



Planning Safe Programs

C/2.1.8

Purpose

Outlines the mandatory minimum requirements and best practice recommendations for planning safe programs, including programs and activities involving children and vulnerable adults. This document provides guidance to implement the Safe Ministry with Children (SMC) [Policy](#).

Scope

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

Legislation

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 vulnerable persons, 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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Definitions

5. Vulnerable

- 5.1. 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:
- 5.1.1. 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.
 - 5.1.2. Belonging to a group within society that is either oppressed or more susceptible to harm.
 - 5.1.3. Aged 18 or older who have the functional, mental, or physical inability to care for themselves.
- 5.2. 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.

6. Child-related role

- 6.1. 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:
- 6.1.1. The volunteer or lay worker is aged 18 years or over.
 - 6.1.2. 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.
 - 6.1.3. The activity is child related. Child-related activities are those activities or programs which are provided **only or mainly to** children.
 - 6.1.3.1. 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.
- 6.2. If your role is not a child-related role, but you start supervising a volunteer under the age of 18. For example:
- 6.2.1. You coordinate the property maintenance. You do not usually need a blue card in this role, as this is not a child-related activity.
 - 6.2.2. However, this year you have a volunteer aged 16 that has commenced volunteering, and whom you oversee.
 - 6.2.3. You are now undertaking a child-related role, as you are directly supervising this volunteer's work, and the volunteer is under 18.
 - 6.2.4. You must now meet the obligations required for all volunteers in a child-related role.

7. Volunteer

- 7.1. 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:
- 7.1.1. The person undertakes a volunteer task, on more than 7 calendar days per year; or
 - 7.1.2. 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

8. Threshold as a 'religious representative'

- 8.1. 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'.



- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. The threshold - Once a volunteer performs the following ministerial functions on **more than** seven days in a calendar year:
- 8.3.1. Preach and/or lead worship in their own congregation; or
 - 8.3.2. Preach and/or lead worship in any other worship services (including weddings and funerals); or
 - 8.3.3. Preside at the sacraments; or
 - 8.3.4. Perform any systematic pastoral care
- 8.4. For example:
- 8.4.1. A person is not a lay preacher as defined under *The Uniting Church in Australia Regulation 2.2.3*.
 - 8.4.2. 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.
 - 8.4.3. This person **must** comply with the additional requirements in *Section 3.1*, as they are now considered a 'religious representative'.
9. **Junior Volunteers**
- 9.1. 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.

Prior Approval

10. Formal approval

- 10.1. All activities must be considered and given prior endorsement by a Church Council or Presbytery Committee or other relevant governing body as confirmation of correct processes and approvals.
- 10.2. In the event of an incident or injury and any subsequent insurance or legal action, the approval and risk assessment documentation may be used as a reference. Throughout this document, where reference is made to 'council' it includes all relevant governing bodies unless otherwise stated.

Risk levels and obligations

11. For activities with a final risk level of Extreme:

- 11.1. The activity **must not** proceed as planned. Final approval must be provided by the appropriate Executive responsible for Child Safety Implementation within the Synod after steps are taken to reduce the risk level.
- 11.2. Identify and plan additional risk mitigation measures then contact the Risk and/or Group Insurance team for guidance and to request approval to proceed.

12. For activities with a final risk level of High:

- 12.1. The activity **must not** proceed as planned. The activity can only proceed if more risk control steps are taken to reduce the risk level to Moderate or Low (preferred). All steps taken must be documented and a review of the effectiveness of the mitigations must happen after the event.

13. For activities with a final risk level of Moderate:

- 13.1. The activity can proceed **with** risk mitigation steps in place once approval is obtained from the council. All steps taken must be documented and a review of the effectiveness of the mitigations must happen after the event. In the event of the risk occurring, the circumstances must be subject to a review.

14. For activities with a final risk level of Low:

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- 14.1. The activity **can** proceed once approval is obtained from the council. Routine management procedures should still be in place to minimise the risk of even a minor incident occurring.

Mandatory Ratios

15. Minimum standards

- 15.1. A minimum of two leaders or volunteers must be always present for each activity, program, or event.
15.2. A minimum of two adult leaders must be always present with children in approved activities.
15.3. A minimum of two adult leaders must be always present when transporting children.

16. Child-related activities

- 16.1. A minimum ratio of one leader or volunteer for every six children in an activity for participants aged five years and over.
16.2. A minimum ratio of one leader or volunteer for every four children aged below five years.
16.3. The ratio of volunteers or leaders to children **must** be reduced (eg one leader to 2 or 3 children) if it is assessed that the children attending the activity, program or event require additional support for the activity to proceed safely.

17. Activities with anyone vulnerable

- 17.1. A minimum ratio of one leader or volunteer for every six participants in an activity, except in the case of each participant having their own or individual carer attend with them, in which case the minimum standards apply.
17.2. The ratio **must** be reduced to one leader or volunteer for every 3 or 4 participants if it is assessed that the participants attending the activity, program or event require additional support for the event or activity to proceed safely.
17.3. It may be necessary for the ratio to be one leader or volunteer per participant in some circumstances to enable an activity or program to occur safely for both participants and volunteers/ leaders.

Roles and responsibilities: Activity leaders

18. Responsible for:

- 18.1. Completing and submitting Risk assessment sheets for all planned activities to the Church Council (or their delegate) for approval before the activities are due to take place, including assessing and managing reasonably foreseeable risk (See risk assessment section and checklist questions below).
18.2. Consulting with Synod Support Services if activities with a risk level of extreme are being considered and incorporating recommendations into plans. The Queensland Synod Group Insurance team can assist with insurance requirements and the Strategic Risk Manager can assist with risk management queries.
18.3. Ensuring team members are aware of their responsibilities under the approval of the council.
18.4. Conducting activities in line with the approval of the council.
18.5. Documenting and reporting to the council, any hazards/risks identified during the planning process .
18.6. Ensuring that leaders and helpers for the activity are from the pool of people who have been previously screened, trained and approved by the council.
18.7. Maintaining an appropriate ratio of leaders to participants for all activities.

Roles and responsibilities: Church Council or Presbytery or their delegate

19. Responsible for:

- 19.1. Developing the Emergency Response Plan to be followed in the event of an unforeseen natural or man-made event (for example flood, fire, car crash) which would impact the safety of the event



- 19.2. Managing all reported hazards—eliminating and/or controlling them to ensure minimal risk
- 19.3. Maintaining property (checklist) and (supplementary information)
- 19.4. Assessing, amending and approving Risk assessment sheets before the activities are due to take place, clearly communicating any issues or changes required before the approval is given
- 19.5. Ensure that all risk assessments or program plans submitted for approval maintain an appropriate ratio of leaders to participants, following the guidelines above in *Sections 15, 16 & 17*.
- 19.6. Minuting approvals (or endorsing approvals made by the delegate) in council meeting minutes
- 19.7. Considering and approving the curriculum to be taught to children within children's ministries under their oversight (e.g. Sunday School lessons)
- 19.8. Ensuring that individuals who seek to work with children within the Church (including transport) have been screened, trained and receive oversight and support
- 19.9. Ensuring appropriate reporting of incidents and near misses
- 19.10. Delegating tasks under this responsibility appropriately

Risk assessment process

20. **List the activities**
 - 20.1. List the activities which are planned—write them in a risk assessment sheet (e.g. Safe Programs Planning tool, WHS risk assessment tool)
 - 20.2. For each activity, anticipate what might happen that could affect what the activity is trying to achieve, i.e. consider what could go wrong—these are the 'risks'
 - 20.3. Write these under the 'Risks' column heading on the risk assessment sheet (see example below).
21. **Determine the likelihood for each risk**
 - 21.1. Refer to the likelihood descriptors and choose the one that best suits. This is the 'likelihood'. Write this in the 'Likelihood' column.
22. **Determine what the potential consequences are for each risk**
 - 22.1. Refer to the consequence descriptors and choose the one that best suits. This is the 'consequence'. Write this in the 'Consequence' column.
23. **Determine the risk level, for each risk**
 - 23.1. Refer to the risk matrix and find the intersection of your risk consequence and likelihood to determine the Risk Level. Write this in the Risk Level column.
24. **Determine the mitigations required to address or reduce each risk**
 - 24.1. Refer to the Actions to Take and find the corresponding action for the risk level
 - 24.2. Based on the Action for 20.1, consider and undertake the appropriate mitigation and note this in the Risk assessment sheet. Include additional mitigation measures you may have identified
 - 24.3. Write the Mitigations in the How to reduce risk column.
25. **Determine the revised risk level, for each risk**
 - 25.1. Think about how the risk likelihood will change because of the mitigations you put in place. This is the revised likelihood if the mitigations are implemented
 - 25.2. Refer to the risk matrix and find the intersection of your risk consequence and the revised likelihood to determine the revised risk level
 - 25.3. Write the revised risk level in the Revised Risk Level column.



Risks and mitigations to control for them (examples)

Risks <i>What could go wrong during these activities?</i>	Likelihood <i>Check the descriptors</i>	Consequence <i>Check the descriptors</i>	Risk level <i>Check the Risk Matrix</i>	How to reduce risk <i>Check the 'actions to take' 'mitigations'</i> <i>Do not alter Risks or Risk Ratings for shaded items a–d below. Mitigations are dictated in policy and process documents. Non-shaded Risks and Mitigations are suggested for consideration.</i>	Revised Risk Rating <i>(mitigations in place) Summarised in 5.A</i>
a. Person(s) conducting activity is not safe to work with children or vulnerable people	Possible	Major	High	All volunteers are screened and approved	Moderate
b. Person(s) conducting activity acts inappropriately towards children or vulnerable people	Possible	Major	High	All volunteers are trained, work in pairs, sign Statement of Personal Commitment and supervised	Moderate
c. Person(s) conducting activity does not follow the plan for the activity	Possible	Minimal	Low	Volunteers are skilled for the task and well briefed on the purpose	Low
d. Person(s) conducting activity becomes aware of grooming, abuse or neglect and does not respond well	Possible	Major	High	Volunteers are aware of mandatory reporting processes and have received training	Moderate

Likelihood scales

Frequent (Almost certain)	Is expected to occur again either immediately or within a short period of time (likely to occur most weeks or months)
Probable (Likely)	Will probably occur in most circumstances (several times a year)
Occasional (Possible)	Probably will occur at some time (May happen every 1–2 years)
Uncommon (Unlikely)	Possibly to occur at some time in 2–10 years
Rare (Remote)	Unlikely to occur only in exceptional circumstances (May happen every 10–30 years)

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Consequence scales

Extreme	Results in a fatality or permanent disability to one or more people, significant or total destruction to property and has a very severe reputational impact for the Church.
Major	Hospital admission and/or severe injury, major property damage is sustained, and it may have a major reputational impact for the Church.
Moderate	Paramedics or comparable medical treatment is required, moderate property damage occurs, and it may have some reputational impact for the Church.
Minor	First aid is required, minor property damage is sustained and there is only a low reputational impact for the Church.
Minimal	Near miss with no injury or minor injury occurs, property damage is very limited and very limited chance of reputational impact.

Risk matrix

Likelihood		Consequence				
		Extreme	Major	Moderate	Minor	Minimal
	Frequent (Almost certain)	Extreme	Extreme	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Probable (Likely)	Extreme	Extreme	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Occasional (Possible)	Extreme	High	High	Moderate	Low
	Uncommon (Unlikely)	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	Low
	Remote (Rare)	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low

Actions to take

Extreme	Activity must not proceed as planned. Final approval must be provided by the appropriate Executive responsible for Child Safety Implementation within the Synod after steps are taken to reduce the risk. Identify and plan additional risk mitigation measures then contact the Risk and/or Group Insurance team for guidance and to request approval to proceed.
High	Activity can only proceed if more risk control steps are taken to reduce risk. All steps taken must be documented and review of effectiveness of the mitigations should happen after the event.
Moderate	Activity can proceed with risk mitigation steps in place. All steps taken must be documented and review of effectiveness of the mitigations should happen after the event. In the event of the risk manifesting, the circumstances should be subject to review.
Low	Activity can proceed. Routine management procedures should still be in place to minimise the risk of even a minor incident occurring.

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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

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

Revisions

Document number		C/2.1.8			
Version number	Date	Approved by	Effective Date	Policy owner	Policy Contact
7.0	26.10.2022	Strategic Risk Manager	26.10.2022	ED Strategic Resources & Assurance	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review		26.10.2027			