



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Creating a safe environment for
children and vulnerable adults in
our Church: Safe Leaders guide



Culture of **Safety**

<http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>



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For anyone working with children or vulnerable adults issues of care, protection and safety have always been complex, but are increasingly so. More than ever, we are aware of issues of safety, our duty of care, the vulnerability of children and some adults, and the possibility of abuse. Standards of care are now expected as a matter of law and of our community practice are higher than in the past.

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (Synod) has developed a policy on the prevention of abuse of children and vulnerable adults because it has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all people are safe. The Safe Leaders Guide should be read in conjunction with the Policy on Creating a Safe Environment for Children and Vulnerable Adults which can be downloaded from the Synod's website <http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>

The responsibility of leadership

Having opportunities to use God-given gifts through leadership can be one of the most satisfying experiences for a person in the life of the Church.

Recruitment and selection of team leaders and members is an important task since leaders are representatives of the Church. We need safe leaders - leaders who respect other people's boundaries, receive regular supervision, have other people's best interests at heart, who are mature in their faith and who are in accountable and transparent teams.

In order to achieve the goal of keeping children safe through leadership in the Church, **we commit to:**

1. Safe recruitment of leaders
2. Adequate training for leaders
3. Continued supervision for leaders

Congregations through their Church Councils should not accept leadership offers without question no matter how well intentioned. Congregations **must** exercise care when inviting individuals to fulfil leadership positions within their children's and young people's programs.

Minimum attendance policy

If a person is not known to the congregation, and has had no previous leadership experience that can be substantiated, it is advisable that they are part of a congregation for at least 6 months before being considered for a leadership position within that congregation.

Safe Ministry Screening

Safe Ministry Screening should be undertaken through a:

- Safe Ministry Check (see the Safe Ministry Training Manual 2012).
- Working with Children Check or equivalent.

Position information and suitability interview

The applicant for leadership should meet with team leaders to find out more about the role and to explore whether he/she is suited for it. This process is intended to assist in further identifying the applicant's skills, gifts and talents and how these can best be used to further the Church's mission.

Formalising the appointment

Once an individual is selected for a position and a confirmation of a positive Working With Children Check is obtained the appointment needs to be formally recognised as approved by the Church Council in its meeting minutes. Recognising this

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person's leadership role through commissioning or other act in a service or worship may also be appropriate. Leaders should also be asked to sign an agreement to comply with all Synod policies and procedures including policies for the safety of children and young people.

Ensure all leaders have received appropriate training and information to enable them to successfully share in their ministry.

Ministry reviews

Appointments to leadership positions will be reviewed periodically.

Supervision

Leaders should be provided with adequate supervision. This can be done by ensuring that two leaders are present at all activities so that the possibility of inappropriate behaviour, or allegation of such behaviour, is minimised. Plans should be in place to ensure appropriate resources and support is available during all activities.

The components of healthy ministry supervision are: clear expectations, adequate ministry support, a commitment to develop leaders, a clear set of boundaries (code of conduct), and a well communicated process for conflict resolution and complaints handling.

Recognition of leaders

Recognition at the beginning and end of a period of service and at significant stages demonstrates a clear commitment from the congregation to prayerful and consistent support and affirmation of leaders.

Responsibilities of leaders

Leaders must keep the Church Council informed of the activities planned in youth and children's ministry. Leaders should report regularly on activities including documented risk

management processes. The Church Council needs to be made aware of any planned activities with a high risk factor. These activities must be assessed prior to the activity being run.

There should always be a minimum of two leaders at any event organised for children and young people and an appropriate gender balance. An appropriate ratio of leaders to participants will vary from one activity to another. The Synod recommends where possible a ratio of 1 leader for every 6 children/young people in the activity for participants aged 5 and over, and 1 leader for every 4 children/young people for children under 5.

Managing behaviour

All leaders must seek to provide a safe environment for children and young people to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community and to grow in faith. It is essential for all groups to have clear expectations about behaviour standards.

Exit interviews - an opportunity to reflect

Exiting leaders should, in supervision, be afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experience of holding that leadership role and invited to comment on the roles further development/improvement.

Assistance with Safe Leadership

The full version of the Safe Leaders Guide can be downloaded from the Synod's website <http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>

If you need assistance with Safe Leadership, please contact the Culture of Safety Unit on (03) 9340 8810.