

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Adopted by Church Leadership Team on 14 November 2023

COMMITMENT

Our Church is committed to modelling the love of Christ to all people we have contact with. We are committed to partnering with individuals, parents and families in providing meaningful, welcoming experiences in safe environments. We want to ensure that when anyone (including children, young people and vulnerable adults) interacts with the ministries and activities of our Church that they feel safe – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The NSW Government requires organisations to implement ten Child Safe Standards with respect to children and young people and we are committed to upholding these standards in our Church community. Every adult working with children or young people holds a valid Working with Children Check. We use strict screening procedures. We have a process for anyone (including children and young people) to be able to raise any concerns they may have, and for the Church to respond in a timely and appropriate manner, including reporting concerns to the relevant authorities if appropriate. We train our leaders and volunteers to understand their responsibilities, to ensure our Church is a safe place.

We encourage anyone with concerns regarding the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person at our Church, or any other concerns about safety, to contact a member of the Safe Church Team. The Church will publish the names of our Safe Church Team members on our webpage and/or noticeboard.

PURPOSE

The Church has adopted the *Safe Church Policy* (the **Policy**) to:

- help us live out our biblical mandate to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself’ (Mark 12:30-31);
- to create an environment so that all people can confidently be and feel safe;
- provide a framework to inform the provision of safe environments and programs for all whom we have contact with, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults; and
- meet our legal obligations in relation to:
 - implementing the 10 Child Safe Standards;
 - Work, Health and Safety.
 - staff and volunteers engaged in Child-related Work; and
 - reporting matters to government authorities, including making reports to police, making mandatory reports, and making notifications about reportable conduct.

The Policy outlines the commitment of the Church to principles in various areas. More detail regarding the practical implementation of these commitments is available in the relevant procedures and guidelines

SCOPE

This Policy applies to:

- all Church Leadership, staff and volunteers; and
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Church Officers

The Church Leadership Team is to exercise due diligence to ensure the church complies with its general obligations under the WHS Act and Safe Church requirements including consultation, reporting, training and responding to information regarding incidents, complaints, hazards and risks.

Due diligence includes taking reasonable steps:

- to acquire and keep up-to-date knowledge of work health and safety matters, including changes in regulations and best practice;
- to gain an understanding of the nature of the hazards and associated risks associated with the ministries of the church and generally;
- to ensure that the church has appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimize risks;
- to ensure that the church has appropriate processes for receiving and considering information regarding incidents, hazards, complaints and risks, and responding in a timely way to that information
- to ensure that all church members and participants have access and trained in the process and procedures
- to ensure that the church maintains proper records for the required period

WHS Officers

The Work Health & Safety (WHS) Officers at Georges River Life Church are responsible for the implementation of this policy and associated programs. They will look at WHS issues as they arise and be involved in the development, monitoring, and periodic review of any WHS management programs or procedures at GRLC.

Staff, Volunteers, and Contractors

A worker is someone who carries out work for the church, such as: staff, a volunteer, a student gaining work experience, a contractor or sub-contractor, an employee of a contractor or sub-contractor, an apprentice or trainee, an outworker

Workers must ensure as far as reasonably practical that they:

- comply with GRLC's WHS and associated WHS programs and procedures;
- ensure their own health and safety;
- ensure that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons; and,
- Identify, prevent and report any unsafe act, hazard or behaviours that put themselves and/or others (including visitors and congregation members) to the WHS and/or Church Officers.

It is also the responsibility of contractors and sub-contractors to conduct risk assessments in accordance with WHS Legislation and recommended practices for all tasks, jobs or activities. Failure to comply with the above may be considered a breach of the contract and could be sufficient grounds for termination of the contract.

Church Participants

Participants in church activities are expected to take measures to protect their own safety and comply with reasonable instruction of Church officers.

ORGANISATION

The Senior Pastor is responsible to the CLT for the enactment of this policy, but may delegate the execution, but not accountability, of specific duties to a staff members.

The following teams are to be formed:

Safe Church Team consisting of at least one male and one female to provide oversight of the church's Safe Church Program, including Safe Church Policy and procedures and to provide oversight of the management of Safe Church/Child Protection Concerns and reports. The roles and responsibilities of this team are at Annex A.

WHS Team to provide oversight of the church's Work Health and Safety program, including policy and procedures. The roles and responsibilities of this team are at Annex B.

1. ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AT THE CHURCH

As a Church, we commit to providing places, services and programs that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

1.1. Church Leadership are to:

- a) recognise that children and young people are an integral part of the Church and talk about this in services, sermons, training events and meetings;
- b) involve children and young people in the routine of Church life as appropriate;
- c) consider the needs of children and young people when they make decisions about budgets, buildings, renovations, use of property, décor, or catering; and
- d) encourage children and young people to have input in decisions that affect them by including them in Church forums and meetings as appropriate.

1.2. Safe Church Team are to:

- a) talk with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to be safe, feel safe, to be listened to and to have their views respected (including discussing what they should do and who they should approach if they feel unsafe or hurt, or they suspect that someone else is unsafe or hurt); and
- b) ensure their contact details are accessible to children.

1.3. Staff and volunteers:

- a) listen to children and take seriously what children say;

- b) talk with children and young people about the kinds of behaviours, attitudes or 'culture' that they would like to promote in their group; and
- c) encourage children and young people to have input regarding the content of programs and types of activities they engage in.

Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

2. STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

2.1 Screening, selection and induction of Staff and Volunteers

The Church will:

- a) undertake screening processes for all staff and volunteers;
- b) engage in fair and transparent selection processes for all staff and volunteers;
- c) provide induction for all staff and volunteers; and
- d) recruit, select and induct all staff and volunteers in accordance with the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*.

2.2 Training and Resourcing of Staff and Volunteers

The Church will:

- a) ensure that staff and volunteers develop the knowledge and skills to create safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people;
- b) ensure that staff and volunteers have access to information about creating safe spaces and that they all undergo appropriate training regarding the available Procedures, Guidelines and Forms referred to in the Policy;
- c) support staff and volunteers with adequate resources to enable them to maintain and promote safe spaces for everyone, particularly children and young people; and
- d) implement the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*.

2.3 Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

The Church will:

- a) provide spaces, programs and relationships that are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe;
- b) require staff and volunteers to uphold the *Code of Conduct* which includes expected standards of behaviour for those who engage in ministry with children and/or vulnerable people; and
- c) expect staff and volunteers to follow *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*.

3. CONFLICT, COMPLAINTS, INCIDENTS AND CONCERNS

3.1. Responding to Child Protection Concerns

The Church will:

- a) ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all child protection concerns and any complaints relating to child sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child in accordance with the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*; and
- b) ensure that all child protection concerns and complaints will be reported to the relevant government departments and, if necessary, police as soon as possible.

3.2. Complaint Handling

The Church will:

- a) respond to complaints in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*; and
- b) where there is a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has engaged in abuse, including child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct involving a child, treat the allegation as an allegation relating to a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* and respond in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*.
- c) in the event of receiving a complaint that relates to a minor breach of the Code of Conduct or a grievance, may determine to respond to the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Resolving Conflict*.

3.3 Resolving Conflict

In the event of receiving a complaint that relates to a minor breach of the Code of Conduct or a grievance, the Church may determine to respond to the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Resolving Conflict*.

4. SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

4.1. Physical Environments

The Church will:

- a) appoint a Work, Health and Safety Team to assist the Church to comply with Work, Health and Safety requirements;
- b) ensure that paid pastoral staff and all members of the Work, Health and Safety Team have completed the Baptist Insurance Services WHS online training (or equivalent training).
- c) will consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk to all people, particularly children and vulnerable people. will identify and address risks arising from the physical environment in which programs and activities take place (see Risk Assessment and Safe Church Risk Management Plan at sections 5.2 and 5.3);
- d) consider whether any ministries it supports have appropriate child protection practices in place;
- e) take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable people when it provides direct support to overseas ministries (that is, not via the relevant Australian entity of the overseas ministry), in accordance with ACNC External Conduct Standard 4 (this includes consideration of whether supporting orphanages overseas is appropriate); and
- f) If the Church has any residential property that is identifiable as being church property then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property obtain and hold WWCC clearance for the duration of their residence.

4.2. Online Environments

The Church will:

- a) ensure that online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed; and
- b) promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication.

Please see the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People* for more detail.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 Risk Assessments

The Church will:

- a) The Church will ensure that ministry leaders complete and make a record of a risk assessment in relation to any program or activity undertaken at, for or with the Church.
 - for regular activities, the risk assessment will be conducted at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in the program activities, attendance or location.
 - for special or 'one-off' activities a risk assessment for that 'one off' activity will be completed.
- b) ensure that appropriate and reasonable precautions are adopted to address risks identified as part of a risk assessment. When considering what measures are appropriate, the Church will consider the likelihood of an incident occurring, the seriousness of the consequences and the difficulty of avoiding the risk. Risk Assessment are to consider all factors and are to reduce to the risk to as low as reasonably practical. If the risk cannot be reduced to an acceptable level the activity is not to occur. at least annually, ensure that the Work Health and Safety Team reviews risk assessments and gives appropriate feedback to each ministry area; and
- c) store risk assessment forms in a secure location for a period of at least 45 years (preferably 100 years).

5.2 Persons of Concern

The Church will manage any person identified as a Person of Concern in accordance with *An Australian Baptist Response to Persons of Concern*.

5.3 Safe Church Risk Management Plan

The Church will:

- a) as a part of the annual risk assessment process outlined in section 5.2, specifically consider risks to children and vulnerable adults;
- b) at least annually, ensure that the Safe Church Team reviews the part of the risk assessments relating to risks to children and vulnerable adults and gives appropriate feedback to each ministry area;
- c) require staff and volunteers to abide by the *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*;

- d) carefully consider and address any disclosures received on the Screening Questionnaire; and

ensure that any staff or volunteer in child related work who poses a serious risk to children will be removed from their role in accordance with the Failure to Protect provisions outlined in Section 43B of the NSW Crimes Act 1900 (or Section 66A of the ACT Crimes Act 1900).

6. THIRD PARTIES AND AFFILIATED ENTITIES

The Church will:

- a) require any third party (tenant or external party using church property) that provides services to children and/or young people to provide written confirmation of their compliance with the Child Safe Standards at least annually.
- b) ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with the Child Safe Standards including annual reports to the governance body regarding child safety.

7. RECORDKEEPING

7.1 Storage of Records

The Church will retain all written records for a minimum of 45 years (preferably 100 years), in hard copy and/or electronically in a secure manner.

Record type	Required Approach
Sensitive information	The records will be stored in a manner to protect confidentiality and only accessed by a limited number of authorised persons (For example <i>Screening Questionnaires</i> , <i>Safe Church Concerns Forms</i> , or incident reports)
Hard copy	The records will be stored in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and the physical condition of the records.
Electronic	The records will be stored in a manner to ensure security and to allow for ongoing accessibility.

Records to which this item applies includes, but is not limited to:

- a) operational records such as ministry information forms, attendance records, staff/volunteer rosters, position descriptions, risk assessments;
- b) staff and volunteer records (as outlined in the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*);
- c) general child safety records such as the *Safe Church Register*, the annual safe Church commitment by third parties and affiliated entities, dated copies of this Policy and the relevant procedures, forms and guidelines from time to time; and
- d) specific child safety incident records such as any completed *Safe Church Concerns Form*, any other document relating to reporting an incident or handling a complaint, and any contemporaneous notes regarding reporting decisions.

Please see the *Privacy Policy* for more detail.

8. REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY

8.1 Internal Review

The Church will review this policy annually.

8.2 External Accountability

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager in relation to any safety and wellbeing incident that relates to a police report, mandatory report, reportable conduct allegation, legal claim, work safe report, and/or any complaint about an Accredited or Recognised Minister.

Please see the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers* and the *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns* for more detail.

ANNEXES

- A. Safe Church Team Duties
- B. Work Health and Safety Team Duties

A. SAFE CHURCH TEAM DUTIES

A person appointed as a Safe Church Team Member should be a mature Christian who has been recruited according to the Procedure for Staff and Volunteers, have a current WWCC clearance and have attended a Creating Safe Spaces workshop in the last 4 years. One of the team members is to be designated as the accountable leader. Close and direct liaison with the Senior Pastor / Senior leader and an ability to maintain confidentiality is essential.

Safe Church Team Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Safe Church Team under the direction of the Team Leader include:

- to provide oversight of the church's Safe Church program, including *Safe Church Policy* and procedures.
- management of Safe Church/Child Protection concerns/reports.

Specific Roles:

1. Oversight of Safe Church Policy and Procedures

- Preparing Safe Church Policy and Procedures for the church in line with legal responsibilities and Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT recommendations
- Implementing *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Promoting awareness of and adherence to *Safe Church Policy* and procedures (including ensuring that staff and volunteers have completed National Police Checks, WWCC clearances and Creating Safe Spaces training)
- Maintaining records related to *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Preparing regular reports for Church Leadership Team meetings
- Analysing data to identify areas requiring management attention
- Reviewing *Safe Church Policy* and procedures annually or more often if required due to changing legislation
- Receiving feedback from church leaders, children, families and communities regarding *Safe Church Policy* and procedures
- Overseeing the completion of the 'Safe Church Health Check' every 3 years

2. Management of Safe Church/Child Protection Concerns and Incidents

- Receiving reports of child protection concerns from church staff, volunteers, ministry leaders and/or church members
- Providing support in following the procedure for responding to child protection concerns and incidents
- Contacting the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager to discuss action plan/appropriate action
- Making any reporting calls (to Police, Government authorities) as required
- Ensuring reporting in line with relevant Reportable Conduct Legislation
- Ensuring child protection concerns and subsequent responses have been appropriately documented
- Ensuring adequate follow-up and pastoral care of all persons involved in a child protection concern/incident
- Assisting with legal, procedural and risk management issues related to a child protection concern/incident
- Keeping records, filing complaints and reports of investigations in a secure file, in accordance with the record-keeping procedure

B. WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAM DUTIES

The Work Health and Safety (WHS) Team will consist of (ideally between 2-4 people with an accountable leader.

Every member of the WHS team, and all paid pastoral staff, are to complete the BIS WHS training so that they can competently undertake their responsibilities.

The responsibility of the Work Health and Safety Team includes:

- To provide oversight of the church's Work Health and Safety program, including policy and procedures

Specific Roles:

- Develop and implement appropriate WHS policy and procedures including the following:
 - Evacuation and Emergency responses
 - Safe Manual Handling, Visual and Auditory Care
 - Risk Assessments
- Address health and safety concerns within one month of the concern being raised.
- Report to senior leadership team meetings regarding work health and safety and provide reports as appropriate
- Ensure Risk Assessments are completed for all church ministry programs (both onsite and offsite)
- Ensure incident report documents are completed and stored, and that serious or dangerous incidents are notified to Baptist Insurance Services (or relevant insurer) as required.
- Ensure that all incidents are properly investigated
- Undertake a safe environment audit of the church site a least once a year, or more regularly for high risk areas, ensuring that any concerns are appropriately rectified.
- Ensure the conduct of WHS Education and training program for the church
 - Each member of the WHS team, and all paid pastoral staff, should complete WHS training.
 - WHS teams should undertake the free online WHS training offered by Baptist Insurance Services and are encouraged to make use of the many other resources provided by Baptist Insurance Services on their website to assist local churches in general risk management and church specific risk management.
- Build and foster a WHS culture in the church
- Any other tasks as advised in the Baptist Insurance Services Risk Management Guide for Churches.