



## Providing Safe Spaces

C/2.4.2

### Purpose

Gives guidance to how we can assess and manage the ongoing risks associated with locations and environments that can expose people to harm or harmful behaviour. This procedure ensures that the Church is a safe place for all people and complies with [Safe Church Policy](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and the [Synod Wide Blue Card Policy](#).

### Scope

Applies in the event a congregation, faith community and/or ministry agent within the bounds of the Synod of Queensland becomes aware that a location, person, or person/s are causing a safety concern.

### Definitions

1. **Behaviours of Concern:** any or all of the following behaviours, including any behaviour which breaches the [Statement of Personal Commitment](#):
  - 1.1. Inappropriate physical contact, including physical contact with a child or vulnerable persons, and includes unwanted physical contact, threats of physical contact, or requests for physical contact
  - 1.2. Fighting, threatening violence, aggressive or bullying behaviour
  - 1.3. Derogatory language including racial slurs, swearing, describing sexual acts, or requesting sexual acts
  - 1.4. Exposing others to inappropriate images, including nudity and pornography
  - 1.5. Exposing body parts to others, including sexual acts, or mimicking sexual acts with or without nudity
  - 1.6. The consumption of harmful or illicit drugs, alcohol and cigarettes when in the vicinity of children and vulnerable people, or whilst on Church property without express written permission from the Church.
  - 1.7. Taking images of any child, young person or vulnerable person without the express written permission of the parent guardian or care provider of the child or person. Images includes photos or video images.
  - 1.8. Behaviours that could be experienced as bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or any kind of sexual misconduct.
2. **Person causing a Safety Concern:** means a person or persons who have displayed or may display any or all the Behaviours of Concern, **and** one of the following applies:
  - 2.1. Is the recipient of an activity or program of the Church - for example a community outreach program such as Emergency Relief.
  - 2.2. Is in or on Church property - for example, someone temporarily living on Church property due to homelessness
  - 2.3. Is visiting or turning up to church property either during or after business hours.
3. **Place/s with a Safety Concern:** means a place or location with a likelihood of exposure to a person or persons displaying any or all the Behaviours of Concern.
  - 3.1. For example: Inner city congregations.
4. **Person of Concern (POC):** means any person who wishes to participate in the life of a congregation or faith community of the Uniting Church in Australia and who has engaged in criminal sexual behaviour – refer to the [Person of Concern Policy](#).



## When to apply this procedure

### 5. Person causing a Safety Concern

5.1. The process outlined below must be followed if a congregation and/or ministry agent becomes aware that an individual is causing a Safety Concern. If a person other than the ministry agent of the congregation (including officials of the presbytery and Synod) becomes aware of such a concern, they must notify the ministry agent of the congregation, who will then initiate the following process.

### 6. Place with a Safety Concern

6.1. The process outlined below must be followed if a congregation and/or ministry agent becomes aware of a high likelihood that the place or location where the Church provides services, programs, or activities will expose participants and attendees to Behaviours of Concern.

## When not to offer a Safe Spaces Agreement

### 7. Person causing a Safety Concern

7.1. When any or all of the following behaviours or actions are observed or suspected. The person:

7.1.1. Is currently making threats to harm themselves or others; or

7.1.2. Is currently behaving aggressively, or violently eg yelling, punching, hitting things, has a weapon or something that can be used as a weapon; or

7.1.3. Is known to have recently assaulted someone, and is currently making threats or behaving aggressively; or

7.1.4. There are suspicions of acute substance misuse or mental health issues that currently affect their capacity to such an extent that attempting to talk or reason with them is deemed dangerous

7.2. If any of the above are present, then immediate safety procedures must be initiated – immediately call for police assistance, and implement lock down safety procedures, and report to the incident to the Synod office.

7.3. No physical pastoral care is to be offered whilst any of the above risks are present. Prayer support to be offered **only**, whilst any of the above safety risks remain.

7.4. It is not safe nor suitable to implement a Safe Spaces Agreement with a person whilst any of the above safety risks are present.

## Responding to a person causing a Safety Concern

### 8. Immediate actions required

8.1. Using the [Template for Complaints and Allegations](#), complete a report, outlining the concerns. This reporting requirement includes the requirement that a report must be made to police for any criminal behaviour. Follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for [lay workers](#) or for [ministry agents](#) if you are concerned that criminal behaviour may have occurred. Ensure a copy of your report is provided to the Synod office.

8.2. All programs, activities and events involving children or vulnerable people **must not** occur whilst a Safety Concern is present. The [Church Council](#) of the congregation must assess the nature of the risk the Safety Concern presents to the congregation.

8.3. In offering care, support and safety to everyone, the person identified as causing a Safety Concern, is also vulnerable and should also be offered pastoral care, and direct support from the Church including referrals to suitable local support services. Some suggestions are included in the [Sample Safe Spaces Agreement](#).

### 9. Next steps

9.1. Complete a [Risk Assessment](#) to determine what strategies can be put in place immediately to reduce the risk of harm to young and vulnerable persons. This Risk Assessment must be approved by the Church Council in consultation with the Synod Risk Team. Provide a copy of the Risk Assessment to the Synod office.



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- 9.2. The Risk Assessment should also include steps taken to support the person identified as posing a Safety Concern. The offer of support may also significantly reduce some of the risks present. Support from a food bank ministry or outreach support from a homelessness service may significantly increase the safety and well-being of the person, by meeting some of their basic needs and increasing their safety.
- 9.3. All programs, activities and events involving children and vulnerable persons **must not** proceed until a completed approved Safe Spaces Agreement is in place, **unless** Synod office approval has been obtained for the Risk Assessment to be used as a short-term measure whilst the Safe Spaces Agreement is completed.
- 9.4. Should it be determined that the risk cannot be managed satisfactorily, or the Church Council decides not to offer a Safe Spaces Agreement, the presbytery and the General Secretary, or their delegate must be notified. All programs, activities and events involving children and vulnerable persons **must** cease until the Safety Concern has been removed. Refer to Synod Legal Services for advice.
- 9.5. Offers of pastoral care and referrals for support should continue if safe to do so. (refer to *Section 7* above)

### Responding to a place with a Safety Concern

#### 10. Immediate actions required

- 10.1. Using the [Template for Complaints and Allegations](#), complete a report, outlining the concerns. This reporting requirement includes the requirement that a report must be made to police for any criminal behaviour. Follow the Mandatory Reporting Process for [lay workers](#) or for [ministry agents](#) if you are concerned that criminal behaviour may have occurred. Ensure a copy of your report is provided to the Synod office.
- 10.2. All programs, activities and events involving young or vulnerable persons must not occur whilst an unmanaged Safety Concern is present. The [Church Council](#) of the congregation must assess the nature of the risk the Safety Concern presents to the congregation.

#### 11. Next steps

- 11.1. Complete a [Risk Assessment](#), to determine what strategies can be put in place immediately to reduce the risk of harm to children and vulnerable persons. This Risk Assessment must be approved by the Church Council in consultation with the Synod Risk Team. Provide a copy of the Risk Assessment to the Synod office.
- 11.2. All programs, activities and events involving children and vulnerable persons **must not** proceed until a completed approved Safe Spaces Agreement is in place, **unless** Synod office approval has been obtained for the Risk Assessment to be used as a short-term measure whilst the Safe Spaces Agreement is completed.
- 11.3. Should it be determined that the risk cannot be managed satisfactorily, or the Church Council decides not to offer a Safe Spaces Agreement, the presbytery and the General Secretary, or their delegate must be notified. All programs, activities and events involving children and vulnerable persons **must** cease until the Safety Concern has been removed. Refer to Synod Legal Services for advice.

### Developing a Safe Spaces Agreement

#### 12. Components of a Safe Spaces Agreement

- 12.1. The Church Council must include the presbytery in the development of the [Safe Spaces Agreement](#). The Safe Spaces Agreement must address the conditions by which activities, programs and events which involve children and vulnerable persons, may continue:



- 12.1.1. The reporting requirements, including the requirement to inform police of any incidents that may have placed a child or children or a vulnerable person at risk of sexual abuse or grooming.
  - 12.1.2. Arrangements to ensure safe entry, exit and participation in Church activities, programs, and events, and includes the appointment of monitors to be present for all activities, events and programs involving children or vulnerable persons
  - 12.1.3. Arrangements may also include monitoring of entry and exit to worship services.
  - 12.1.4. A clear process is in place to respond to an incident during entry or exit, or during an event, activity, or program. All leaders, volunteers and monitors are aware of their roles and responsibilities.
  - 12.1.5. Arrangements for monitoring of high-risk publicly accessible areas such as toilets, secluded areas, or areas with an obstructed line of sight
  - 12.1.6. Clear response procedures are in place to respond to any observed Behaviour of Concern.
  - 12.1.7. Include actions or steps taken to increase the safety of everyone, for example, the person's basic needs for food are being met by regular support from a foodbank ministry, and their needs for accommodation are being addressed by a referral to a homeless support service. Increasing their safety and well-being reduces the likelihood that they may engage in risky or criminal behaviour to meet their own basic needs for food or shelter.
- 12.2. A copy of the signed [Safe Spaces Agreement](#) must be provided to the Church Council, presbytery and General Secretary or their delegate at the Synod office.

### 13. Safe Spaces Agreement Terms

- 13.1. Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all parties to the Safe Spaces Agreement, including offers of pastoral care and any supports being offered to the person whose behaviour has been causing a Safety Concern.
- 13.2. Identification of at least two monitors always assigned to high-risk locations, activities, or programs.
- 13.3. Failure to have at least two monitors present will result in the program, event, or activity being cancelled.
- 13.4. Obligations for the Church council including supporting monitors, monitoring, and reviewing the Safe Spaces Agreement at least annually, and informing the General Secretary or their delegate of any incidents. These obligations may also include engaging with a local homelessness service or other local services regularly, to increase safety.

### 14. Maintain and review a Safe Spaces Agreement

- 14.1. The Church Council has the responsibility to monitor the Safe Spaces Agreement.
- 14.2. In a transition of role(s), it is the responsibility of the incumbent office bearer(s) to ensure that their knowledge of the Safe Spaces Agreement, the roles of the others within the congregation who are supporting them in carrying out the Safe Spaces Agreement and a copy of the Safe Spaces Agreement are forwarded to the new person taking the role.

### 15. Annual review of the Safety Agreement

- 15.1. The focus of the church council will always be to assist the individual to be placed in a more sustainable and dignified position or situation. Where this is not possible:
  - 15.1.1. The capacity of the congregation to manage the risk of the Safe Spaces Agreement must be reviewed annually.
  - 15.1.2. The terms of the Safe Spaces Agreement must be reviewed annually.



## 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)

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

## Revisions

Document number		C/2.4.2			
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
2.0	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		16.05.2027			