



SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all children and vulnerable adults who engage with the Lutheran Church of Australia (the church) and provide for relevant roles and responsibilities for all in the church.

2. Policy Statement

In bringing God's love to life, the church is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all who engage with the church, especially children¹ and vulnerable adults. It will take all reasonable measures to nurture children, protect them from harm and ensure compliance with all legislative requirements for the prevention of harm to children. All children and vulnerable adults are to be embraced, regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, or social, economic or cultural background, and their equity is to be upheld. Bullying and harassment of children or vulnerable adults are not to be tolerated.

1. Commitment to the safety of children and vulnerable adults

The church is committed to:

- the safety and protection of children and vulnerable adults always being the first priority
- children and vulnerable adults being valued, respected and encouraged to participate
- the protection of children and vulnerable adults, especially from any form of physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological harm and risk of harm and any form of sexual harm, harassment, abuse or exploitation, in a manner consistent with scriptural principles and in accordance with legal obligations
- the rights of children and vulnerable adults being respected
- an environment in which children and vulnerable adults can express their views, especially in matters that directly affect them
- an environment in which no form of physical punishment is administered to any child while engaged in church activities
- meeting the requirements of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- complying with all applicable legislation that pertains to the safety of children and vulnerable adults
- all children and vulnerable adults being embraced, regardless of their abilities, sex, gender, or social, economic or cultural background, and their equity being upheld
- bullying and harassment of children and vulnerable adults not being tolerated
- displaying information about services that can assist children and vulnerable adults in areas accessed by them
- displaying key information about the steps the church is taking in relation to the safety of children and vulnerable adults and how to report harm or abuse

¹ For the purposes of this document, 'child' includes any child or young person under the age of 18 years.

- making relevant documents (such as this policy) available on the church's website and displaying key information in prominent spaces
- providing further information and guidance on key documents, such as this policy, during Safe Church Training.

2. Other key principles

The application of this policy will also provide for:

- careful recruitment and selection processes, which include working with children type checks, for roles where there is contact with children or vulnerable adults and also for any leadership and governance roles holding decision-making authority that affect children or vulnerable adults or where trustworthiness is implied or perceived
- training for all people who work with children or vulnerable adults, including pastors, employees and volunteers
- awareness of and compliance with systems and procedures for the prevention of harm to children and vulnerable adults by all those to whom this policy applies
- implementation of risk management systems for all activities that involve children or vulnerable adults
- prompt and proper responses to all reports and allegations of harm or risk of harm, abuse or neglect to a child or vulnerable adult
- documented procedures for receiving, reporting and handling allegations of harm and risk of harm (including abuse)
- regular review of this policy in consultation with relevant ministries at least every three years; after each review, a copy of the updated version will be provided to the applicable government authority, for example, the Department of Human Services in South Australia.

3. Application

This policy applies to:

- agencies of the church
- Lutheran-related entities
- church workers
- employees
- office-bearers and other volunteers
- LCANZ members and visitors.

4. Responsibilities

Communication and compliance

1. General Church Board (GCB) is responsible for the communication of this policy to churchwide agencies and to districts and congregations. GCB is responsible for compliance with this policy and the procedure within churchwide agencies and Lutheran-related entities.
2. District church councils/boards (DCC/DCB) are responsible for the communication of this policy to their respective district agencies. DCC/DCB are responsible for compliance with this policy and the procedure within their respective district agencies and Lutheran-related entities.

3. Congregation/parish councils are responsible for compliance with this policy and the procedure within their congregation/parish and their agencies, Lutheran-related entities, and activities.
4. Church workers, employees, contractors, office-bearers and volunteers are personally responsible for complying with this policy and the procedure.

Implementation

1. Governance bodies of agencies, Lutheran-related entities, parishes and congregations are responsible for:
 - developing and implementing related policies and procedures that meet their particular requirements and contexts
 - ensuring that such policies and procedures are consistent with this policy
 - communication, induction and training procedures that create awareness of and promote understanding of this policy and its procedures.

5. DEFINITIONS

Common definitions

- **'agencies'**: a board, commission, committee, council, department or tribunal of the church; a board, committee, council or department of a district of the church; and a member congregation or parish of the church
- **'church'**: the Lutheran Church of Australia, including its districts as defined in the LCA Constitution
- **'church worker'**: includes pastor and lay worker serving in any agency or entity of the church
- **'employee'**: a non-ordained (lay) person serving in a paid capacity in any entity of the church, including a lay worker listed on the roll of lay workers
- **'governance body'**: the elected or appointed committee, board, council or other group that governs the LCA agency or Lutheran-related entity on behalf of its members or shareholders to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, legal compliance, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment and participation
- **'Lutheran-related entities'**: includes schools that are members of the Lutheran Education system, aged-care or community-services organisations, youth camps, outdoor education centres, bookshops and op-shops operating under the auspices of a Lutheran organisation
- **'volunteer'**: any person serving in an unpaid capacity in an entity of the church, including in ministry, worship, leadership and governance roles

Specific to this policy

- **'child'**: any child or young person under the age of 18 years
- **'complainant'**: a person who makes a complaint
- **'emotional (psychological) harm, harassment or abuse'**: negative and unwanted behaviour towards a person (or group of people) that offends, humiliates, intimidates or undermines the person; psychological harassment or abuse or harm is often repeated or part of a pattern of behaviour, which alone may be relatively minor but cumulatively can become a serious form of violence that can have serious psychological effects on a person; behaviour that is a once-off occurrence is considered to be harmful if it is sufficiently serious
- **'harm'**: a reference to 'harm' should be taken to mean physical or psychological harm (whether caused by an act or omission), including harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect
- **'national police check'**: summary of an individual's offender history in Australia and a record of their criminal history relating to convictions, finding of guilt or pending court proceedings
- **'physical harm or abuse'**: any incident where a person is threatened or physically attacked

by direct or indirect application of force that creates a risk to health, safety and wellbeing, whether intentional or unintentional, including striking, scratching, biting, spitting or any other type of direct physical contact, throwing objects at or towards a person, attacking a person with or without any type of weapon, pushing, shoving, tripping or grabbing a person

- **'respondent'**: a person who is the subject of a complaint; this may be a church worker, employee or volunteer
- **'sexual harm, harassment or abuse'**: this is where a person uses power or authority over a child or vulnerable adult to involve them in sexual activity; this sexual activity might be in person or online; physical force is sometimes involved; manipulation, grooming, bribes and threats are more common; the sexual activity might include fondling of the genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration, or exposing the child (or vulnerable adult) to pornography; whilst the majority is committed by adults a significant proportion of instances of sexual harm, harassment and abuse are committed by other children; an offending child may not be older but will have greater power than the target child
- **'spiritual harm or abuse'**: when a person with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploit another person, causing spiritual wounds; such wounding or scarring affects a person's relationship with God, and they may develop a distorted image of God and themselves
- **'vulnerable adults'**: adult persons who are vulnerable due to their circumstances, including but not limited to people with disabilities, the aged, those with mental or physical illnesses, chronically lonely people or those recently bereaved
- **'working with children type check'**: a background check in a respective jurisdiction that assesses whether a person poses an unacceptable risk to children; for example, in South Australia, the applicable check is the working with children check; as part of the assessment process, the screening unit will look at criminal history, child protection information and other information

Reference documents/legislation

- [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
- [Children and Young People Act 2008 \(ACT\)](#)
- [Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Child Protection Act 1999 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Working with Children \(Risk Management and Screening\) Act 2000 \(Qld\)](#)
- [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)](#)
- [Child Safety \(Prohibited Persons\) Act 2016 \(SA\)](#)
- [Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 \(NT\)](#)
- [Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Worker Screening Act 2020 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 \(Tas\)](#)
- [Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013 \(Tas\)](#)
- [Children and Community Services Act 2004 \(WA\)](#)

Relevant LCA NZ policies and procedures

- Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Procedure www.lca.org.au/policies
- Child Safety Standards for Congregations www.lca.org.au/css
- Standards of Ethical Behaviour www.lca.org.au/seb

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