

# Responding to and reporting child abuse

This document provides guidelines for handling disclosures of child abuse and for reporting child abuse



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

**Keeping  
Children  
Safe**



The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) Synod of Victoria and Tasmania deals fairly and appropriately with all reports of alleged child abuse under the Keeping Children Safe Policy and the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse. The UCA will act within the law based on the following principles:

- Ensuring the safety of the child
- Preventing misconduct where this is possible
- Dealing sensitively and expeditiously with any allegations including responding compassionately to anyone who has been affected
- Documenting all allegations made and actions taken
- Ensuring procedural fairness for persons against whom allegations are made
- Promoting a positive experience of the Church and creating a strong community of faith.

## Handling disclosures of abuse

If a child alleges they have been abused, they may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry and/or powerless. A person receiving a disclosure may feel a sense of outrage, disgust, sadness, anger and sometimes disbelief. **It is important for you to remain calm and in control and to reassure the child that something will be done to keep him/her safe.**

Show your concern and care for the child by:

- Listening carefully to what they are saying
- Telling the child you believe them
- Telling them it is not their fault and they are not responsible for the abuse
- Letting the child know that you will make a report to the authorities so they can help stop the abuse
- Telling the child you are pleased they told you.

Clarify exactly what the allegation is. Do not undertake an investigation. Assure the child the matter will be taken seriously and explain what may happen next.

### **You will not be helping the child if you:**

- Make promises you cannot keep, such as promising that you will not tell anyone
- Inquire about details of the abuse from the child. Your role is to listen to what the child wants to tell you but not conduct an investigation (beware of asking any direct questions of the child as this may prejudice any subsequent investigation)
- Indiscriminately discuss the circumstances of the child with others not directly involved in helping the child.

### **How can a report be made?**

There is a **flow chart** (see Attachment 3) that outlines the process you should follow.

In response to an allegation, the congregation or presbytery will undertake the following as applicable:

- Seek support from the congregation's Culture of Safety Contact person (where available)
- Seek support from the Synod Safe Church Educator
- Complete the Report of Abuse Notification form (see Attachment 2) and send to the Safe Church Educator
- Refer all allegations of child abuse to child protection services and, if so advised, to the police
- The congregation should inform the presbytery and/or Synod Safe Church Educator. The Church Council must inform the Synod General Secretary of all reports made to the authorities
- Implement any recommendations made by child protection services or police
- Develop a pastoral aftercare plan in consultation with the Safe Church Educator and/or the Presbytery Minister - Pastoral Care

If unclear about what to do consult immediately with child protection services or the Synod Safe Church Educator.

## **Ensuring the safety of the child**

The immediate safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount. Where the child is in danger of continued abuse, police and child protection services must be called immediately.

Protect the child – once an allegation is made there should be an immediate response that protects the child from further abuse or victimisation. The child may require medical assistance or counselling support. Where possible the child should remain in their place of residence or continue participation in the relevant program. If the child is in immediate danger you should make arrangements for the child to go to a safe place on the advice of child protection services or the police.

Distance the alleged perpetrator. The best interests of the child may require standing aside a staff member, congregational leader, volunteer or person in a specified ministry. Any employed person stood aside in this manner continues to receive full pay. This measure recognises that the person is entitled to a just process that does not pre-judge guilt or innocence.

If the parents or caregivers are the alleged offenders, child protection services investigators or the police will advise how and when they are informed of the disclosure.

In all cases, child protection services and the police will inform the parents or caregivers to ensure due processes are not interfered with.

Subject to advice from the police, ministers and other pastoral carers may provide pastoral care for parents/caregivers according to the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice provided the parents/caregivers are not the alleged perpetrator(s). Alternative arrangements may be made to offer pastoral care to the alleged perpetrator(s).

## **Reporting allegations of abuse**

### **What you should report:**

You may come across matters of concern in a variety of ways. If you are unsure about reporting you can consult with your state child protection service. Congregations can also consult with the Synod's Culture of Safety Unit on [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

Examples of what should be reported include:

- Any disclosure by a child,
- Any reasonable belief you have formed that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse of any kind
- Observing events that cause you to form a reasonable belief that a child is being harmed or abused, or is at risk of being harmed or abused  
Observing events that cause you to form a reasonable belief that a child is being groomed- where the person prepares a child significant adults and the environment to allow for abuse to occur
- Being present and witnessing an event or incident involving child abuse
- Any allegation of conduct towards a child which is or might be unlawful
- Any allegation of sexual misconduct towards a child
- Any conduct which would or might give rise to a mandatory requirement to report under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Victoria) and the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (Tasmania)
- An incident in which a child goes missing
- Any allegation of violence inflicted by an adult upon a child
- Any allegation in which an adult has been under the influence of drugs (illicit or misused medication) or alcohol while responsible for children
- Any incident in which a child has been harmed or injured (either physically or psychologically) or is at risk of harm or injury

## When to make a report

### Current Abuse: Reporting in Victoria

#### Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

Any person may report a belief that a child is in need of protection to child protection services. Mandated reporters (doctors, nurses, teachers, police) must report a belief that a child is in need of protection as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse.<sup>1</sup>

#### Failure to Disclose Offence (2014)

This Victorian Government legislation is to ensure that child sexual abuse is reported. It relates to failure to disclose child sexual abuse to police. Where there is a “reasonable belief” that child sexual abuse has occurred or may occur this must be disclosed to either the Police or relevant child protection service. The definitions of “reasonable belief” and of “reasonable excuse” for not reporting are set out in the ‘Failure to disclose offence’ Fact Sheet. The fact sheet distils the message down to a very clear statement:

*“The simple rule is: if you have a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child in Victoria, you must report that belief to Victoria Police.”<sup>2</sup>*

Agencies funded by the Department of Health and Human Services in Victoria must follow the incident reporting requirements of the Department. Schools must follow the reporting requirements of the Department of Education and Training.

### Current abuse: Reporting in Victoria

- Department of Human Services Child Protection Crisis Line 13 12 78 at any time
- Police 000
- To report to the Synod 1300 789 374 or email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/590864/ecec\\_fact2\\_april\\_2006.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/590864/ecec_fact2_april_2006.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/betrayal+of+trust+implementation>  
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/new-criminal-offences-to-improve-responses-to-child-sexual-abuse>

## Tasmania

### The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997

All adults in Tasmania have a responsibility to report suspected or actual child abuse or neglect

Any person may report a belief that a child is in need of protection to child protection services. Mandated reporters (eg. doctors, nurses, teachers, police, psychologists, dentists, volunteers in government-funded agencies, child care providers) must report a belief that a child is in need of protection as a result of physical injury, sexual abuse or neglect.. The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 requires that every adult who knows, or believes or suspects on reasonable grounds, that a child is suffering, has suffered or is likely to suffer abuse or neglect has a responsibility to take steps to prevent the occurrence or further occurrence of the abuse or neglect. One way that an adult can discharge this responsibility is to report their knowledge, belief or suspicion to child protection services or a Gateway Service.

In Tasmania, agencies funded by the Department of Health and Human Services must follow the requirements of the Department. Schools must follow the reporting requirements of the Education and Care Unit in the Department of Education.

#### Current abuse: Reporting in Tasmania

- Department of Health and Human Services 1300 737 639 at any time.
- Police 000
- To report to the Synod email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

#### Disclosure of past childhood abuse

Where an adult discloses **past childhood abuse** you should consider referring them to counselling services and assist the person who has been abused in making a report to police if they wish to do this.

The person may wish to talk about their experience with someone in the Uniting Church. They should contact the following:

- To report to the Synod Tel: 1300 789 374 or email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

#### Who should make a report past childhood abuse?

Any person witnessing or becoming aware of abuse should make a report. If an allegation involves sexual or other abuse of a child it must be reported to the police and child protection services in your state. **You should not investigate the matter yourself.**

## **What happens if concerns about another people's wellbeing are made to you by another person?**

When a third party informs someone of concerns about past childhood abuse the Uniting Church person should:

- Listen carefully to the report and ensure it is fully understood.
- Ensure that relevant authorities have been informed where this is required by law.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to advise others within the Uniting Church.
- Determine what action will be taken.
- Document all action taken.
- Maintain the confidentiality of all parties (including the person making the report, and any person to whom the report relates) at all times to the extent this is possible under law. In some cases, it may be necessary to inform relevant authorities or others in the Uniting Church. Depending on the nature of the allegation it may be necessary to:
  - Inform the police, if the behaviour is or might be criminal.
  - Consider whether a mandatory report must be made under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 in Victoria or the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997 in Tasmania.

All reports made in good faith will be viewed as being made in the best interests of the child regardless of the outcomes of an investigation.

All staff, congregational leaders, volunteers and people in specified ministries are responsible for ensuring that all concerns raised will be treated seriously and that all parties will be treated fairly.

All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially and expediently.

*This template is to assist with the implementation of the **Keeping Children Safe Policy** of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, adopted by the Synod Standing Committee (SSC 17.174D) on 15 February 2017. Templates will be updated from time to time. If you are using a printed or saved copy please check the website for the latest update.*

Updated: 12 April 2017

## Disclosure Reporting Process

**Who can report?**

Child

Parent

Congregational Leader

Congregational Members

**What to report?**

Any child safety concerns, including:

- disclosure of abuse or harm
- allegation, suspicion or observation
- breach of Code of Conduct

**Listen without judgement or fear, use open questions, show empathy  
Do Not Problem Solve**

**Call 000 if a child is in immediate danger**

**Who?**

Culture of Safety contact person OR ministry agent or Synod Culture of Safety unit

**How?**

- Face-to-face conversation, phone or email contact with Culture of Safety contact person or; (03) 9251 5288
- Email the Synod Culture of Safety unit: [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

**What happens next?**

- The Culture of Safety contact person will offer pastoral support to the child, the parents, the person who reports and the respondent; and
- The Synod Culture of Safety unit will support the matter being reported to the relevant authorities and manage process, making a report as soon as possible if required.

**Follow-up**

The Synod Culture of Safety unit may:

- Suggest ongoing pastoral support of those affected,
- Support the ongoing investigation by the relevant authorities
- Provide feedback to the congregation,
- Make recommendations regarding preventative measures; and
- Provide advice on how the Code of Ethics relates to the incident.

**ATTACHMENT TWO**

**Report of abuse notification form**

**Congregations**

*Complete this form listing your concerns as soon as possible after the abuse is disclosed and the appropriate actions have taken place to ensure the immediate safety of the child. Fill in as much as you know, immediately after the discussion or incident, without asking more questions.*

**Section A - Your details**

Full name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of incident \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ /20 \_\_\_\_\_

**Section B – Who are you concerned about?**

**(Fill in as much as you know without asking more questions)**

**Details about the child**

Full name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ Age now \_\_\_\_\_ Age at the time of the incident \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Child’s first language \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_





**Immediate action taken**

Have you reported the incident to the:

- Police
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Ethical Standards Officer of the Uniting Church
- General Secretary, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

**Your Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

Date of report \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

- General Secretary, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

**Your Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

Date of report \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

**Save this form to a secure location and send a copy to the Synod Safe Church Educator.**

**OR Print and scan and email the scan to [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)**

OR print and send to Safe Church Educator, Culture of Safety Unit, 130 Lt Collins Street, Melbourne 3000

**For more information, email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au) or telephone 03 9251 5288.**

## ATTACHMENT THREE

### Contact points

#### Key Contacts in protecting Tasmanian children

##### Child Protection Services

Telephone: 1300 737 639, Email: [cpaars@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:cpaars@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

24 hour number. Use only for emergencies or urgent concerns outside of usual business hours (9-5 Monday – Friday)

#### You may also contact:

##### Child Protection Services (North West)

Telephone: (03) 6434 6308 or Email: [CPInorthwest@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:CPInorthwest@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

##### Child Protection Services (North)

Telephone: (03) 6336 2376 or Email: [CPInorth@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:CPInorth@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

##### Child Protection Services (South West)

Telephone: (03) 6230 7650 or Email: [CPIsouthwest@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:CPIsouthwest@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

##### Child Protection Services (South East)

Telephone: (03) 6230 7833 or Email: [CPIsoutheast@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:CPIsoutheast@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

**You can also speak to a Gateway service** to discuss any difficulties you may be having, or any concerns that you might feel towards the well-being of a child you know.

Contact number for Gateway Services: 1800 171 233

From 9am-5pm, Monday – Friday, this number will divert you to your regional Gateway Services office.

**Tasmania Police: Tel 000**

## Key contacts in protecting Victorian Children

### Intake Units at Regional Offices

#### URBAN

Eastern Suburban Region	1300 360 391
Northern and Western Suburban Region	1300 664 977
Southern Suburban Region	1300 655 795

#### RURAL/REGIONAL

South Western Rural and Regional (Barwon)	1800 075 599
Eastern and South Eastern Rural and Regional (Gippsland)	1800 020 202
Western Rural and Regional (Grampians)	1800 000 551
North Eastern Rural and Regional (Hume)	1800 650 227
North Western Rural and Regional (Loddon Mallee)	1800 675 598

**After hours Child Protection Emergency Services (AHCPEs)** Tel: 131 278

Statewide number for all emergency child protection matters outside of normal business hours  
(24 hours, 7 days a week)

**Victoria Police Tel: 000**

## Key contacts in the Uniting Church – Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Congregations: Uniting Church Ethical Standards Officer (03) 9521 5200

Schools: Director Relationships Innovation: Commission for Mission (03) 9251 5253

Agencies: Associate Executive Director: Commission for Mission (03) 9251 5275

General Secretary: (03) 9251 5215

Messages can also be left on email [contactcultureofsafetyunit@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:contactcultureofsafetyunit@victas.uca.org.au)

Document Review History

Version Number	Date	Reason	Developed By	Approved
CC5V1	07.2016	Created to support Keeping Children Safe Policy, Overseeing Child Safe Standards and Planning Safe Programs processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child safe standards Executive Officer</li> <li>• Culture of Safety Unit SC17.17.4D</li> </ul>	Associate General Secretary
Due	12.04.2017	Review cycle – every year		