



## Responding to Safety Concerns

C/2.4.2

### Purpose

The Uniting Church in Australia, QLD synod is committed to loving and serving all people as a core part of our mission. The outworking of this often requires us to meet and work with people who are from all parts of society and to hold a particular concern for those on the margins who are hurt, disadvantaged or vulnerable. There is always some risk to this posture and yet we are absolutely committed to making our places of ministry as safe as possible for everyone involved. This procedure gives guidance to how we can recruit and appoint safe people to work as volunteers. It also gives guidance to how we can assess and manage the ongoing risks associated with locations and environments that can expose people to harm of harmful behaviour. This procedure ensures that the Church is a safe place for all people and complies with the Safe Ministry with Children (SMC) [Policy](#).

The 3 main steps of the procedure are as follows:-

- 1) Ensure that all lay workers and volunteers undergo pre-appointment screening.
- 2) Pro-actively address any concerning behaviour including reporting any illegal behaviour to authorities.
- 3) Assess and manage safety concerns for any locations or environments that expose people to harm or harmful persons.

### 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.

### Legislation

The *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (QLD)* and the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020 (QLD)*, *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) 2013*, *Disability Services Act 2006* and *Disability Services Regulation 2017*, details the requirements for ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people.

The SMC Policy complies with the *Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020* 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 National Person of Concern Policy Framework 2020* and the *UCA Child Safe Screening National Policy Framework 2020*.

### Mandatory Reporting

1. The [Mandatory Reporting Process for Ministry Agents](#), and the [Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers and Volunteers](#) outlines the steps to take when reporting incidents of suspected abuse, grooming or neglect using the [Template for Complaints and Allegations](#) and the [Guide for Reporting Child Safety Concerns](#) if required. This will ensure you are meeting your legal obligations and fulfilling your duty of care to the children 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.

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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.

## Definition

### 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.

### 6. Behaviours of Concern: any or all of the following behaviours, including any behaviour which breaches the Statement of Personal Commitment:

- 6.1. 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
- 6.2. Fighting, threatening violence, aggressive or bullying behaviour
- 6.3. Derogatory language including racial slurs, swearing, describing sexual acts, or requesting sexual acts
- 6.4. Exposing others to inappropriate images, including nudity and pornography
- 6.5. Exposing body parts to others, including sexual acts, or mimicking sexual acts with or without nudity
- 6.6. 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.
- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. Behaviours that could be experienced as bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or any kind of sexual misconduct.

### 7. 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:

- 7.1. Is the recipient of an activity or program of the Church - for example a community outreach program.
- 7.2. Is in or on Church property - for example, someone temporarily living on Church property due to homelessness

### 8. 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.

- 8.1. For example: Inner city congregations, particularly those ministering to the marginalised.



9. **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](#).

## The Principles

The following principles apply when a place with a Safety Concern, or a person causing a Safety Concern has been identified within a congregation or faith community:

10. The Church aims to provide welcoming environments where all persons, including children and vulnerable persons feel comfortable, safe, and included. We aim to provide experiences which are free from discrimination, exclusion, bullying and abuse. The Church welcomes everyone.
11. The Church has a primary responsibility to care for children and those who are vulnerable in the Church; and will seek to ensure they are safe and protected from harm. This responsibility includes reporting all incidents of sexual abuse, suspected sexual abuse, or grooming to the police.
12. For people with Behaviours of Concern, or for locations that may cause exposure to Behaviours of Concern, the Responding to a Safety Concern process must be implemented. This process implements safety guidelines through a [Safe Spaces Agreement](#). A Safe Spaces Agreement allows the Church to continue to offer support and minister to all people, whilst keeping children and vulnerable persons safe.

## When to apply this procedure

13. **Person causing a Safety Concern**
  - 13.1. The process must be applied in the event a congregation and/or ministry agent becomes aware that a person is causing a Safety Concern. If a person other than the ministry agent of the congregation (including officials of presbytery and Synod) become aware of a person causing a Safety Concern, they must notify the ministry agent of the congregation who will implement the process described below.
14. **Place with a Safety Concern**
  - 14.1. The process must be applied in the event a congregation and/or ministry agent becomes aware that there is 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.

## Responding to a person causing a Safety Concern

15. **Immediate actions required**
  - 15.1. 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.
  - 15.2. 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.
  - 15.3. 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.
16. **Next steps**
  - 16.1. 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.
- 16.2. 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.
  - 16.3. 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.
  - 16.4. 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.
  - 16.5. Offers of pastoral care and referrals for support should continue if safe to do so.

## Responding to a place with a Safety Concern

### 17. Immediate actions required

- 17.1. 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.
- 17.2. All programs, activities and events involving children 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.

### 18. Next steps

- 18.1. 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.
- 18.2. 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.
- 18.3. 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

### 19. Components of a Safe Spaces Agreement

- 19.1. 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:



- 19.1.1. 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.
- 19.1.2. 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
- 19.1.3. Arrangements may also include monitoring of entry and exit to worship services.
- 19.1.4. 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.
- 19.1.5. Arrangements for monitoring of high-risk publicly accessible areas such as toilets, secluded areas, or areas with an obstructed line of sight
- 19.1.6. Clear response procedures are in place to respond to any observed Behaviour of Concern.
- 19.1.7. 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.
- 19.2. 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.

## 20. Safe Spaces Agreement Terms

- 20.1. 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.
- 20.2. Identification of at least two monitors always assigned to high-risk locations, activities, or programs.
- 20.3. Failure to have at least two monitors present will result in the program, event, or activity being cancelled.
- 20.4. 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.

## 21. Maintain and review a Safe Spaces Agreement

- 21.1. The Church Council has the responsibility to monitor the Safe Spaces Agreement.
- 21.2. 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.

## 22. Annual review of the Safety Agreement

- 22.1. 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:
  - 22.1.1. The capacity of the congregation to manage the risk of the Safe Spaces Agreement must be reviewed annually.
  - 22.1.2. 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)

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)

### Revisions

| Document number       |               | C/2.4.2                |                |                                      |   |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Version               | Approval date | Approved by            | Effective date | Policy owner                         | Policy contact                            |
| 1.0                   | 23.02.2023    | Strategic Risk Manager | 23.02.2023     | ED Strategic Resources and Assurance | Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer |
| Next scheduled review |               | 23.02.2028             |                |                                      |   |