



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

**Creating a safe environment
for children and vulnerable
adults in our Church: Children**



Culture of Safety

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



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We are committed to protecting children from harm and abuse

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is committed to provide safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained. We seek to provide a safe environment for children to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community, and to grow in faith (A Safe Place for Children, Uniting Church Press, 1999).

We commit to being a community which:

- provides and maintains a welcoming and safe environment
- offers suitable and well-equipped leadership
- provides a level of resourcing that reflects the value of all people, in particular children
- provides clear and appropriate guidelines for managing the safety of people, in particular children, and its programs.

Why is there a policy?

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that children are safe.

To whom does the policy apply?

This policy on the prevention of child abuse applies to all members, officers, volunteers and attendees of the Church. Agencies of the Church also have their own policies.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is any act that endangers the child's physical or emotional health or development. These may be things people do to children or things they fail to do for them. Abuse occurs when those in positions of trust and power abuse that trust and make use of their power to harm children (ChildSafe team Members Pocket Guide, 17).

Roles and responsibilities of Presbyteries and Church Councils

Presbyteries and Church Councils each have specific roles and responsibilities. The policy outlines what these are.

Our principles for keeping children safe

To prevent child abuse in the Church we are committed to developing and maintaining an open and aware culture. The Church is committed to establishing a safe environment for children by:

1. Communicating openly and honestly
2. Being open to outside influence, transparency and accountability
3. Setting clear boundaries of behaviour between adults and children
4. Educating staff, volunteers and children to be aware of appropriate/inappropriate behaviour
5. Educating employees, volunteers and children to raise any concerns they have about children's safety
6. Vigilantly screening and selecting all employees and volunteers who work with children
7. Adopting a Code of Conduct for all adults who interact with children

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8. Providing adequate planning and supervision of children's programs and activities provided by the local church
9. Offering ongoing training opportunities to employees, volunteers and leaders in safe ministry with children and young people
10. Taking all concerns and reports of child abuse seriously and taking action immediately in accordance with statutory requirements and Synod policy
11. Supporting the process of investigation by relevant authorities of concerns about children and/or allegations of abuse
12. Introducing safeguards where a situation of risk has been or may be identified
13. Supporting families who have concerns about the safety of children and/or who are affected by child abuse
14. Making the process of handling of complaints clear to everyone involved

How to handle disclosures of abuse

Listen...do not add anything to what the child says

Reassure...the child they have done the right thing in speaking to you

Inform...the child you need to tell people who can help

Ensure...the child is not in immediate danger

Act...by reporting the matter to the authorities

How to report

Report all disclosures from children and young people alleging harm, abuse or neglect to both Child Protection Services and local Police. Inform the General Secretary of the allegation and the Congregation's proposed plan of support.

To report concerns that are life threatening ring Victoria/Tasmania Police on 000.

To report concerns about the immediate safety of a child, call the Child Protection Crisis Line 13 12 78 (24/7, toll free within Victoria)

Encourage adults who disclose historical abuse (that occurred when they were a child) to report the alleged abuse to Police or a counsellor, and in the event of the alleged abuser being a Minister or a Member or adherent, to the Church's Ethical Standards Officer.

Support for parents and children

Parents who have made complaints and children who have been allegedly abused will be supported by referral to Bethel Pastoral Centre, or another source of professional counselling and support and/or a victim support organisation.

Media inquiries

All media inquiries as a consequence of situations of abuse or critical events that create media interest should be responded to only by a spokesperson designated by the Uniting Church Synod Communications and Media Services Unit please ring (03) 9251 5222.

Where to find the full policy

Download the policy at:
<http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>

Assistance to implement this policy

If you need assistance to implement this policy, please contact the Culture of Safety Unit on (03) 9340 8810.