The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Policy

Safe Church Policy

C/2.1

Purpose

The Safe Church Policy supports the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod's (Synod) vision, mission, and ministry to create safe places for all people including children and anyone vulnerable. It details the Synod's response to the requirement for organisations to develop and implement a 'child and youth risk management strategy'.

Scope

Applies to all organisations within the Synod.

Safe Church policy statement

The Uniting Church in Australia, Qld Synod is committed to loving and serving all people. We commit to providing safe places where people are cared for, nurtured, and sustained. We aim to provide experiences which are free from discrimination, exclusion, bullying and abuse. The Synod welcomes everyone. The outworking of this often requires us to meet and work with people who are from all parts of society and to hold a particular concern for those on the margins who are hurt, disadvantaged or vulnerable. The Synod must care for children and those who are vulnerable and will seek to ensure they are safe and protected from harm. This responsibility includes reporting all incidents of suspected sexual abuse and grooming to the police.

Safe Church policy requirements

1. All organisations must formally adopt the Safe Church Policy annually.

2. All workers must be screened, trained, sign a code of conduct with a commitment to child safety (or a Statement of Personal Commitment) and be approved by the organisation's governing body before commencing in a role (paid or volunteer).

3. Systems are in place for planning safe programs and promoting safe physical and online environments.

4. Communication, ongoing training, and support is in place for all workers.

5. Systems are in place for managing breaches of the strategy, and responding to concerns, including the requirement to report all suspected sexual abuse, and grooming to police.

6. To participate in the Annual Safe Church Audit.

Obligations

7. As part of the risk management strategy, the organisation is required to establish and maintain a register of workers.

8. Under the Act, Blue Card Services has the power to conduct an audit of an organisation to ensure a register of workers is being maintained.

9. A risk management strategy must be reviewed at least annually and after any incidents to ensure that risks continue to be addressed and minimised throughout the organisation.

10. Assurance is provided to the Synod Standing Committee and Audit and Risk Committee via an Annual Safe Church Audit that all organisations are demonstrating compliance with the relevant legislation and UCA Policy.

Responsibilities

11. The organisation is responsible for the oversight of all activities within the organisation, including activities involving children and vulnerable people. They will oversee local arrangements which are appropriate for the organisation's size, availability of suitable leaders, local needs and demographics.

Mandatory Screening

12. All workers **must** undergo pre-appointment screening and be appointed by the organisation's governing body. All child-related roles **also** require the worker to comply with the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy.

13. Pre-appointment screening is required for working with vulnerable people. All workers are required to be deemed as suitable to apply for a Blue Card.

14. All persons with a negative notice or excluded or disqualified from requesting a Blue Card check from any state or territory of Australia **are not permitted to** work or volunteer with children and vulnerable people.

Legislative requirements

15. The Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (QLD) and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020 (QLD), National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) 2013, Disability Services Act 2006 and Disability Services Regulation 2017 have specific screening requirements for all persons working or volunteering with children and working or volunteering with disability services.

16. All organisations must have a risk management strategy. The Safe Church Policy is the Synod's risk management strategy for interacting with children and those who are vulnerable. It complies with the legislative framework for the Synod to have a child and youth risk management strategy and requires all people working and volunteering with children or vulnerable people, to meet these same screening standards.

17. The Safe Church Policy complies with the Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020 and aligns with the ten (10) National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, the Uniting Church in Australia's (UCA) National Child Safe Policy _Framework_ 2022, the UCA National Person of Concern _Policy_ Framework 2020 and the UCA Child Safe _Screening_ National Policy Framework 2020.

Mandatory Reporting

18. The Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents and the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers and Volunteers outline the steps to take when reporting incidents of suspected abuse, grooming or neglect, including breaches of behaviour and boundary violations. Using the Template for Complaints and Allegations and the Guide for Reporting Child Safety Concerns if required will ensure the organisation is meeting their legal obligations and fulfilling their duty of care to the children involved in their activities. A copy of each of these documents is available on the synod website.

19. Pursuant to Section 13E (1) of the _Child Protection Act 1999_ all teachers and early childhood educators are defined as a 'relevant person' and a 'particular person' mandated to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse and neglect. All adults must report all suspected sexual abuse and grooming to police. The Template for Complaints and Allegations and the Guide for Reporting Child Safety Concerns outlines the steps to take to when reporting incidents of suspected abuse or neglect.

Definitions

Term	Meaning
Act	The *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (QLD)*
Blue Card check	The blue card check is more than a police check. It looks for charges, convictions and any other information that may deem a person unsuitable to work with children and young people. All applicants and blue card holders are monitored daily by the Queensland Police Service with immediate notification if there is a change in a card holder's police information.
Child	Any person under the age of 18.
Child and youth risk management strategy	Is a legislative requirement and is a risk management strategy that must include eight minimum requirements: 1. A statement of commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm. 2. A code of conduct for interacting with children. 3. Written procedures for recruiting, selecting, training, and managing staff and volunteers. 4. Policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm, including reporting guidelines. 5. A plan for managing breaches of your risk management strategy. 6. Risk management plans for high-risk activities and special events. 7. Policies and procedures for managing compliance with the blue card system. 8. Strategies for communication and support
Governing Body	The board, committee, council or body with management control of the organisation.
Institution	Any body whether incorporated or unincorporated established by or on behalf of the Synod for a religious, educational, charitable, commercial or other purpose. Institutions include but are not limited to: • UnitingCare Queensland • Wesley Mission Queensland • Dwell Community Hub
Negative notice	A negative notice is issued when this assessment is concluded with the decision that it is not in the best interests of children for the applicant to hold a blue card.
Organisation	Is all regulated businesses and institutions of the Synod
Register of Workers	Is a register that contains details of the workers screening, appointment, training and blue card requirements.
Regulated Business	Is a business that's usual activities may include health, counselling and support services, disability work, private teaching, coaching or tutoring, education and care services, childcare services, outside school hours programs, religious services, child accommodation services, sport and active recreation and directors or authorised persons of non-state schools. Regulated businesses of the Synod include but not limited to:

Term	Meaning
	• Presbyteries, congregations and faith communities • Ministry agent in placement or providing supply • The Uniting Church in Property Trust (Q.) schools • Uniting Early Learning (UEL) childcare centres and outside school hour care services • UEL in home care services • UEL family day care services
Regulated Employment	Is a worker employed in a regulated business
Risk management strategy	A risk management strategy is to help identify potential risks of harm to children and vulnerable persons and to implement strategies to minimise these risks. A well-developed strategy will: 1. Address an organisation's **commitment** to creating a safe and supportive service environment, 2. Strengthen an organisation's **capability** to provide such an environment, 3. Assist an organisation to manage any particular **concerns** with respect to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are involved with the organisation, and 4. Promote the **consistency** of an organisation's approach to risk management, both within the organisation and with respect to compliance with legislative requirements.
Screening	All workers must undergo screening which includes an interview and referee checks with the information recorded in the register of workers.
Vulnerable person	includes seniors and all people who may not be able to care for themselves or are unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation
Worker	Section 7 of Work Health and Safety Act 2011 defines a person as a worker if they are carrying out work in any capacity for the organisation. It includes employees, employees in regulated employment, ministry agents, contractors and subcontractors, labour hire workers, work experience students and volunteers. A worker includes a person who is serving on a board or committee or is involved in running the activity, and/or directed to perform specific tasks.

Revisions

Document number	C/2.1				
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
6.0	07.03.2024	Synod Standing Committee	07.03.2024	Strategic Risk Manager	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review	07.03.2026				