



# **SAFE CHURCH TRAINING**

## **Participant's Booklet**



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA





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## **Introduction**

### **Welcome and thank you**

We warmly welcome you to this training session. Thank you for being available for this important component of the Church's ministry – ensuring all people feel safe and are safe.

### **Participant outcomes**

By the end of this session you will be able to:

1. explain to others in a clear manner the importance of, and reasons for, the Safe Church commitments for effective ministry;
2. discuss the nature and extent of abuse in the Church and wider society;
3. summarise what congregations and church councils must do to ensure a safe culture and prevent abuse;
4. respond to and support children according to the Uniting Church's requirements and legal obligations;
5. respond to and support vulnerable adults according to the Uniting Church's requirements and legal obligations;
6. identify and manage potential risks, and promote an awareness and respect for personal and professional boundaries;
7. explain the processes for selecting and screening leaders and implement accountability and support structures;
8. respond appropriately to any reports or allegations of misconduct;
9. demonstrate an awareness of legislation and the requirements of insurers in regard to Safe Church matters;
10. provide opportunities for children and vulnerable adults to contribute to the life of the church;
11. readily locate the necessary resources; and
12. recognise the need to remain current in relation to church and insurance requirements and government legislation.

### **Session outline**

Today's training is broken into four parts:

- A. Our Keeping Children Safe Policy
- B. Making our Church safe for children
- C. Making our Church safe for vulnerable adults
- D. Planning safe places, safe programs

## A. Our Keeping Children Safe Policy



The Keeping Children Safe policy, a whole of Synod policy, was approved by Synod Standing Committee in 2015 and was updated in May 2017 (Synod Standing Committee minute SSC17.42.3B) to ensure it complies with:

- the legislative requirements of the three states our Synod covers;
- UCA Assembly policy;
- the outcomes of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017); and
- community standards, including Victoria's Child Safe Standards.

### A-1 What we believe: Theological Imperative (KCS Policy Section 1.2)

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997).

Central to living out the Gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people, including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990). This states that children shall be protected from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 19).

Children are gifts of God to be received, welcomed and cared for responsibly and justly. The Gospel also directs us to listen to and learn from children. On the Way Together (1998) affirms that 'children in the Uniting Church in Australia are nurtured in Christian faith and discipleship, experiencing relationships which promote trust, cooperation, honesty, positive valuing of persons, responsibility and Christian service.' It adds that the Church 'affirms the value and the rights of children as human beings as it listens to, guides, protects, advocates for, and empowers children within its own communities and the wider community.'

Unfortunately, not all children are protected from harm. Abuse occurs across all areas of society. Some adults will seek opportunities to form relationships with children which may become exploitative. Whilst children, parents and the Church should be aware of 'stranger danger', most people who sexually abuse children are known to the victim through family, friends, school, sports groups, church and other community based activities.

The Uniting Church abhors the crime of child abuse. The Church is devoted to the care, protection and wellbeing of the most vulnerable. To know that innocent and trusting children have been preyed upon within the Church is deeply distressing. We are committed to do everything we can to achieve justice for those who have been abused and to create an environment where children are safe.

## **A-2 Implementing Safe Church processes**

The Church is required to implement Safe Church processes by state and federal laws, and to respond to the Federal Government's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. All church entities, including all congregations and faith communities, must incorporate its recommendations, summarised as the Ten Elements of a Child-Safe Organisation. (The Royal Commission looked at historical abuse by religious organisations, including the Uniting Church.)

## **A-3 Resources on the website**

A number of resources have been developed to assist with the implementation of child safe practices across the church. These are referenced by their relevant codes throughout this booklet and can be found at <http://ucavictas.org.au/keepingchildrensafe/>

## **A-4 What congregations need to do**

Because Victoria's Child Safe Standards are considered best practise, Synod Standing Committee has resolved to adopt a policy that requires these standards to be implemented by all Uniting Church entities, including all congregations and faith communities, across the Synod. (CSS1 on the website)

## **A-5 Victoria's seven Child Safe Standards require each congregation or entity to have:**

1. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including effective leadership.
2. A child safe policy or statement of commitment.
3. A clear code of conduct for appropriate behaviour with children.
4. Human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.
5. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.
6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove the risk of abuse.
7. Strategies for children's participation and empowerment.

In addition, the Victorian Government requires us to:

- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children (CSS2);
- promote the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (CSS4); and
- promote the safety of children with a disability (CSS3).

So, we have legal reasons to keep children safe. If we cannot demonstrate that we take child safety seriously, we leave ourselves open to potentially costly legal consequences.

Our Synod's Keeping Children Safe policy was written to take account of all these theological, ethical, legal and practical reasons. Appendix 1 of the Policy illustrates how the policy meets the Royal Commission's Ten Elements and Victoria's seven Child Safe Standards. Our policy also complies with the Assembly's National Child Safety Framework.

## **A-6 Scope: Who must adhere to this policy (KCS Policy Section 1.3)**

All individuals and entities related to the Uniting Church will adhere to this policy. By having a shared understanding of and commitment to an environment of safety, we all have an active role in keeping children safe.

Individuals of the Church include but are not limited to:

- Board and/or council members of any entity
- Church council members, elders and other appointed leaders
- Employees and volunteers
- Congregational members and adherents
- Presbytery and synod members
- Children, parents and carers
- People in specified ministries of the Church including those from other denominations who are serving in Uniting Church placements.

Entities of the Church include but are not limited to:

- All congregations, parish missions, faith communities and presbyteries within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
- All agencies, programs, services, events and employees in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
- All camping activities related to the Uniting Church
- Uniting (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)
- Associated Uniting Church schools
- Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congresses (Victoria and Tasmania)
- University colleges

**Note:** UCA entities are not responsible to ensure that outside organisations hiring their premises abide by the UCA Keeping Children Safe policy. The standard letting agreement from Synod Property Services and on the Keeping Children Safe website provides the necessary wording. Outside hirers needing information about WWCC/Rs should check the appropriate website for their state.

## **A-7 What we will do: Policy Actions (abridged from KCS Policy Section 2)**

We will provide a just and safe culture and environment for children. We will heed our beliefs as outlined in the theological imperative. We will ensure that the expectations outlined in the Royal Commission's elements of child-safe organisations and the Victorian Government's Child Safe Standards are incorporated into our programs and practice.

We commit to the following actions to keep children safe:

- Promote strong leadership and governance and a culture of child safety
- Promote access, equity and diversity
- Promote appropriate behaviour
- Recruit, train and supervise workers well
- Manage risk, promote safety and respond to concerns
- Promote child, family and community participation

## **A-8 Online resources mentioned in this section:**

Keeping Children Safe Policy (KCS1)

Guide for Church Councils for Implementation of KCS policy (CC1)

Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children (CSS2);

Safety of children with a disability (CSS3);

Cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (CSS4)

## **B. Making our Church safe for children**

### **B-1 Understanding Child Abuse**

Part of understanding our responsibilities as leaders is to understand child abuse and to understand our ethical and legal responsibilities to respond to abuse.

**Child abuse** – is *any act that endangers the child's physical or emotional health or development*. These may be *things people do to children or things they fail to do for them*. Abuse occurs when those in positions of trust and power abuse that trust and make use of their power to harm children.

**By government definition, a child is anyone under the age of 18 years.**

### **B-2 Myths and Truths about child abuse**

*Myth: Child abuse is rare*

**Truth:** On the contrary, it is quite common. The statistics are probably quite conservative.

Drawing on a range of recent studies, the best current Australian estimates are that up to 5% of boys (1 in 20) suffer penetrative abuse, and 12% (1 in 8) are exposed to non-penetrative sexual abuse.

Girls experience child sexual abuse at far higher rates, with up to 8% (1 in 12) suffering penetrative abuse, and up to 26% (1 in 4) exposed to non-penetrative abuse. (The Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect, Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016)

Within Australia, the most common forms of abuse are emotional (43%); neglect (26%); physical (18%) and sexual (13%). (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014)

*Myth: People lie about child abuse to gain attention and sympathy*

**Truth:** It is much more common for people to deny abuse when they *have* been abused than to claim abuse when they have *not*. Court records also show that it is very rare for people to fabricate accusations of abuse.

*Myth: It's only abuse if it is violent*

**Truth:** As the definition of abuse above has indicated, abuse includes but is not confined to violent abuse.

*Myth: Children grow out of bad childhood experiences*

Truth: Most adults continue to be deeply affected by childhood abuse. Survivors need lots of the right kinds of support to live full and healthy lives.

*Myth: Sexual abuse only happens to children from poor families*

Truth: Being poor does not mean a child will be sexually abused, but poverty is a serious risk factor as well as families that are in crises, dysfunctional families and parent/s under stress. These situations create vulnerable children who are more likely to be exposed to abuse.

**B-3 Types of abuse – Remember that all abuse is about misuse of power.**

- Physical abuse – occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child or young person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.
- Sexual abuse – occurs when a child or young person is used by an older or bigger child, adolescent or adult for that's person's own sexual stimulation or gratification. These acts may or may not involve physical contact, as sexual abuse includes threats and exposure to pornography.
- Emotional abuse – occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected or frightened by threats. This may involve name calling, being put down or continual coldness to the extent that it affects the child's physical and emotional growth.
- Neglect – involves failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, supervision or care to the extent that the child's health and development are placed at risk.

**B-4 Become aware of grooming (Website resource is CC10)**

Grooming (sometimes called sexual grooming) is a process by which a person develops a relationship, friendship and/or emotional connection with a child, adults significant to the child and the environment in order to gain the trust of the child and parent(s) to facilitate later sexual abuse or gratification. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, desensitising the child in order to increasingly violate boundaries, gaining the child's silence, compliance and agreement to secrecy.

This kind of predatory conduct is an offence. The offence applies where an adult communicates in this way in any form, including in person or by electronic means (online), with a child under the age of 16 years in Victoria, under the age of 17 years in Tasmania or under the age of 17 years if the person grooming the child has care, supervision or authority for the child. Grooming is an offence under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), the Criminal Code 1924 (Tas) and the Criminal Code 1995 (Cwlth).

In Victoria, the crime of grooming may be committed without sexual abuse occurring.



## **B-5 Effects of child abuse**

Effects of child abuse may include: self-blame, difficulty with love or trust, low self-esteem, various forms of disability, anti-social or violent behaviour, suicide or homicide, alcohol or drug abuse, depression, eating disorders, sleep disorders, caring or loving unhelpfully, withdrawal, denial, self-harm, victimising others.

## **B-6 Disclosures and reports**

Any person who has a reasonable belief that a person under the age of 18 is being abused in any way has an obligation to report that belief to the relevant authorities.

## **B-7 Responding to and reporting child abuse**

Reporting child abuse can be stressful; the Synod has developed a flowchart called Disclosure Reporting Process (SCT3) as a best-practice guide to assist people receiving a disclosure – see the outside back cover of this booklet.

If a child discloses abuse, show your concern and care by:

- Listening carefully to what they are saying. Only ask clarifying questions. Do not ask or say anything that might put words in the child's mouth, let them explain in their own way. Your role is to listen, not to investigate.
- Telling the child you believe them and you are pleased they told you.
- Telling them it is not their fault and they are not responsible for the abuse.
- Not making promises you can't keep.
- Letting the child know that you will make a report to the authorities so they can help stop the abuse.

## **B-8 Culture of Safety Contact Person**

Each congregation or group of congregations needs a Culture of Safety Contact Person. Children or adults in a congregation can report concerns or abuse to the CoS Contact Person. The role description is outlined in website resource SCT1.

## **B-9 Ethical reporting**

Any person in a position of leadership and authority (paid or unpaid) or any person working with children or young people in any capacity or a congregational member who may suspect that a child is at risk of harm is ethically bound to report these concerns to the relevant authorities – even if told in confidence and/or if the alleged perpetrator is a friend, family member, respected community leader, etc. Safety of a child is a greater priority than trying to avoid conflict.

## **B-10 The Law in Tasmania**

In Tasmania, members of certain professions are obligated to report any kind of abuse.

For the general public the following applies: "An adult who knows, or believes or suspects on reasonable grounds, that a child is suffering from, 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." That may involve reporting to appropriate authorities.

## **B-11 The Law in Victoria**

Any person who has a reasonable belief that any kind of abuse has been committed by an adult against a child under 18 is obligated to report that belief to relevant authorities. This applies to all adults, not just those who work with children in a professional capacity.

Note that this is not limited to sexual abuse. The suspected offence must be reported, even if the child's parents are protecting the child from further abuse.

### **Recent Legislation:**

Failure to Disclose – Any adult who has a reasonable belief of a sexual offence of a child under 16 is obligated to report that belief. Not to do so is an offence.

Failure to Protect – Adults in positions of authority are required to reduce or remove any substantial risk to children under their care.

Grooming – The crime of grooming may be committed without sexual abuse occurring.

More information about these is in Appendix Two of the KCS Policy.

Reportable Conduct - a new legal requirement applies to VICTORIA ONLY

From 1 January 2018 churches are required to respond to allegations of child abuse or other child-related misconduct made against any of their workers, volunteers and appointed leaders. Allegations can be made about the conduct of people even if:

- they do not have direct contact with children
- the conduct occurred outside of their roles at the church

There are five types of 'reportable conduct':

- sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
- sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child;
- physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child;
- any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; or
- significant neglect of a child.

A screening tool and other resources have been developed and are available on the Culture of Safety website.

## **B-12 The Law in NSW**

If a person, in the course of their paid or unpaid work, suspects on reasonable grounds that a child "is at risk of significant harm" then that person is mandated to report to Child Protection Services.

Any person may voluntarily report.

The person who reports must report in good faith, does not have to prove that abuse has taken place, and does not need permission from the parents.

## **B-13 Online resources mentioned in this section:**

Guide for Church Councils for Implementation of KCS policy CC1  
Guide for the Prevention of Grooming CC10  
Disclosure and reporting CC5, SCT3  
Culture of Safety Contact Person SCT1

## **C. Making our Church safe for vulnerable adults**

### **C-1 Who is a vulnerable adult?**

Vulnerable adults are defined as people who may be considered to be susceptible to abuse or exploitation based on factors such as their health status (physical or mental), age, grief, social isolation or financial hardship. Vulnerability can be temporary or permanent.

Consider who might be a vulnerable adult in your congregation or entity. People with mental or physical disabilities probably come to mind. But what about a recently bereaved young widow? An aged person no longer able to do his own banking? A recently arrived asylum seeker with limited English ability?

### **C-2 Elder abuse**

Most congregations and Uniting Church entities have older people as members or clients. Our responsibility is to ensure that older people feel safe and are safe. Sadly, elder abuse has emerged as a serious issue.

“Elder abuse is mistreatment of an older person that is committed by someone with whom the older person has a relationship of trust such as a partner, family member, friend or carer.

“Elder abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect. Sometimes family, friends and carers may not know that their actions amount to elder abuse.

“Elder abuse violates an older person’s basic right to feel safe. It is a controlling behaviour or action which frightens or intimidates and can be illegal. It can occur at any time and be subtle to extreme.”<sup>1</sup>

The latest figures compiled by the National Ageing Research Institute of Seniors’ Rights Victoria data show that financial abuse and psychological/emotional abuse together are the most common forms of abuse reported by older Victorians (81.8%). Victims are most likely to be female (72.5%), and the perpetrators are 60% male and 40% female; 92.3% of abuse is perpetrated by persons related to the older person or in a *de facto* relationship; 66.8% of abuse is perpetrated by a child of the older person.

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Government Elder Abuse prevention Strategy, Resource Toolkit (2015)

### **C-3 Types of abuse**

The forms of abuse may include physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse, domestic violence, neglect.

### **C-4 Our principles for keeping vulnerable adults safe**

The Church is committed to establishing a safe environment for vulnerable adults by:

1. Recognising, identifying and supporting vulnerable adults in congregations.
2. Promoting and implementing a Code of Conduct.
3. Responding to bullying or other inappropriate behaviour.
4. Ensuring vulnerable adults are aware of the complaints process, as well as their rights and responsibilities as Church members.
5. Planning and conducting safe programs for vulnerable adults.
6. Communicating openly and honestly.
7. Educating employees, volunteers and vulnerable adults to raise any concerns they have about the safety of vulnerable adults.
8. Vigilantly screening and selecting all employees and volunteers who work with vulnerable adults.

### **C-5 When vulnerable adults are at risk of abuse**

Similarly to how we respond to children, we can support vulnerable adults who are experiencing or are at risk of abuse by:

- Listening respectfully.
- Assuring people that they have done the right thing by disclosing or reporting.
- Assuring people we believe them.
- Telling people what action could be taken.
- Talking with the adult about a response.
- Respecting their decision.

Most vulnerable adults we interact with would retain 'agency' – that is the capacity to make decisions for themselves. This means there might be times when WE feel we should report our concerns but the vulnerable adult does not wish this to occur

When the vulnerable adults retains agency- and they ask us to stop, we must STOP.

### **C-6 Online resources available for this section:**

RVA1, all SSL resources

## D. Planning safe places, safe programs

By following the Guide for Implementing the Keeping Children Safe Policy (CC1), you will be planning safe programs and ensuring you have safe places. And you will be meeting your legal requirements.

### D-1 10 Steps for Church Councils

Here are the 10 steps church councils need to take:

- 1 Prepare for action – read the policies and familiarise yourself with the resources.
- 2 Make a statement of commitment to the Keeping Children Safe Policy and publicise it.  
*These two items help you meet your obligation to have strong leadership and a culture of child safety – policy action 1.*
- 3 Appoint a Culture of Safety Contact Person.  
*This will help you meet your obligation to promote access and encourage child participation – policy actions 2 and 6.*
- 4 Use a Code of Conduct – make sure every appointed leader, employee and volunteer signs it.
- 5 Ensure all existing personnel have Working with Children Checks or Registrations.
- 6 Support and train existing personnel.
- 7 Respond appropriately to any concerns of abuse.
- 8 Carefully select and induct new personnel.  
*All these points help you meet your obligation to promote appropriate behaviour and to recruit and supervise workers well – policy actions 3 and 4.*
- 9 Ensure good planning practices for events involving children or youth.  
*This helps you to manage risk and promote safety – policy action 5.*
- 10 Encourage participation of children and families.  
*This helps you meet your obligation to empower children and families – policy action 6.*

### D-2 Working with Children Check/Registration – Appointed leaders

While there is some variation in the requirements from state-to-state, the Synod is required to decide who needs a WWCC/R.

- Our Synod requires a WWCC/R from all ministers, pastors, lay preachers, lay leaders, and appointed leaders. In addition employees, volunteers and all other people who have contact with children and young people in programs, events and activities run on behalf of congregations, presbyteries or the Synod require a WWCC/R. “Appointed leader” includes, but is not limited to, elders, church councillors, worship leaders, anyone commissioned by the Church Council to perform a leadership role, music leaders, organists and Bible study leader and of course anyone involved in children or youth ministry (eg. Sunday School teachers, messy church leaders and helpers, youth group leaders or those leading camps and day programs – advent and Easter workshops – with children and young people)

**Caution:** *Any negative notice or communication from the Department of Justice must be reported to the Synod General Secretary.*



**D-3 Online resources mentioned in this section:**

Resources available to assist with Implementing the Policy Actions (CC3)  
Code of Conduct (KCS4 and KCS7)  
Screening and selecting leaders (SSL1)  
Occupational Health and Safety (SPSP1)

**All material pertaining to Keeping Children Safe can be found at:**

**<http://ucavictas.org.au/keepingchildrensafe/>**



The material developed for the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Safe Church Training, Keeping Children Safe website and associated resources has met Safe Church Training Agreement National Standards, an initiative of the National Council of Churches in Australia and is endorsed.

**Contacting the Culture of Safety Unit**

We look forward to your feedback, including which resources you find helpful or any you would like us to add.

The Culture of Safety unit can be contacted by:

Email: [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au)

Josh Tuhipa-Turner, Safe Church Educator

[josh.tuhipa-turner@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:josh.tuhipa-turner@victas.uca.org.au)

03 9251 5288

Sue Clarkson, Ethical Standards Officer

[sue.clarkson@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:sue.clarkson@victas.uca.org.au)

03 9251 5912

**Self-care information**

Please remember that working on this subject sometimes triggers memories of long-ago abuse.

Should you or anyone in your congregation need to talk about abuse within the church or by church people, we in the Culture of Safety unit are available.

Ring 1300 789 374 and leave a message or email [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au).

Or contact the Bethel Pastoral Centre, (03) 9859 8700 or email [bethel@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:bethel@victas.uca.org.au).

Or, if it is a criminal matter, ring the police, 000.

### **Your notes**

### **Your reflections**

Note here 2-3 new things you have learned and 2-3 actions you will take as a result of the training today.

## Disclosure Reporting Process – SCT3



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Keeping  
Children  
Safe



## Disclosure Reporting Process

## Who can report?

Child

Parent

Congregational  
LeaderCongregational  
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.