



Responding to 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 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 transparent and accessible
- Mandatory reporting obligations are met

Mandatory Reporting

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, 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](#).

Responding to concerns and/or complaints

Concerns and complaints provide an opportunity to strengthen understanding and improve our services. When people's expectations are not met, they may complain to one another or directly to their ministry agent.

Concerns and complaints may range from feedback about "how to do it better" to emotional demands for explanation and action. Use the Mandatory Reporting Guides for [ministry agents](#) and [lay workers](#) for additional guidance.

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.

1. Acknowledge and apologise

- 1.1. **Thank** the person for taking the time to raise the issue that's concerning them.
- 1.2. Offer an **apology**, before moving on to ask further questions (e.g. "I'm sorry that xyz happened").
- 1.3. Use the R.E.S.P.O.N.D. technique (ministry agents) or the B.C.A.L.M. technique (lay workers and volunteers).



2. Ask and listen

2.1. 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?”

2.1.1. 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.

2.2. 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.

3. Act

3.1. 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).

3.2. 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?”.

3.3. 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

4. Assess the immediate risk

4.1. 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).

4.2. 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.

4.3. Does the person/s involved need to be stood aside from their duties pending the outcome of due process?

4.4. The resources [Performance Management Processes](#), [Performance Improvement Plan](#) and [Performance Discussion Record](#) provide guidance on addressing a volunteer’s behaviour or performance.

5. Report the concerns and actions taken

5.1. Follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for [ministry agents](#) or [lay workers](#). These guides also outline who else you should report to within the Church.

5.1.1. 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.

5.2. Record your concerns and actions taken using the [Template for Complaints and Allegations](#).

5.3. 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.

5.4. Provide a copy of your report to the presbytery chair and/or church council chair.



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- 5.5. Provide a copy of your report to the Synod office at safechurch@ucaqld.com.au.
- 5.6. 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

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. If you are not sure about what action to take or what information to include when reporting, contact the Synod Office:
 - 6.2.1. For work health and safety, email Health.Safety@ucaqld.com.au or call 07 3377 9703 for advice.
 - 6.2.2. 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.

7. Report the concerns and actions taken

- 7.1. Record your concerns and actions taken, using the [hazard/incident template](#) available on the Workplace Health and Safety website.
- 7.2. Provide a copy of your report to the presbytery chair and/or church council chair.
- 7.3. Provide a copy of your report to the synod office at Health.Safety@ucaqld.com.au.
- 7.4. 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

8. Storage of documents

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

Disagreement, grievance, resolution, and appeal rights

9. Procedure

- 9.1. If the person disagrees with any aspect of the way the process was conducted:
 - 9.1.1. 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.
 - 9.1.2. Encourage the person to speak to their immediate supervisor, church council chair, minister, cultural advisor or presbytery chairperson for advice.



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"> • 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. • All religious representatives, including persons studying to be a religious representative. • A worker that undertakes a child-related activity or task, on more than 7 calendar days per year. • 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. • 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. <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"> • You coordinate the property maintenance. You do not usually need a blue card in this role, as this is not a child-related activity. • However, this year you have a volunteer aged 16 that has commenced volunteering, and whom you oversee. • 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.
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 more than seven days in a calendar year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preach and/or lead worship in their own congregation; or • Preach and/or lead worship in any other worship services (including weddings and funerals); or • Preside at the sacraments; or



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform any systematic pastoral care <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"> 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. The flexibility that this role offers, may be utilised for adult workers that would otherwise be excluded from volunteering. Note that all adult volunteers undertaking a junior role must hold a valid linked blue card if they are working with children All workers aged between 12 years and (under) 18 years must sign and complete a Junior Statement of Personal Commitment (SOPC) All junior workers must complete relevant Safe Church Training, if assessed as having the level of maturity and ability to do so. Note that Junior volunteers or junior leaders are not expected to follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers, Lay Preachers, and Volunteers, and are not 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.
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 all children and young people under 18 and people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In need of special care, support, or protection because of age,



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	<p>disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.• Belonging to a group within society that is either oppressed or more susceptible to harm.• Aged 18 or older who have the functional, mental, or physical inability to care for themselves. <p>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.</p>

Revisions

Document number	C/2.1.3				
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
5.0	06.11.2023	Strategic Risk Manager	06.11.2023	Strategic Risk Manager	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review	06.11.2025				