Overseeing Safe Ministry

C/2.1.1

Purpose

Outlines specific obligations to comply with the Safe Ministry with Children Policy in relation to conducting safe activities and programs and complements the Planning Safe Programs, Selecting Leaders and Helpers, and Supporting Leaders and Helpers procedures.

Scope

Applies to all persons working or volunteering in congregations, faith communities, and presbyteries of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod.

Legislative requirements

The *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (QLD)* and the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020 (QLD)*, the *Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020*, *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. All regulated businesses and regulated organisations must have a child and youth risk management strategy.

The Safe Ministry with Children (SMC) Policy is the Synod's child and youth risk management strategy 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 Child Safe Screening National Policy Framework 2020 and the National Person of Concern Policy Framework 2020.

Mandatory Reporting

1. The Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents and the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers Lay Preachers and Volunteers outlines the steps to take when reporting incidents of suspected abuse, grooming sexual abuse or neglect, using the Template for Complaints and Allegations and the Guide for Reporting Child Safety Concerns if applicable. This will ensure you are meeting your legal obligations and fulfilling your duty of care to the children and vulnerable people involved in your activities. A copy of each of these documents is available on the synod website.

Mandatory screening

2. All lay workers and volunteers **must** undergo pre-appointment screening and be appointed by the Church Council. All child-related roles **also** require a valid linked Blue Card or exemption card.

3. To offer safe activities and programs for vulnerable people, pre-appointment screening has been aligned with the screening requirements for people working or volunteering with disability services. As such, all people working and volunteering with anyone vulnerable, are required to meet the same screening standards, and **must** be deemed as suitable to apply for a Blue Card.

4. All persons excluded or disqualified from applying for a Working with Children Check; and persons with a negative Working with Children notice (a 'Negative Notice') from any state or territory of Australia **must also** be excluded from working or volunteering with vulnerable people, with the Church.

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Increasing accessibility – recruitment interview and application process

1. **Promoting a shared understanding**

   1.1. Any applicant may request to have a support person, or cultural or linguistic representative present for the application process. The discussion or interview should not proceed without this support person present.

   1.2. For some persons with English as their second language, persons with communication barriers including hearing impairments and persons from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds, a translator service or person may be required to ensure a shared understanding of the discussion. Ensure that the person able to translate is suitable and available.

   1.3. Prior written approval of the full costs associated with the use of a Translator service, should be obtained from the Church Council prior to using a Translator service. If the use of a Translator Service is approved by the Church Council, ensure that the service is available at the requested time, as an appointment may be required, and failure to book a suitable appointment time may result in additional costs.

   1.4. All junior applicants should have a parent, guardian or carer present during any discussions, and parental consent must be obtained prior to proceeding with any interview or discussion. The Junior Worker role has been designed to allow flexibility of the allocation of tasks and responsibility, which are to be allocated dependent upon the person's level of ability and maturity. The flexibility that this role offers, may be utilised for adult workers that would otherwise be excluded from volunteering.

   1.5. Note that all adult volunteers undertaking a junior role must hold a valid linked blue card if they are working with children. Junior workers from the age of 12 years are to be provided with a copy of the Junior Statement of Personal Commitment which is to be completed and signed each year.

   1.6. It is important to ensure that the application process itself, is not a barrier and does not exclude potential volunteers from volunteering. Throughout the application process, offer alternatives to written communication, such as a conversation in person, or via online services such as *zoom*.

   1.7. Consider the appropriateness of gender and culture when planning an interview or discussion and ensure that any cultural considerations are observed e.g. a female may not feel comfortable being interviewed by a male, and if so, the interview should proceed with a female conducting the interview process. Alternately the interview may proceed at a minimum with a female person present as a support, but only if the applicant/volunteer is comfortable to do so.

   1.8. In all circumstances, ensure that consent is obtained for notes to be taken during the discussion. Be sure that a copy of the notes of the discussion signed by all parties present, is kept and placed on file.

Privacy and confidentiality

2. **Protecting privacy**

   2.1. It is important to ensure that the application process is completed in an open and honest manner. Therefore, it is essential that confidentiality and privacy are observed throughout the recruitment process. This includes the applicant, referees and members of the Church Council and their delegates.

   2.2. Confidentiality is observed when statements (written and oral) are made on the clear understanding that they will be shared only with those who have a legitimate reason to hold that knowledge in order to progress the application or where there is a legal obligation to share the information.

2.3. Where applicants choose not to provide any of the information requested, it is important to let them know that the Church may be unable to send information, fully process applications or properly consider the person for a volunteer role. Any information collected about applicants in the future will be used and disclosed in the same manner as described. Applicants may request access to personal information about them that is held by the Church. Refer to the [Privacy Policy](#).

Statement of Personal Commitment

2.4. We prevent opportunities for abuse and exploitation to occur by implementing safe boundaries and respectful relationships. The Statement of Personal Commitment includes the code of conduct which outlines the boundaries required to keep everyone safe. Offenders typically look for access and opportunity to target and offend against a victim. We can reduce opportunities for offending, by adhering to the behaviours and boundaries outlined in the Statement of Personal Commitment.

2.5. By committing to uphold these boundaries each year, we make our safety focus clear to others, and maintain our culture of safety. This is a simple but very effective tool in actively preventing opportunities for abuse, exploitation, secrecy and grooming to occur.

Definitions

3. Vulnerable

3.1. The following descriptions have been provided to assist in forming a shared understanding of 'vulnerable'. Vulnerability may occur at a specific point in time due to personal crisis, noting that some people may identify themselves as not being vulnerable. The list is not exhaustive but includes people:
3.1.1. In need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect. Unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
3.1.2. Belonging to a group within society that is either oppressed or more susceptible to harm.
3.1.3. Aged 18 or older who have the functional, mental, or physical inability to care for themselves.

3.2. Some services may require a yellow card as part of employment. Currently congregations offering activities and programs for adults or children with disabilities **do not** require yellow cards. However, mandatory screening requirements **must** be met for all people working or volunteering in Church activities or programs for anyone vulnerable, including adults with disabilities.

4. Child-related role

4.1. All lay workers or volunteers in child-related roles **must** hold a valid linked blue card. A person is considered to be 'working or volunteering with children' under state legislation if that person undertakes a paid or volunteer activity as defined below:
4.1.1. The volunteer or lay worker is aged 18 years or over.
4.1.2. All First Aid Officers are required to hold a valid linked blue card or exemption card, in case emergency first aid treatment is required for anyone under 18 years of age.
4.1.3. The activity is child related. Child-related activities are those activities or programs which are provided **only** or **mainly to** children.
4.1.3.1. The volunteer or lay worker is deemed a "religious representative". Worship services and other activities aimed at only or mainly families, are not child-related activities, with the exception of some tasks that meet the threshold of a 'religious representative' defined below.

4.2. If your role is not a child-related role, but you start supervising a volunteer under the age of 18. For example:
4.2.1. You coordinate the property maintenance. You do not usually need a blue card in this role, as this is not a child-related activity.

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4.2.2. However, this year you have a volunteer aged 16 that has commenced volunteering, and whom you oversee.

4.2.3. You are now undertaking a child-related role, as you are directly supervising this volunteer's work, and the volunteer is under 18.

4.2.4. You must now meet the obligations required for all volunteers in a child-related role.

5. **Volunteer**

5.1. A person is considered to be a volunteer if that person is aged over 18 years, and undertakes a volunteer activity on a regular basis, such that:

5.1.1. The person undertakes a volunteer task, on more than 7 calendar days per year; or

5.1.2. The person is scheduled to undertake a volunteer activity or task on a regular basis, i.e. is part of a roster for that volunteer task or activity

6. **Threshold as a 'religious representative'**

6.1. Under the Act, all persons considered to be a 'religious representative' must hold a valid linked Blue Card or Exemption Card. This includes a person who is training to become a religious representative. The roles of lay preacher and ministry agent both require a blue card, as under the Act these roles are defined as a 'religious representative'.

6.2. Once the following threshold has been reached, the person is required to hold a Blue Card or Exemption Card as a religious representative and must complete additional Lay Training specific to this role. This requirement remains the same for congregations which do not offer child-related activities.

6.3. The threshold - Once a volunteer performs the following ministerial functions on **more than** seven days in a calendar year:

6.3.1. Preach and/or lead worship in their own congregation; or

6.3.2. Preach and/or lead worship in any other worship services (including weddings and funerals); or

6.3.3. Preside at the sacraments; or

6.3.4. Perform any systematic pastoral care

6.4. For example:

6.4.1. A person is not a lay preacher as defined under *The Uniting Church in Australia Regulation 2.2.3*.

6.4.2. However, the person takes on one or more of the above tasks or roles (*section 3.2 above*) on a regular or ongoing basis as there is no ministry agent in placement at their congregation.

6.4.3. This person **must** comply with the additional requirements in *Section 3.1*, as they are now considered a 'religious representative'.

7. **Junior Volunteers**

7.1. A child or young person aged between 12 years and 18 years may undertake a volunteer activity as a junior volunteer after participating in a pre-appointment screening process suitable for their age, maturity, and ability.

Annual Safe Church audit information

Legislative Requirement	Safe Church Compliance Test	Evidence Reviewed
1. A statement of commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm and includes a commitment to the safety of anyone vulnerable.	All church councils and presbytery committees are required each year to: • formally adopt, 'not rescind' or re-affirm the Safe Ministry with Children policy; and	[Templates](#) available for use; or Copy of Church council or presbytery committee minutes showing the resolution to adopt the policy

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	• to record a statement of commitment to the safety and protection of all people, including Children	
2. A code of conduct for interacting with children and anyone vulnerable	All lay workers, Lay Preachers, and volunteers sign a Statement of Personal Commitment (SOPC) annually All ministry agents sign a Statement of Commitment to Safe Ministry, annually.	Register of Volunteers (RoV), records on *UCare* ☐ Date the Statement of Personal Commitment was signed ☐ Date the ministry agent Statement of Commitment to Safe Ministry was signed
3. Written procedures for recruiting, selecting, training and managing staff and volunteers	• All lay preachers, lay workers, and volunteers have evidence of pre-appointment screening • All ministry agents, lay preachers, lay workers and volunteers have evidence of current training	(RoV), records on *UCare*, Training registers · Date of the initial interview · Date of referee checks · Date of appointment by the Church Council
4. Policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm, including reporting guidelines	• All ministry agents, lay preachers, lay workers and volunteers have evidence of current training	RoV Training Register Report from edUcate
5. A plan for managing breaches of your risk management strategy	• Breach Procedure • Breach Report	A copy of your Breach register
7. Policies and procedures for managing compliance with the blue card system	Screening has included the required working with children checks (blue card) for all child-related roles, including: • Lay preachers • Religious representatives • Lay staff and Volunteers in child-related roles Screening has included the required 'Applicant Declaration' or yellow or blue card for roles working or volunteering with anyone vulnerable • Lay staff and Volunteers	Use of the Yellow Card or Blue Card Services Portal; or Validation and linking of all yellow cards, blue cards and exemption cards in the RoV, *UCare* · Date that the initial positive notice was received, or the date that the card was validated online, or Applicant Declaration signed · Yellow Card, Blue Card or Exemption Card expiry date · Type of card · The card is linked to the organisation · A card or Applicant Declaration is required for the role
8. Strategies for communication and support	• All lay preachers, lay workers and volunteers have evidence of ongoing support	(RoV), records on *UCare* · Date of the New Starter Check-In ☐ Date of the Annual Well-

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		[Being Check-In](#)

Adopting the SMC policy annually

8. **Reviewed annually**

    8.1. A 'child and youth risk management strategy' must be implemented, and a commitment to this strategy must be adopted and reviewed annually. The SMC Policy is the Church's Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy and is annually reviewed by the Queensland Synod via the Annual Safe Church audit. Refer to the [Child and youth risk management strategy: Annual review procedure for congregations and presbyteries](#).

Code of Conduct

9. **Statement of Personal Commitment (SOPC)**

    9.1. All people working or volunteering within the Church are required to complete and sign a [SOPC](#) or [Junior SOPC](#) annually.

10. **Ministry agent Statement of Commitment**

    10.1. All ministry agents must sign a [Statement of Commitment](#) to Safe Ministry, annually.

Pre-appointment screening

11. **Pre-appointment screening for all volunteers and lay workers**

    11.1. All people working or volunteering within the Church **must** undergo the following screening:

        11.1.1. Application
        11.1.2. Interview
        11.1.3. Referee Checks

    11.2. A copy of each document must be kept and recorded in the (RoV). Refer to [Selecting Leaders and Helpers](#).

Suitability Checks

12. **Roles**

    12.1. Additional suitability checks are required for the following roles:

        12.1.1. Working or volunteering with children
        12.1.2. Working or volunteering with anyone vulnerable

13. **Blue Cards**

    13.1. All lay workers or volunteers holding a valid linked blue card are suitable to work or volunteer with anyone vulnerable (with both children and vulnerable adults aged over 18 years). Blue Card details must be recorded in the (RoV). Note that a Blue Card is **required** if the role includes working or volunteering with children. Refer to [Blue Card requirements of lay workers lay preachers and volunteers](#).

14. **Yellow Cards**

    14.1. All lay workers or volunteers holding a valid linked yellow card are suitable to work or volunteer with anyone vulnerable aged 18 years and over. Yellow Card details must be recorded in the (RoV). Note that a Blue Card is **also** required if the role includes working or volunteering with children.

15. **Declare suitability**

    15.1. All lay workers and volunteers wishing to work or volunteer with anyone vulnerable aged 18 years or over, that do not hold a valid linked blue card or yellow card, **must** complete and sign the 'Applicant Declaration' in the [Volunteer Application Form](#), declaring that they are suitable to work with anyone vulnerable including children, noting the requirements in *Section 2 & 3* above.

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15.2. The person **must not** be approved to work or volunteer in a role with anyone vulnerable aged 18 years and over, and must not appointed by the Church Council unless they have completed and signed the 'Applicant Declaration' in the Volunteer Application Form, declaring that they are suitable to work with anyone vulnerable including children. Note that a Blue Card is **required** if the role includes working or volunteering with children.

15.3. The 'Applicant Declaration' **must** be re-signed annually by each volunteer to maintain their suitability to continue working or volunteering with anyone vulnerable aged 18 years or over.

Formal Appointment

16.   Appointed by the Church Council

16.1. Once all interviews, referee checks and suitability checks have been obtained, a determination must be made about the person's suitability to work or volunteer for the role.

16.2. Once the person has been deemed suitable, formally appoint the person to the role, noting the appointment in the Church Council minutes, and record in the RoV. Refer to Selecting Leaders and Helpers.

Training

17.   Obligations

17.1. All ministry agents, lay preachers, religious representatives, lay workers and volunteers must comply with the Safe Church Training procedure and complete the training requirements for their role. All training must be recorded using the Synod's Learning Management System (LMS) edUCate.

17.2. All people seeking to volunteer in roles, activities and programs supporting vulnerable adults, and children and young people with disabilities, must comply with the Safe Church Training procedure **and** also complete the free Worker Orientation training module available from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Register for a free eLearning account and record all training in the RoV.

Support and supervision

18.   Supporting leaders and helpers

18.1. Care and oversight of individuals who volunteer or work with the Church, is to be provided by the Church Council, their delegate or in the case of faith communities, the presbytery, or their delegate. The process Supporting Leaders and Helpers details the Church Councils obligations in supporting volunteers and lay workers.

19.   Responding to concerns

19.1. The process: Responding to Concerns is the Synod's system for responding to performance issues and complaints. This system includes ongoing training and support for all volunteers and lay workers. All concerns and complaints must be recorded in a register.

Assessing and approving activities and programs

20.   Planning safe programs

20.1. The process: Planning Safe Programs applies to **all** activities, events, programs and activities, including programs and activities for vulnerable people or for children. It is the Synod's system for planning and approving safe programs including high risk activities.

20.2. A risk assessment tool must be used on **each** occasion when planning activities, programs, or events. It is the responsibility of activity leaders to provide documentation of the planned activities to the Church Council, including completed risk assessment documents.

Core values and curriculum

21.   Curriculum

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21.1. As a foundation to safe ministry, the Church Council should consider and approve the curriculum to be taught within children and youth ministries to make sure it aligns with the teachings of the Church.

22. Visiting Preachers or speakers

22.1. Visiting preachers or speakers can enhance and support the life of a congregation and its people by upholding the beliefs and practices of the Uniting Church. Refer to UCA requirements of visiting speakers and preachers for the process to follow.

Inclusion and safety

23. Safe spaces

23.1. For people with behaviour that poses a risk to others, or for locations that may cause exposure to behaviour which may harm others, the Responding to a Safety Concern process must be implemented. This process implements safety guidelines through a Safe Spaces Agreement. A Safe Spaces Agreement allows the Church to continue to offer support and minister to all people, whilst keeping children and anyone vulnerable safe.

24. Person of Concern

24.1. For people with behaviour or a criminal history that poses a risk to others, the Person of Concern (POC) process is in place. The POC process implements safety guidelines through a Safety Agreement. A Safety Agreement allows all people to be safely included in Church activities.

Managing breaches

25. Managing breaches of the SMC Policy

25.1. The SMC Policy requires all volunteers and lay workers to undergo pre-appointment screening and suitability checks and complete Safe Church Training relevant to their role. Breaches of the SMC Policy relate to a lack or failure to comply with these requirements. Refer to the Breach Procedure.

25.2. All breaches must be recorded in a register and must be reported to the SMC Coordinator, Church Council or Presbytery Chair or their delegate.

Registers and records

26. Storage and sharing of records

26.1. All records must be collected, used and stored in accordance with the Synod Privacy Policy. Templates and tools are provided on the SMC website and the Workplace Health and Safety website to assist with this function.

26.1.1. Records must be stored securely and shared in line with the Privacy Policy and reporting protocols of the Church and requirements of Statutory Authorities. Unless otherwise required by law or policy, no records are to be shared with any person or organisation.

26.1.2. Copies of reports relating to personal injury, property damage, incidents and accidents may be shared with statutory authorities and Church representatives.

Information and support

Information and support can be obtained from the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer on 07 3377 9833 or safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au

Most training materials are now available online, using the Synod's Learning management System (LMS) edUCate. For information or support to access online training, please contact the Learning Team: 07 3377 9990 or learning@ucaqld.com.au

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Revisions

Document number	C/2.1.1				
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
8.0	17.01.2024	Strategic Risk Manager	17.01.2024	Strategic Risk Manager	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review	17.01.2024 Retired				