are to be made available for monitoring, evaluation, capacity development and practice improvement purposes. Where a recommended tool or template is not used, the alternate is to provide the same standard of record keeping and adhere to policy and process expectations.

- 8.4 **Faith communities:** Each faith community will be made aware of the expectations of policy and process and will be supported by their respective presbytery to adhere to the requirements therein. The Presbytery Standing Committee or church council of the congregation overseeing the faith community is deemed to assume the responsibilities of the church council as outlined above. The Presbytery Council or church council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities. All delegations of authority are to be minuted.
- 8.5 **Accountabilities:** All congregations and faith communities will be held directly accountable to the relevant presbytery and ultimately accountable to the Synod Standing Committee for their compliance or otherwise with this policy and associated statutory compliance.
- 8.5.1 Monitoring of compliance: information will be gathered via the annual audit of Registers of Workers, copies of minute excerpts and other documentation as necessary.
- 8.5.2 Where required, additional support and/or corrective measures will be provided via the presbytery or synod support services.
- 8.5.3 Individuals will be held accountable for their actions, and in accordance with the outlined processes, issues of concern are to be referred for appropriate corrective or legal action on every occasion.

9. Range of acceptable behaviours (code of conduct)

The range of acceptable behaviours or code of conduct shall be maintained by all people in ministry with children positions regardless of gender, age, cultural background or role. The conduct of all individuals within ministry with children shall be free from abuse including neglect, emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse; grooming behaviour and sexual abuse. It is envisaged that all individuals, including children and those not in approved leadership positions, will be encouraged to adopt [these behavioural standards](#) so that the culture of safety is enhanced and grown. Leaders must ensure children are made aware of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and outline the consequences of unacceptable behaviour for parents, children and any other people involved.

The physical, emotional, behavioural and spiritual boundaries necessary to support the maintenance of safe ministry environments are outlined in the following documents:

- Uniting Church in Australia [code of conduct for Lay Leaders](#) applicable to leaders and helpers
- [Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice](#) for Ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia, applicable to Ministers of the Word, Deacons and lay people serving in an approved Ministry of Pastor roles

To support the implementation of the code of conduct, see the [Guidelines for councils of the church, when implementing the code of conduct for lay leaders](#).

10. Inclusion and participation

Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child. They allow their children to participate in Church activities assuming they are safe. All efforts should be made to include the needs, views and perspectives of family and community members when congregations consider their mission, vision and ministry activities with/for children. Where children are able to express their views, opportunities should be provided for them to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Particular attention is paid to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.



11. Handling concerns

- The process to be followed in every instance are outlined in [Systems for handling concerns](#).
- 11.1 **Reporting concerns:** In every instance, individuals who have a concern must raise their concern in accordance with church policy and process to allow for issues to be addressed, and for small pieces of relevant information to be gathered and evaluated. All disclosures and/ or suspicions of grooming and/or sexual abuse should be believed and reported to statutory authorities and Church officials immediately.
- 11.2 **Receiving complaints:** For this to be possible, leaders must treat individuals who raise concerns with respect, providing them with an opportunity to speak openly about issues without fear of being judged or rejected. Individuals who raise a concern should be listened to, treated fairly and the person receiving the concern will do their best to assist, and progress the matter in a way which is healthy and constructive and in adherence to the requirements outlined in [Systems for handling concerns](#).
- 11.3 **Access to information about processes:** All members, including children, will be given access to information about complaints processes and leaders will provide support and respond to questions about the processes to ensure that they are understood by children, staff, families and volunteers. Where appropriate, leaders will ensure families and children have access to sexual abuse prevention programs and information.
- 11.4 **Information storage:** All information relating to knowledge, suspicion or reports of alleged abuse or neglect must be collected, stored and used in accordance with the provisions of the church privacy policy. Complaints and concerns will be analysed to identify causes and systemic failures in order to inform continuous improvement.

12. Incidents and accidents

- In the event of an [incident or accident](#) the coordinator of the activity will ensure that team members:
- 12.1 provide for the child or individual's immediate needs; this includes the provision of first aid, contacting emergency services, and remaining with the child;
- 12.2 assess the safety of the activity for the whole group and if necessary divert them to a different task or cease activities altogether;
- 12.3 activate the congregation's emergency response plan if required;
- 12.4 inform church council chair person or their delegate immediately, and arrange for parents to be contacted, if appropriate; and
- 12.5 document the event on an incident report form, giving a copy to the church council chair or other appropriate delegate;
- 12.6 the church council chair or delegate will be responsible to address workplace health and safety requirements, and work with the risk and insurance team to resolve ongoing issues related to the incident.



13. Training and support 13.1

Regular mandatory training must be undertaken by church council members, ministry agents and all people conducting or assisting with child-related services or activities as part of the ministries of the congregation. This must be undertaken and completed before commencing duties and repeated no less than every two years.

13.2

Revision of approved training materials: to ensure the commitment to safe ministry is met, the training modules are to be reviewed and updated annually by the Safe Ministry with Children Reference Group; re-approved and disseminated via the presbytery-appointed personnel.

13.3

Additional and supplementary training: participation in additional training opportunities which support safe ministry with children is to be encouraged.

14. Communication 14.1

Communication plan: It is important that every person within the scope of this policy understands their responsibilities relating to the policy. The development of a communication plan will assist synod support staff and presbytery support staff in making people aware of these. The communication plan will be reviewed annually by the Safe Ministry with Children Reference Group, with the assistance of Uniting Communications, in line with the requirements of the Act.

14.2

The use of internet, social media and networking sites is to be conducted in a manner consistent with the Queensland Synod [Social Media Policy](#) and Guidelines for Ministry in a Digital Context. This document is aligned with the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (section 2.1, the pastoral relationship, Uniting Church in Australia: [Code of Ethics and ministry practice 2009](#) updated effective 1.1.10) and the Assembly [Code of Practice for Lay Leaders](#).

14.3

Responding to media: All situations or critical events which may reasonably create media interest must be reported immediately to the general secretary or director of Uniting Communications. All responses to media enquiries will be provided by a Synod-authorized person. Such events may include accidents causing injury or death, allegations of abuse, or any incident which may cause loss or distress to any member of the public. After the notification and briefing, Synod Support staff will consult with the relevant church stakeholders regarding an appropriate course of action to ensure appropriate standards of safety, privacy and accountability are maintained within the polity of the church.

15. Definitions

Abuse refers to both adult to child abuse and child to child abuse. Abuse and neglect include but are not limited to:

- **Physical abuse** – where a person purposely injures or threatens to injure a child or young person.
- **Emotional abuse** – an attack on a child or young person’s self-esteem such as bullying, name calling, threatening, ridiculing, harassing, intimidating or isolating the child or young person.
- **Family violence** – when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically dominate the other.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child.
- **Grooming** – predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity.
- **Neglect** – where a child is harmed by the failure to provide the basic physical and emotional necessities.
- **Spiritual abuse** – where abuse is administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation, misuse of religion and/or faith for selfish ends or gratification.

Child – defined under the [Child Protection Act 1999 \(Qld\)](#) as an individual under 18 years of age.



15. Definitions

Disclosure – child has made a reasonably clear statement of any form of abuse or harm.

Harm – in addition to harm caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect, sexual abuse or exploitation, this policy refers to physical injury, mental damage, and moral injury caused by wrong doing.

Incident – an undesired event which resulted or could have resulted in harm, damage or loss.

Ministry agent – a person who is determined within the Uniting Church in Australia regulations (2.2) definition of specified ministries (of the word and deacons); pastors; lay pastors; lay preachers; youth workers and community ministers. The ministries of lay pastor, youth worker and community minister were closed for entry by Assembly some years ago. Anyone still operating in one of those now closed ministries is covered by this policy.

Parent/guardian – birth mother or father or adoptive parents, someone else having or exercising parental responsibility for the child on a permanent basis, or someone who under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom is regarded as a parent of the child.

Privacy provisions – the requirement that all information be collected, stored and used in accordance with the provision of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland privacy policy (ucaqld.com.au).

Regulated business and regulated employment – as defined by the [Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening\) Act 2000 \(Qld\)](#).

Regulations – throughout this policy, where the word ‘regulations’ is spelled with an upper case ‘R’ it refers to the regulation under the Act. Where it is spelled out with a lower case ‘r’, it refers to the regulation of the Church.

Staff and volunteers – refers to all relevant (according to the context in which it appears) persons, and may include board/council members, employees, volunteers, parents, carers, presbytery members and adherents, church council members, elders, congregation members, people in the specified ministries of the church and any other person with responsibility for the care of children.

16. References and related documents

- Uniting Church in Australia Regulations
- Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Sexual Abuse and Sexual misconduct Policy (Assembly)
- National Child Safe Policy Framework (Assembly)
- Privacy Policy (POL-0001)
- Conflicts Policy (POL-0002)
- Complaints & Allegations Policy (POL-0003)
- Safe Ministry with Children processes and tools
- Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Bullying Policy POL-PEO-01
- Anti-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Employment Equity POL-PEO-02
- Volunteer Management POL-PEO-06
- Social Media POL-PEO-14
- Probity POL-PEO-15
- Induction POL-PEO-16
- Family and Domestic Violence Policy POL-PEO-18



Document Review History

Version Number	Date	Reason	Author / reviewer	Endorsed	Approved
1	03.12.2015	Created to replace Child Safe Church policy	Child Safe Church administrator General counsel Risk & Insurance manager	Associate general secretary Qld Synod Royal Commission Task Group Presbytery ministers	SSC (#15.184)
2	02.03.2017	Annual review to comply with legislative requirements	Safe Ministry (children) administrator Legal counsel Risk & Insurance manager	General secretary Presbytery ministers Presbytery chairpersons	SSC (#17.051)
Due	December 2017	Annual review to enable launch in January 2018			