



# Obligations of lay workers volunteering with vulnerable people

C/2.1.15

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## Purpose

Outlines the minimum obligations and training requirements for lay workers working with vulnerable people. This document is a guide to assist with the implementation of the Safe Church Policy and the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy.

## Scope

Applies to all lay workers in roles with vulnerable people in congregations, faith communities, and presbyteries of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod ('Synod'). The information in this document complements the [Overseeing Safe Ministry procedure](#).

## Mandatory Reporting

1. 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, and includes the requirement to report all boundary violations and breaches of behaviour. Use 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 **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. [Pre-appointment](#) screening is required for working with vulnerable people. All lay workers, are required to be deemed as suitable to apply for a Blue Card.
4. 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.

## Obligations

5. **Reporting Abuse**
  - 5.1. All lay workers must report all suspected abuse, neglect, or grooming.
    - 5.1.1. The maximum penalty for **failing** to report a reasonable suspicion of a child sexual offence is 3 years' imprisonment.
  - 5.2. Junior volunteers and junior leaders must report all concerns to the ministry agent, another adult leader, or the adult supervisor of the activity as soon as possible.
6. **Governance**
  - 6.1. You must complete and sign a [Statement of Personal Commitment](#) (SOPC) every year.
  - 6.2. Failing to annually complete and sign a SOPC is a breach of the Safe Church Policy. Following the [Safe Church Breach Procedure](#), complete a [Breach Report](#), recording the breach in a [register](#).



## 7. Ongoing Support

- 7.1. Participate in a [New Starter Check-In](#) for all new workers, for workers changing roles, or for workers nominated and appointed to a new position.
- 7.2. Participate in an [Annual Well-Being Check-In](#).

## Suitability Checks

### 8. Blue Cards

- 8.1. All lay workers must comply with the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy.
- 8.2. All lay workers holding a valid linked blue card are suitable to volunteer with vulnerable people (with both children **and** vulnerable adults aged over 18 years) in Church activities or programs. Blue Card details must be recorded in the Register of Workers (RoW). Note that a Blue Card is **required** if the role includes working or volunteering with children.

### 9. Yellow Cards

- 9.1. All lay workers who already hold a valid linked yellow card are suitable to volunteer with vulnerable people aged 18 years and over in Church activities or programs. Yellow Card details must be recorded in the RoW. Note that a Blue Card is **also required** if the role includes working or volunteering with children.

### 10. Declare suitability

- 10.1. All lay workers wishing to volunteer in Church activities or programs, with vulnerable people aged 18 years or over, that do not already hold either 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 vulnerable people including children, noting the requirements in *Section 2,3 & 4* above.
- 10.2. The person **must not** be approved to volunteer in a role with vulnerable people aged 18 years and over, and **must not** be 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 vulnerable people, including children. Note that a Blue Card is **required** if the role includes working or volunteering with children.
- 10.3. The 'Applicant Declaration' must be re-signed annually by each volunteer to maintain their suitability to continue volunteering in Church activities or programs, with vulnerable people aged 18 years or over.
- 10.4. Failing to meet the mandatory screening criteria when working or volunteering in a role with vulnerable people is a breach of the Safe Church Policy. Following the [Safe Church Breach Procedure](#), complete a [Breach Report](#), recording the breach in a [register](#).

### 11. Recordkeeping

- 11.1. A copy of all suitability checks must be kept and recorded in the RoW. A copy of the RoW must be provided annually as part of the Annual Safe Church Audit. For people working or volunteering with vulnerable adults, that do not hold either a blue or a yellow card, the date of the signed 'Applicant Declaration' must be recorded in the RoW each year.

## Training

### 12. Obligations

- 12.1. All people seeking to work or volunteer in roles, activities and programs supporting vulnerable adults, children and young people, **must** 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 RoW.
- 12.2. All lay workers working with vulnerable people must also comply with the [Safe Church Training](#) procedure.



- 12.3. Failing to comply with the Safe Church Training procedure is a breach of the Safe Church Policy. Following the [Safe Church Breach Procedure](#), complete a [Breach Report](#), recording the breach in a [register](#).
- 12.4. From the age of **15 years onwards**, all junior volunteers deemed to have the **appropriate level** of maturity and ability may complete:
- 12.4.1. 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 Register of Volunteers.

### Information and support

Information and support can be obtained from the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer on 07 3377 9833 or [safechurch@ucaqld.com.au](mailto:safechurch@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 and Development Team: 07 3377 9990 or [learning@ucaqld.com.au](mailto:learning@ucaqld.com.au).

### Definitions

Term	Meaning
Child-related role	<p>Under state legislation, child-related activities are those activities or programs which are provided only or mainly to children. All workers must comply with the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy, including workers that meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• All religious representatives, including persons studying to be a religious representative.</li> <li>• A worker that undertakes a child-related activity or task, on more than 7 calendar days per year.</li> <li>• A worker that is scheduled to undertake a child-related activity or task on a regular basis, ie is part of a roster for that volunteer task or activity.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p>You will have additional responsibilities as part of your duty of care, if your role is not a child-related role, but you start supervising a volunteer under the age of 18. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You coordinate the property maintenance. You do not usually need a blue card in this role, as this is not a child-related activity.</li> <li>• However, this year you have a volunteer aged 16 that has commenced volunteering, and whom you oversee.</li> <li>• As part of your duty of care to children and anyone vulnerable, you are now required to hold a Valid linked Blue Card whilst you remain in a role supervising a junior worker.</li> </ul>



Term	Meaning
Threshold as a 'religious representative'	<p>1. Under the Act, all persons considered to be a 'religious representative' must comply with the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy, and 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'.</p> <p>2. Once the following threshold has been reached, the person is required to comply with the Synod Wide Blue Card Policy and must 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.</p> <p>3. The threshold - Once a volunteer performs the following ministerial functions on <b>more than</b> seven days in a calendar year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preach and/or lead worship in their own congregation; or</li> <li>• Preach and/or lead worship in any other worship services (including weddings and funerals); or</li> <li>• Preside at the sacraments; or</li> <li>• Perform any systematic pastoral care</li> </ul> <p>For example: A person is not a lay preacher as defined under <i>The Uniting Church in Australia Regulation 2.2.3</i>. However, the person takes on one or more of the above tasks or roles (above in Section 3) on a regular or ongoing basis as there is no ministry agent in placement at their congregation. This person must comply with the additional requirements in Section 2, as they are now considered a 'religious representative'.</p>
Worker	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A person is a worker, if that person is aged over 18 years, and undertakes a paid or volunteer activity on a regular basis, including being scheduled on a roster to undertake a paid or volunteer activity.</p>
Lay Worker	All workers, (see above) but specifically excludes ministry agents.
Junior workers	<p>For more information about suitable roles and responsibilities, refer to the document '<i>Sample Role Descriptions</i>', noting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A child or young person aged between 12 years and 18 years may undertake a volunteer activity as a junior worker after participating in a pre-appointment screening process suitable for their age, maturity, and ability.</li> <li>• All workers aged between 15 years and (under) 18 years must sign and complete a Junior Statement of Personal Commitment (SOPC) and complete relevant Safe Church Training, <b>if assessed</b> as having</li> </ul>



Term	Meaning
	<p>the level of maturity and ability to do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note that Junior volunteers or junior leaders <b>are not</b> expected to follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers, Lay Preachers, and Volunteers, and <b>are not</b> responsible for reporting suspected abuse, neglect or grooming, as they are children themselves. Junior Leaders must report to the activity or team leader if they notice that something is not right.</li> </ul>
Vulnerable	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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. This includes all children and young people under 18.</li> <li>Belonging to a group within society that is either oppressed or more susceptible to harm.</li> <li>Aged 18 or older who have the functional, mental, or physical inability to care for themselves.</li> </ul> <p>Some services may require a yellow card as part of employment. Currently congregations offering activities and programs for adults or children with disabilities <b>do not</b> require yellow cards. However, mandatory screening requirements <b>must</b> be met for all people working or volunteering in Church activities or programs for anyone vulnerable, including adults with disabilities.</p>
Blue Card check	<p>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.</p>

## Revisions

Document number		C/2.1.15			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
2.0	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			