



**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
and Procedures**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Policy Statement

The Echuca Community Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all its Members, Leaders and particularly to children.

The Church's Policy & Procedures aims to reduce the risk of Abuse occurring, and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur.

1.2 Scope

The Policy & Procedures apply to:

- All Ministries authorised by or under the control of the Church, including those ministries undertaken at the Church's premises or away from the Church's premises.
- All Leaders within the Church or engaged by the Church.

1.3 Authority

These are the Policy & Procedures of Echuca Community Church and were adopted for use by Eldership on 4th September, 2011.

The Church is committed to implementing the Policy & Procedures and training our Leaders in its content and application.

1.4 Definitions

Child Any person under the age of 18.

Abuse Can consist of one or more of but is not restricted to the following:

Physical Abuse – Any non-accidental physical injury.

Sexual Abuse - Any sexual act or threat to perform such upon another person. It occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. It does not necessarily involve genital contact but is any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.

Church The Echuca Community Church located at 13 Rose Street, Echuca.

Eldership The Governing body of Echuca Community Church exercising powers consistent with the Constitution of Echuca Community Church.

Helpers Any unpaid person over the age of 16 who is invited by a Leader to assist them in their Ministry.

Leader Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of members placed in their care whilst holding a formal position in a recognised Ministry of the Church. A leader could include but is not limited to:

- Religious Practitioner,
- Small group Leaders,
- Music, Drama or other Ministry Leaders,
- Counsellors,
- Youth Leaders,
- Sunday School Superintendents,
- Teachers,
- Kid's Club Leaders,
- Scripture Teachers,
- Sports Coaches and Organisers.

Members Any person, including children, who attends or participates in Church Ministries.

Ministry Any organised activity that is authorised by the Church.

Ministry Leader The person recognised and authorised by the Church as head of a ministry.

2. EXTERNAL POLICIES

We acknowledge that some Ministries in the Church might have external affiliation with other organisations. These organisations will possibly have policies governing the issues of Member and/or Child Safety and Abuse. The Church's Policy & Procedures are not intended to replace or conflict with the other policies, but instead to operate in conjunction with them.

3. POLICY REVIEW

The Policy & Procedures will be reviewed from time to time by the Eldership. The Eldership may, at their discretion, inform the ministries involved when the date of review will occur, and invite them to suggest any changes to the policy. Recommendations by the ministries should be submitted in writing to the Eldership for consideration.

4. OBLIGATIONS

4.1 Spiritual

The core beliefs of the Church require us to treat all people with love and respect and to care for those who are vulnerable and in need of nurture and protection.

4.2 Legal

The Church and its Leaders are subject to Federal and State legislation and principles established through common law.

4.3 Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as Abuse, but are unacceptable behaviour for Church Leaders. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature.
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.
- Inappropriate touching.
- Inappropriate literature (e.g. PG, M, MA, R or X rated material used with young Children).
- Acts of violence committed by a leader in the course of an activity.

The age of individuals is recognised as one of the determinants in deciding what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ministry Leaders will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

5. SELECTION & SCREENING

5.1 Leaders

Leaders involved in Children's Ministry must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to Leaders commencing Child-related Ministries, the following precautions will be taken:

- Volunteer Leaders will be Members of the Church and have regularly attended the Church for at least 6 months.
- Candidate Leaders will complete an application form which requests details of referees and permission to contact them.
- Referees will be checked and spoken to, using an agreed set of questions which have been drafted by the Church. The questions will seek to establish the applicant's suitability for the role or position and the conversation will be documented and retained on file.
- Short listed candidate Leaders will be interviewed by an experienced and responsible member of the Church prior to being accepted as a Leader
- A Police and/or Community Services check which complies with the legislative requirements of Victoria will be requested and received prior to the Leader commencing their proposed role.

Where the Church has identified that an applicant has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence they can not, under any circumstances, be considered for child related ministries.

These offences do not preclude the applicant from serving in other Ministries and the church would welcome their contribution in more appropriate areas.

5.2 Helpers

Helpers are expected to have an awareness of the content of the Policy & Procedures and be prepared to work within them.

Any Helper who provides assistance in a Children's Ministry must be supervised by a Leader at all times and will be accountable to that Leader.

Leaders who accept the assistance of a Helper must be satisfied of the Helpers maturity and their suitability for Children's Ministry.

6. TRAINING

All Leaders will be issued with a copy of this policy and training in;

- The content and application of the Church's Member Protection Policy & Procedures,
- Reporting procedures and the associated legal requirements

In addition Ministry Leaders responsible for recruiting Leaders for Child related Ministries will undertake further education on Child/Member Protection.

7. A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Incidents of Abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, two Leaders will always be present when working with or supervising Children.

Leaders will not visit Children in their homes unless a parent is present or another Leader accompanies them.

When transporting Children, Leaders should never be alone with a child in a car. Where this is not practical, Leaders will take Children directly to and from arranged venues and will not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.

All personal counselling is to be carried out within sight of another Leader.

Leaders will respect a Member's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.

Adults and Children are expected to respect each other's privacy during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No Leader will be alone in a room with a Child while either is changing.

Initiations and secret ceremonies are prohibited. All aspects of every Child-related programme will be open to observation by parents/guardians.

Leaders have the right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at Child-related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

8. DISCIPLINING CHILDREN

It is not the responsibility of the Church or its Leaders to discipline a Child. If a Child does not abide by the rules set down by the Leader, or is an obstruction to the care of other Children or may cause harm to other Children, the Child will be removed and referred back to their parent or guardian.

At no time will a Leader administer any form of physical discipline.

9. REPORTING PROCEDURES

An independent person will be appointed by the church with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations that arise. The name, address and contact telephone number will be freely available to all leaders.

Documented reporting and escalation procedures will be established by the Church for handling allegations of abuse.

If there are reasonable grounds to suspect a Child has been or is suffering Abuse, the Police and the Church's Insurer will be contacted **immediately**.

The phone number for the Police is: 03-5482-2255

The phone number for our Church Insurer: 03-5483-1031.

Reasonable grounds can be assumed when:

1. A Child discloses that he or she has been abused, and/or
2. Someone close to a Child (e.g. sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of that Child.

The Police will also be notified if a Child discloses an incident of Abuse that has occurred somewhere other than the Church (e.g. home or school).

If a disclosure of abuse is made, the person who receives the disclosure will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure. This will include:

- Treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim. The matter should not be swept under the carpet.
- Not pushing the Child to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation.
- Assuring the Child that they are understood: that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault, and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- Reporting the abuse to the police and the church's insurer.
- Not making contact with the alleged perpetrator. If the Leader is already providing counsel to the alleged perpetrator, it may be advisable for

another person to assume this responsibility for the duration of any investigation.

- If the alleged assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the Child should be retained and handed to the police for forensic examination.
- Maintaining confidentiality.

Any disclosures by a Child and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.

The Church reserves the right to carry out Church disciplinary procedures in accordance with the constitution of the Church.

Where an allegation is made the accused Leader will be removed from all Children's ministry pending the outcome of all investigations.

10. ALCOHOL & DRUGS

The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on Church grounds or during an activity is not to be condoned by any Leader. Any Child found to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so the Child can be returned home immediately.

Any Child required to take prescription medication will provide a letter from the parents/guardians to the Ministry Leader.

APPENDIX 1 – Legal Obligations

Below is a précis of legislative requirements with respect to Child Abuse that apply in Victoria. Every attempt has been made to ensure this information is accurate however a review should be undertaken regularly to ensure the information remains correct and current.

VICTORIA

The Working with Children Check (WWCC) is a mandatory checking system which helps protect children by checking a child-related worker's criminal history for serious sexual, serious violence or serious drug offences and findings from professional disciplinary bodies. It is different from a police check and doesn't necessarily replace one.

A WWCC is required for all existing employees, new employees, volunteers or self-employed persons who undertake child-related work. People in child-related occupations must submit an application to the WWCC Unit who in turn will provide the applicant with an Assessment Notice or an Interim Negative Notice

Under the Working with Children Act 2005 it is an offence (punishable by up to two years imprisonment) to knowingly engage in child-related work without a current Assessment Notice.

The WWCC will be incrementally phased in between 2006 and 2011. More information on the WWCC can be found at www.justice.vic.gov.au

Police Checks See above

Reporting Abuse There is no specific legislation that requires volunteer Church Leaders to report suspicions of abuse however you do have a "duty of care" and we would strongly suggest that all reasonable suspicions of abuse be reported to the authorities.

Where the church is a provider of education, teachers and principles are required to report reasonable suspicions of abuse.

Reports should be made to:

Department of Human Services
Child Protection & Care
Community Care Division
20/55 Collins Street
Melbourne Vic, 3000
Phone Number: 9616 7777
After Hours: 131 278
URL: www.dhs.vic.gov.au

APPENDIX 3 – Interview Questions

WORKING WITH CHILDREN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions asked in this interview may make you feel uncomfortable but they are a necessary part of our child safety policy and must be answered. The answers you provide will be kept confidential where possible but may be divulged to other Leaders with in the Church.

1. Why have you applied for this position and why do you feel you are suitable for the role?
2. Please describe any positive experiences you have had with children or young people
3. Please describe any negative experiences you have had with children or young people
4. Have you ever been in a situation where you have disciplined a child or young person, if so how did you handle this situation?
5. Have you ever been investigated for violent or sexually related offences, if so, what were the circumstances?
6. Is there any other information relating to your suitability for this position, which we should be aware of?