

SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT ST PAUL'S

CHILD SAFE PROGRAM

What constitutes Child Abuse?

According to the World Health Organisation, child abuse or maltreatment constitutes “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.”

In Victoria child abuse is defined in section 3 of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) as including:

- any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence or a grooming offence listed in the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- the infliction of physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm
- the serious neglect of a child.

Whilst the term “family violence” does not form part of the official definition of “child abuse”, the impact of family violence on a child is commonly referred to as a form of child abuse.

In Victoria section 5 of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) defines “family violence” as behaviour by a person towards a family member that is:

- physically or sexually abusive
- emotionally or psychologically abusive
- economically abusive
- threatening
- coercive
- in any other way controlling or dominating the family member and causes them to feel fear for their own, or other family member’s safety or wellbeing.

Behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or be exposed to the effects of such behaviour also falls within the definition of “family violence”.

Who is a Child?

A child is defined by the Act as a person who is under the age of 18 years.

CHILD SAFETY PROTECTION POLICY

St Paul's Lutheran Church Box Hill is committed to promoting and protecting at all times the best interests and safety of children involved in its programs.

All children at St Paul's, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse and are encouraged to actively participate in building and maintaining a safe and secure environment.

St Paul's has zero tolerance for child abuse.

Child-related work is paid or unpaid work involving regular direct and unsupervised contact with a child or caring for children.

All personnel on Church Council and those involved in child-related work (paid or unpaid work involving regular direct and unsupervised contact with a child) at St Paul's are required to undergo Working With Children Screening Checks (WWCC) and receive Professional Standards Training including the Code of Practice for Child Safety and our policy and procedures in relation to child protection at St Paul's. Records are maintained of training, screening and other checks conducted.

Responsibility for preventing, detecting and reporting of suspected child abuse is shared by all our leaders and team members.

St Paul's Church Council will implement the following principles to embed a child safe culture in all its ministries

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.
2. Implement child safety policies and procedures which support ongoing identification, assessment and control of risks.
3. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
4. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.
5. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
6. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.
7. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
8. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues.
9. Provide information regarding the steps to take after a disclosure of abuse, neglect or mistreatment to protect, support and assist children.
10. Adhere to guidelines with respect to record keeping, privacy and confidentiality ensuring information is only shared on a "need to know basis".
11. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other congregations where the safety and wellbeing of children are at risk.
12. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.
13. St Paul's mission statement to include specific consideration of child safety.

Child Protection Champions

St Paul's Lutheran Church Box Hill has appointed the following people as Child Protection Champions within the congregation:

Position	Name	Contact details
Senior Pastor	Neville Otto	neville@stpaulsboxhill.org.au
Associate Pastor	Phil Haar	phil@stpaulsboxhill.org.au
Coordinator Child and Family	Keren Loffler	keren@stpaulsboxhill.org.au
Coordinator Youth and Family	Stephanie Juers	stephanie@stpaulsboxhill.org.au

If you need to call one of these Champions, please phone the office to request their number on 9899 0623.

Key responsibilities for the Child Protection Champions include:

- having a good working knowledge of the Child Safety Protection Policy and Program.
- being the first point of contact for staff, or other members of the St Paul's community, raising child protection concerns.
- ensuring that the Child Safety Protection Policy is clearly communicated to all key stakeholders including children, parents, staff and volunteers.
- ensuring that the Child Safety Protection Policy and Programs are being implemented effectively.
- ensuring that there are clear procedures to allow people to report child protection concerns.
- promptly managing the response to an allegation or disclosure of child abuse, and ensuring that the allegation or disclosure is taken seriously.
- review and assess the effectiveness of the Child Safety Protection Program.

Our Child Safety Code of Conduct.

St Paul's Lutheran Church Box Hill aims to provide a caring and safe environment, where the love of Jesus Christ governs all interactions and relationships. Therefore, this Code lists behaviours that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable in order to protect children and reduce any opportunities for abuse or harm to occur by promoting child safety in its programs. Where an adult breaches the Code, Church Council may take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal (staff) or exclusion from St Paul's programs.

Acceptable Behaviour

- Behave in a manner consistent with your position as a positive role model to children and as a representative of St Paul's.
- Follow the Policy, Code of Conduct and implement the procedures as outlined in St Paul's Child Safety Protection Program.
- Be vigilant and proactive with regard to child safety, their welfare and well-being.
- Encourage children to 'have a say' and then listen to them with respect.
- Promote the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability.
- Promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of linguistically and culturally diverse children.
- Help provide an open, safe and supportive environment for all children to interact and socialise.
- Use positive and affirming language toward children.
- Reporting of incidents – refer to 'Acceptable Responses'.

Social Media Usage Guidelines

The following guidelines are to assist all people who work with children and all people who are in positions of authority within the church.

Background

As a person in a position of authority within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You should avoid situations where you are vulnerable to temptation or where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of this Code of Conduct."

Basic Communication Principles

There are three basic principles when having any type of conversation with a child:

1) Remember God is listening:

- The 'God test' – is this conversation honouring God?
- The 'parent test' – if this child's parents were listening/reading this, would they feel comfortable with this conversation?

2) Seek transparency in conversations with children and wherever possible do not converse where you can't be observed by others.

3) Don't get in deeper than you can handle – if issues arise that are greater than your ability or in an area of your weakness refer the child to others who are better equipped to deal with it. When in doubt, ask for help.

Online communications can create an intense, relational situation because of the ease of access, the comfort of distance and its unobserved nature. A relationship can be developed far more quickly than was possible before online communication became common. Therefore, the church considers talking with children online to be exactly the same as talking to them face to face. **The same code of conduct for leaders interacting with children face to face applies to all types of online communication.**

Specific Social Media conduct guidelines:

1. Facebook /blogs/websites

Where St Paul's establishes any of the above social media platforms as a method of communication within the group this is the best place for leaders to converse with members of the group as all conversations may be held in public. The group administrator must ensure there is no option for private conversations to take place on this facility.

Best practice is for leaders not to be individual friends on social media with children within the church. This is due to the risks inherent in private relationships which may develop over social media. These risks affect both children and leaders.

However, it is recognised that leaders may be individual friends on social media with children where the relationship is pre-existing or established via other connections, for example they may be related, in a mentoring relationship, or may have formed the friendship via knowing each other external to the leader/group member relationship. In circumstances where leaders are individual friends with children on social media, leaders are at all times to adhere to the basic principles above as all conversations are accessible by children and their friends.

2. SMS Text messaging/emails

Best practice is to only use the above methods of communication as a “one-way” avenue for communicating within a group. Make it clear to all members of the group that while SMS texts/emails will be used for communication, leaders will not reply individually to any response from group members, unless a matter of urgency arises. Parents are always to be given the option of being copied in on any communication from the ministry or organisation leaders and are encouraged to be members of the group/ contacts list.

When sending group emails always remember to send any email to yourself first and put all contacts into the blind copy (BCC) field to ensure you do not distribute email addresses without permission. Always copy in fellow leaders. Follow the same privacy protocols if using SMS texts to do mass communication within a group.

Exceptions: One-on-one email/SMS communication between an adult and a child within church ministry is acceptable:

- within a formal mentoring situation where parents have approved the mentoring relationship.
- Within the context of church programs ie reminding a child they are leading a section of the program or to bring something specific to a program.
- Within the context of receiving and responding to a confidential report from a child. In this case hard copies of the communication will be made and placed in a confidential file.

3. Phone/Skype/FaceTime

In the main seek to avoid where possible individual contact with children via phone/Skype/FaceTime. Aim to have 100% of communication to children via group communication. Should a need arise to use phone/Skype/FaceTime you should be accountable – always get parental permission before you talk with a child over the phone and tell a co-leader that you are conversing with a child by phone. If using Skype or FaceTime again always get parental permission before you talk with a child using this facility. Ensure both you and the child are using this form of communication in an open area where people can see you or there are others present, e.g. not alone in your room.

In the case where an inappropriate message or image is sent to a leader by a group member via any social media, whether publicly or privately, the leader should not reply or forward the message under any circumstances and must immediately notify the Child Youth and Family Ministry (CYFM) chair or a pastor that this has occurred. The ministry chair or pastor will advise on how to proceed.

SUMMARY

- Social media communication has significant potential risk involved for all users
- Adhering to these guidelines will help minimise risk
- Always seek transparency in online activities
- Practice online behaviour that demonstrates a true witness to the Christian faith
- As much as possible adopt an online philosophy that uses social media as a 'broadcast' communication tool to a group
- If a situation develops online that you need advice or guidance about talk to a pastor or the CYFM chair

Unacceptable Behaviour

- Use prejudice, oppressive behaviour or inappropriate language with children.
- Engage in inappropriately rough physical games.
- Use any physical means to control or discipline a child, other than restraint by holding to prevent injury.
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch children in an inappropriate and/or culturally insensitive way.
- Make sexually suggestive comments, even as a joke.
- Assist children to do things of a personal nature that they can do for themselves, such as going to the toilet or changing clothes.
- Enter a bedroom or dormitory without warning and behave in an inappropriate manner, such as sitting on a child's bed.
- Spend time alone with a child in an isolated location. Always ensure another adult is within sight when conducting one-to-one counselling or instruction.
- Take a child to one's home, or encourage meetings outside the program activity unless authorised by the child's parent or carer. Ongoing contact with participants should only occur within strict guidelines.

Acceptable Responses

- Intervene when children are engaging in inappropriate bullying behaviour towards others or acting in a humiliating or vilifying way.
- Report concerns about child safety to Child Protection Champions and ensure that legal obligations are met.
- Where an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child involved is safe.
- Call the Police on 000 if there are immediate concerns for a child's safety.
- Confidentially document and file any report or suspicion of child abuse.

Create a culture whereby all persons, including staff, volunteers, parents/carers of children feel confident and comfortable to disclose any child safety concerns.

Strategies that help such a culture include:

- Encourage open communication and discussions in children's programs about experiences and feelings.
- Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives and provide leaders with resources that support participation.
- Establish pathways for children to get to know who they can go to when they have a question or concern and that they will never get into trouble for telling trusted adults that someone did something that they were not comfortable about.
- Create an environment supportive of children with a disability or from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds by supporting their different needs in keeping child safety paramount.
- Promote to staff, volunteers, children and families a confidential reporting system for suspected abuse by ensuring all incidents are recorded and maintained at all levels and reported in accordance with legislative requirements.

Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

To evaluate risks posed to children in programs conducted at St Paul's, taking into account the size, resources and the types of children participating in the activities:

- Encourage incident/complaint reporting to Child Protection Champions. Where there is a report of child abuse this is to be assessed and reported immediately to the appropriate authorities. As an interim, risk to be controlled by suspension of staff/volunteer alleged not suitable to work with children – seek legal advice before terminating such a relationship.
- Provide support and comfort to a child reporting abuse or safety concerns and ensure that a child is never blamed or interrogated.
- Provide staff and volunteers with training in what is not acceptable behaviour and identifying children at risk of abuse both physically e.g. engage in inappropriately rough physical games and environmentally e.g. child entering out of sight spaces with doors that can be locked.
- Learn from past lessons and talk about incidents/complaints with appointed Child Protection Champions to ensure that learnings are shared and preventative action taken as required.

Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children:

Provide personnel involved in St Paul's programs, including all children of appropriate age with information about what child abuse is, their rights and how they can raise concerns about abuse e.g. through information sheets, websites etc.

Train staff and volunteers on what is acceptable behaviour including methods of empowering children and encouraging their participation in child safe programs including the planning and decision making of such programs.

Treat all children with respect and take notice of their reactions to your tone of voice and manner.