



Responding to Complaints and Concerns

C/2.1.3

Purpose

Provides guidance to councils and committees of the Church when issues arise, either with complaints, performance, or behaviour. Complements the Safe Church [Policy](#).

Scope

Applies to all lay workers (paid and volunteer) in congregations, faith communities, and presbyteries of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod.

Principles

- Each person is treated fairly and consistently
- The safety, dignity and well-being of each individual is important
- Concerns and incidents are investigated thoroughly
- Decision-making processes are timely, transparent, and accessible
- Mandatory reporting obligations are met

Reporting timeframes

1. Concerns and complaints offer a chance to enhance understanding and improve our services. When individuals' expectations are not met, they may express their grievances to each other or directly to their ministry agent.
 - 1.1. All concerns and complaints must be recorded, and a report made to the Synod office, including a report to the relevant authority if required. All lay workers, lay preachers and volunteers must follow the **B.C.A.L.M.** process. All ministry agents must follow the **R.E.S.P.O.N.D.** process.
 - 1.2. A report is to be made to the Synod office as soon as practicable, for any incident, concern, or notification likely to be classed as a critical incident. If a verbal report was provided, a copy of the incident report or completed template **must** be provided to the Synod office as soon as practicable or within 24 hours of the incident.
 - 1.3. For all other incidents, concerns, or notifications, a report is to be made to the Synod office as soon as practicable. If a verbal report was provided, a copy of the incident report or completed template **must** be provided to the Synod office as soon as practicable or within 3 business days of the incident.

Process

2. A three-step process to responding well provides guidance to help you remain respectful, maintain rapport, and ensure appropriate action, has been provided in this document.
3. **Step 1: Acknowledge and apologise**
 - 3.1. **Thank** the person for taking the time to raise the issue that's concerning them.
 - 3.2. Offer an **apology**, before moving on to ask further questions (e.g. "I'm sorry that xyz happened").
 - 3.3. Use the R.E.S.P.O.N.D. technique (ministry agents) or the B.C.A.L.M. technique (lay workers and volunteers).
4. **Step 2: Ask and listen**
 - 4.1. Ask open **questions** to clarify that you understand what the person is telling you. To assist the communication, it may be helpful to acknowledge facts, thoughts, emotions and wants. This can be done by asking questions like "what happened?", "what thoughts do you have about it?", "how are you feeling about it" and "what would you like to see happen?"



- 4.1.1. An interpreter service or a communication aid may be required to assist the child or person to adequately disclose their concerns and allow clear communication to occur.
- 4.2. Listen—don't interrupt, argue, justify, or make promises. Pay attention to what the person is telling you and use **open** questions to clarify your understanding of what is being said.
5. **Step 3: Act**
 - 5.1. Explain **what** actions you will take next, being mindful of any mandatory reporting processes. Focus on what you can do, for example, "I will check on ..."; "I will speak to ..."; "I will take you to..."; "I will arrange ..." (see actions to take section below).
 - 5.2. Plan a time to report back to them and whether this timing is acceptable for them. For example, "... and I'll get back to you about it on Wednesday, how does that sound?".
 - 5.3. Follow up. Act quickly and keep the person informed about the actions that have taken place (see below for more **detail**).

Actions to take: Unsafe behaviour

6. **Assess the immediate risk**
 - 6.1. Are there any immediate safety concerns? Use the **R.E.S.P.O.N.D.** technique ([ministry agents](#)) or the **B.C.A.L.M.** technique ([lay workers and volunteers](#)).
 - 6.2. Are the concerns about repeated boundary violations, breaches of behaviour, grooming behaviour, harm, or abuse? Follow the **R.E.S.P.O.N.D.** or **B.C.A.L.M.** process.
 - 6.3. Does the person/s involved need to be stood aside from their duties pending the outcome of due process?
 - 6.4. The resources [Performance Improvement Processes](#), [Performance Improvement Plan](#) and [Performance Discussion Record](#) provide guidance on addressing a volunteer's behaviour or performance.
7. **Report the concerns and actions taken**
 - 7.1. Follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for [ministry agents](#) or [lay workers](#). These guides also outline who else you should report to within the Church.
 - 7.1.1. If you are not sure about what action to take or what information to include when reporting, contact the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer at the Synod office at safechurch@ucaqld.com.au or on 07 3377 9833 for advice.
 - 7.2. Record your concerns and actions taken using the [Template for Complaints and Allegations](#).
 - 7.3. The [Reporting and Referral Guide](#) provide details if a report needs to be made to the appropriate statutory authorities, noting the mandatory reporting requirements. Provide a copy of your report to the relevant authority.
 - 7.4. Provide a copy of your report to the presbytery chair and/or church council chair.
 - 7.5. Provide a copy of your report to the Synod office at safechurch@ucaqld.com.au , noting the required reporting timeframes in *Section 1*.
 - 7.6. After reporting, care must be taken to cooperate with authorities, manage the person's expectations, and offer pastoral care.

Actions to take: Unsafe programs or activities

8. **Assess the immediate risk**
 - 8.1. Are there any immediate safety concerns? Use the **R.E.S.P.O.N.D.** technique ([ministry agents](#)) or the **B.C.A.L.M.** technique ([lay workers and volunteers](#)).
 - 8.2. If you are not sure about what action to take or what information to include when reporting, contact the Synod Office:
 - 8.2.1. For work health and safety, email Health.Safety@ucaqld.com.au or call 07 3377 9703 for advice.



8.2.2. For activities or programs, and concerns about people or children, contact the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer via email safechurch@ucaqld.com.au or call 07 3377 9833 for advice.

9. Report the concerns and actions taken

- 9.1. Record your concerns and actions taken, using the hazard/incident [template](#) available on the Workplace Health and Safety website.
- 9.2. Provide a copy of your report to the presbytery chair and/or church council chair.
- 9.3. Provide a copy of your report to the synod office at Health.Safety@ucaqld.com.au .
- 9.4. Review the activity or program and complete a new [Risk Assessment](#). Provide a copy of the new risk assessment to the Church Council chair and provide copies to the Presbytery Chair and Health.Safety@ucaqld.com.au if required.

Storage of documents

10. Storage of documents

- 10.1. All records must be kept in the relevant personnel file for the period of the position.
- 10.2. All records and reports concerning grooming behaviour, harm or abuse must be kept indefinitely.

Disagreement, grievance, resolution, and appeal rights

11. Procedure

- 11.1. If the person disagrees with any aspect of the way the process was conducted:
 - 11.1.1. The person may lodge a grievance in accordance with the [Complaints and Allegations Policy](#) (POL-0003) at complaints@ucaqld.com.au or on 1800 586 591.
 - 11.1.2. Encourage the person to speak to their immediate supervisor, church council chair, minister, cultural advisor or presbytery chairperson for advice.

Information and support

Information and support can be obtained from the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer on 07 3377 9983 or safechurch@ucaqld.com.au

The preferred method of completing [Safe Church training](#) is online, using the Synod learning platform, [edUCate](#). Please contact the Learning and Development Team at learning@ucaqld.com.au or 07 3377 9734, for more information or to obtain this access.

Revisions

Document number		C/2.1.3			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
6.0	16.05.2024	General Manager Risk and Safeguarding	16.05.2024	General Manager Risk and Safeguarding	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review		DD.MM.2026			