

GRLC COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT GUIDE

This document is written for church leaders to provide an overarching guidance on managing complaints within the church. It refers to processes for dealing with some specific types of issues

Within community, including the Christian communities, there will be conflicts, bad behaviour and things that go wrong. Dealing with these events well when they occur is an important part of living out our faith and provides an opportunity for growth for all people involved. We also have an obligation to keep people physically safe and we need to be able to identify and deal with safety concerns.

PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING COMPLAINTS

This procedure is a commitment to justice and righteousness in how we work in relationship and as a community. Jesus uncompromisingly told the truth in love. He called people to act rightly and uphold the rights of those who had been oppressed or were powerless to get justice (Matthew 23:23). This commitment means calling abusers to true change in heart and action. This differs greatly from guilt-ridden remorse. What is needed is a readiness to accept discipline and make restitution. These are indicators of true change (Matthew 3:7-12). In Ezekiel 18:30-31, God requires the abuser to take responsibility for the hurt caused to the victim and a complete change of attitude and behaviour.

The following Principles should guide the approach:

- Safety of individuals. All steps should be mindful of the safety and well-being of all involved (including the accused), particularly the weak and vulnerable.
- Seeking of the truth with love. Without truth there can be no real justice, and for grace to prosper.
- Procedural fairness (also known as natural justice), this involves the steps of acting as quickly as possible, providing clear communication, acting in a non-biased manner and allowing individuals the opportunity to respond to accusations or findings.
- Evidence based decision making by unbiased authorities.
- Adhere to the church's Privacy policy (POLICY) and protect, as much as possible, the privacy and confidentiality of all parties concerned.
- Comply with Baptist Association and Government rules and regulations.
- Management of conflict of interest.
- Recording of details, decisions and outcomes.
- Seek to further the Kingdom of God in the lives of all involved.

STEPS IN COMPLAINT

While the details will vary from case to case depending upon the severity, each incident or complaint follows the following steps. Cases involving low-level conflict may move through the process faster than more serious cases, which may require reporting up the chain and a more detailed approach. It is, however recommended that the process below is followed and documented regardless of the seriousness.

1. Complaint or concern identified

A complaint or grievance may come in the form of a phone call, email, mail, observed conduct or in conversation with a staff member or relevant Safe Church officer. It may first be made at a local church level to another person in the congregation or leadership.

In the first instance it is important that the matter is taken seriously, and the complainant is provided assurance that their concerns will be addressed quickly and thoroughly.

DO

- Listen
- Reassure that it will be dealt with
- Follow the procedure guide relevant to the complaint or concern
- Ask for help from your direct report or Safe Church Team to navigate the complaint or concern
- Follow up

DON'T

- Make promises you can't keep
- Be dismissive
- Tell others who don't need to know

In the case of a concern over child welfare, the details should be noted in the *Safe Church Concerns Form* ([doc hyperlink](#)).

2. Immediate Response

- a) **Safety.** There should be an immediate assessment of the safety of the people involved and steps taken to protect them from danger, including action such as separating the complainant from the situation. The incident should be contained to protect people, including applying medical attention, and if possible, preserving evidence which normally involves isolating the area and separating witnesses.
- b) **Who should respond.** Determine who is the correct person to deal with the following phases of the process. If it is not you, work through how quickly it should be reported up the chain for someone else to get involved.
- c) **Details.** Establishing as much detail as possible is helpful on the immediate management of the case. It is important to get as much detail as possible, and for the complainant and witnesses to write down their account of the situation as soon as possible. The person who received the complaint should note the details of the complaint down.
- d) **Reporting.** An assessment is to be made on the seriousness of the case is to be reported to the appropriate authority, which may include civil authorities. Check the handy guide below to see the recommended responsible person. If the case is reported up the chain, the person who it is reported to should indicate if they have assumed responsibility.

3. Identify Management Process

Once the immediate steps are taken, the person responsible for the case should make an assessment as to which complaints process to follow. The specific process may need to alter as the case progresses and further details are established.

- a) WHS Issues: *WHS Procedures fill in an incident/ hazard report*

- b) Conflict Resolution *Policy 3- The Procedure for Conflict Resolution* sets out a procedure for resolving low-level conflict between two or more staff, volunteers, members or attenders of the Church in a pastoral and restorative manner, rather than through a formal complaint handling procedure.
- c) Complaints against staff and volunteers (*Policy 4 – Procedures for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*), deals with serious breaches of the Code of Conduct. The Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers sets out a procedure by which a complaint or information relating to a serious breach of the Code of Conduct can be received, investigated, reported where necessary resolved.
- d) Child Protection Issues – *Policy 5- The Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns* sets out a procedure to follow when a complaint or information about any form of child protection concern is received. In NSW this includes a Child Abuse Offence, Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct involving a Child, or that a child is at Risk of Significant Harm.

4. Case Management

For low-level conflicts, the matter may be handled by the direct report of the complainant(s) or the case may be managed by a staff or volunteer further up the chain.

For more serious cases, either the Senior Pastor or the CLT will nominate who will be the Case Manager, this may be an individual or a team. The Case manager will ensure within the above procedures that:

- Procedures are followed correctly.
- Support structures are in place for all impacted people. This includes complainant and defendant but may also include other people impacted by the issue.
- Provide advice to the church leadership on communication and outcomes.
- Records are properly retained and stored

5. Investigation

Nearly all cases will require investigation. The procedures provide guidance on the details of the investigation. The aim of the investigation is to establish the facts of the case, and every effort should be made to ensure that the investigations are fair and thorough, as the outcomes of the investigation form the basis of follow-on action.

6. Decision Making

In many cases there will need to be decisions made on the outcomes of the investigation. For serious cases, this needs to be done by a person/people of appropriate authority, in an unbiased manner and informed by the facts. Guidance should be sought from the Senior Pastor/CLT on who is appropriate for the specific case, but normally it would be someone of sufficient experience, removed from investigation and management of the case.

There should be an opportunity for the impacted people to appeal against a finding, and a process of independent review. This will normally close the complaint.

7. Reporting Outcomes

The procedures detail the specific reporting requirements. The outcomes, and in some cases details of decision making, are to be reported to the relevant external agencies. There may

also be a need, taking due regard to privacy that a wider group may need to be informed of the outcomes. The details and extent of the disclosure should be minimised, and only contain information to assist in the ongoing resolution of the incident.

8. Restoration

Often incidences and the complaint processes will reveal significant personal issues and may damage relationships. This is an important opportunity for personal and spiritual growth and the Church Leadership should put in place arrangements (including counselling, mentoring, or a restoration process) to assist the individuals to move forward from the incident.

GRLC COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT HANDY GUIDE

Incident Type	Summary	Immediate Action	Lead Staff	Lead 2021	Policy
Safety Hazard	Danger or risk to the environment has been identified	Minimise hazard Fill out <i>GRLC Incident/Hazard Form</i>	Advise Katharine (katharine@grlc.org.au)	WHS Team Leader	WHS Policy
Safety Incident/Accident	Something has happened that has caused injury and/or damage	Deal with incident Fill out <i>GRLC Incident/Hazard Form</i>	Report to Katharine	WHS Team Leader	WHS Policy
Conflict between staff, volunteers or church members	Procedure for resolving low-level conflict between two or more staff, volunteers, members or attenders	Listen. Refrain from making judgment. follow procedure 3, document and ask for help if needed.	Direct report of complainant or report up chain if required. Report to SLT member at some point during/ after process.	SLT	03 - The Procedure for Conflict Resolution
Complaint against staff or volunteers	Deals with breaches of the Code of Conduct	Listen to complaint Have complainant report to SLT member or Grievance Officer	Report to Scott as soon as possible	Safe Church Team Leader	04 - Procedures for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers
Complaint or information on a child protection matter	Complaint or information about any form of child protection concern is received	Make situation safe and make notes. Immediately advise Ministry Leader and complete <i>Safe Church Concerns Form</i>	Report to Sophie as soon as possible	Safe Church Team Leader	05 - The Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns