

# **POLICY**

**FOR CHILD PROTECTION**

*And*

**PROTOCOLS FOR DEALING WITH ALLEGATIONS OF  
ABUSE (SEXUAL AND OTHERWISE) AGAINST CHILDREN**

**FOR USE IN**

**THE PRESBYTERIAN REFORMED CHURCH  
OF  
EVERTON PARK**

## A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

A hallmark of true religion has always been a willingness on the part of God's people to defend the cause of the defenceless, even if that cause should appear to be very unpopular in the eyes of the world. But the true child of God does not go by appearance, but rather seeks to judge righteously (John 7:24). As a result, his priorities are not shaped by this world's agenda, nor by current popular trends in the media.

This readiness to adopt unpopular causes in the defence of the defenceless finds expression in the Old Testament in frequent references to taking up the case of the "*the stranger, the fatherless and the widow*" (eg. Exod 22:22-24, Deut 14:29, Deut 24:17-22, Deut 26:12-13, Deut 27:19, Psa 82:3-4, Isa 1:17, Jer 7:5-7, Jer 22:3, Zech 7:10 etc.) – indeed, in this, we emulate God Himself (Deut 10:18-19, Psa 10:14-18, Psa 68:5, Psa 146:9).

Even where, in the New Testament, the "people of God" were more clearly identified as a spiritual people (rather than a political body), from the earliest days a defining characteristic of God's people was still to identify those who were disenfranchised and easily overlooked, in order to come to their aid (see Acts 6:1). James makes the point that this is not an accident of our religion, but of its very essence – essential to true holiness: "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world*" (Jas 1:27).

In more recent times the church (and, thankfully, society) has become more aware that a constituency in our midst that is truly defenceless, and hence needs our help, are those who are victims of child abuse (whether sexual, physical or emotional). There is no sincere or thoughtful Christian who would not whole-heartedly come to the defence of such little ones, especially as the issue has received a high profile in recent years. This comes naturally since, not only is the crime itself utterly repulsive, but the victims (as little children) readily evoke our sympathy (see also Luke 17:1-2). This is one popular cause that all Christians rightly espouse.

Along with these we also recognise another class of those who are vulnerable, i.e. those who may be (either mistakenly or, with some older children, deliberately) falsely accused of child abuse (particularly sexual abuse). These suffer as serious an offence (see Deut 19:16-21), and rarely recover their reputation once the accusation is made public.

Hence, when an accusation is made, it is extremely important that we, as a church, judge righteous judgment (Prov 17:15); the church is bound to uphold the truth (1 Tim 3:15). If a member of the church is involved, as either accuser or accused, the church is obliged to investigate the matter and come to a considered judgment (1 Cor 6:2-5). Where a crime has been committed, the matter will also need to come before the courts (Rom 13:1-4). The church, however, may not abrogate its responsibility by leaving it all to the courts; the Bible says this would be the "shame" of the church.

If an accusation is made that proves to be true, the perpetrator must be made to face up to the consequences of his sin before the church, and his crime before the courts; if false, then the one making the accusation must be made to face up to the consequences of making a false accusation. Either way, where a serious accusation has been made there is serious sin that needs to be addressed.

However, in framing this protocol, the Church recognises that we need to do more than address the problem once it has arisen. The Bible requires us (eg. as *per* the principle in Deut 22:8) to do all we reasonably can to foresee possible sources of danger and put in place reasonable safeguards. We also recognise the need in this to strike a sensible balance between taking reasonable precautions on the one hand, and not being unreasonably oppressive when it comes to guarding against all possible scenarios on the other.

## **PREAMBLE**

This policy outlines the overall<sup>1</sup> approach adopted by the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia and New Zealand. The members of our churches are committed to providing a safe environment for children and young people to hear the gospel and grow in Christ.

## **DEFINITIONS**

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|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>1) Church</b>                | The Presbyterian Reformed Church of Everton Park.   |
| <b>2) Session</b>               | The body of elected elders who are responsible to oversee all of the activities within the Congregation.  |
| <b>3) Child or young person</b> | Any person under the age of 18 years; or (in certain circumstances) a person over the age of 18 who, by reason of mental incapacity is particularly vulnerable.   |
| <b>4) Leader</b>                | Any person over the age of 18 years to whom the Session has given the responsibility for the control and safety of any child or young person placed in their care in the course of a recognized activity of the church. |
| <b>5) Responsible Elder</b>     | The elder designated by the Session to have particular responsibility for an organized activity of the church.  |

## **WHO MUST COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY ?**

The following positions within the church have been currently identified as either directly child-related, or requiring the same trust that would be expected of a child-related position. Any person who fills one of these positions is required to comply with this policy.

If any other position or activity is commenced within the church relating to children, then this policy will be amended to include relevant positions.

- Teaching elder
- Ruling elders
- Deacons
- Sunday School Superintendent
- Sunday School teachers and helpers
- Children's Club leaders and helpers
- Scripture teachers
- Fellowship (Youth Group) leaders and helpers

## **THE LAW**

The responsible elder is to see that no activity is conducted in breach of the law. This includes

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly recommend to Presbytery omit "overall"

requiring that anyone assisting in the activity holds a current “Blue Card” unless legally<sup>2</sup> exempted.

## SCOPE OF POLICY

This policy covers all activities and practices ~~that could reasonably be considered<sup>3</sup>~~ to be conducted under the auspices of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Everton Park.

The elders shall not give permission for any activity to be conducted in the name of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Everton Park unless they<sup>4</sup> has first ensured that there is a clear commitment on the part of those organising the activity that they will adhere to this policy.

Nor will the elders allow any outside activity to be advertised in church meetings, or to church members and their children, unless they are satisfied that those organising that activity will also adhere to this policy.

## EXTERNAL POLICIES

Some child related ministries in the church may be conducted through affiliation with other organisations. Those organisations may have their own policies governing the issues of child safety and abuse.

No such affiliation will be entered into unless the policies in this document can be maintained during activities carried out under that affiliation.

In some cases the administration of such policies may be in the hands of the affiliate organisation, and for convenience such changes as are necessary to the roles and procedures set out in this document will be adopted.<sup>5</sup>

Before promoting the relevant activity the PRC will satisfy itself that the applicable policies, and the administration of them, are consistent with these policies and procedures in all material respects.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

The following guidelines are to be observed in the conduct of any church activity. Leaders are to ensure that high<sup>6</sup> standards of conduct are maintained:

### 1. APPROPRIATE CONDUCT FOR ALL CHURCH ACTIVITIES

- The age of individuals is recognized as one of the determinants in deciding what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behaviour. For example, it could be acceptable for a 19 year old male to be courting a 17 year old female, but not a 11 year old female.<sup>7</sup>
- Leaders will not visit children/young people in their homes unless a parent is present and/or another leader accompanies them.
- In any physical contact with children or young people, leaders will respect the child’s or young

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<sup>2</sup> Add “legally”

<sup>3</sup> Omit words struck through

<sup>4</sup> “it” changed to “they”

<sup>5</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that this para be re-worded to be clearer to identify who is responsible for approving “changes”

<sup>6</sup> Possibly recommend to Presbytery that “high” be changed to “these”

<sup>7</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that [this sentence](#) be added as an example

person's feelings and privacy.

- A Biblical pattern of behaviour is to be observed with respect to modesty and chastity and Biblical<sup>8</sup> standards of morality. Adults and children/young people are expected<sup>9</sup> to respect the privacy of the other during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders should<sup>10</sup> set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No leader shall be alone in a room with a child while either is undressing / changing clothes – unless there is a known direct family / guardianship relationship.<sup>11</sup>
- Initiations and secret ceremonies are forbidden. All aspects of every child related / youth programme are to be open to observation by parents/guardians.
- Leaders have the right to ask persons who do not have a valid reason to be present at child related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.
- There shall always be at least two approved leaders at any activity. Preferably<sup>12</sup> there should be male and female leaders for mixed groups; and male leaders for boys and female leaders for girls groups where ever possible. It is recognised that there may be occasions where there is a sole leader when breaking up into small groups; but in such cases, the small groups will not be out of eyesight or earshot (or both) of others.
- If any personal counselling is to be done, it shall be carried out within the sight of other people, and preferably another leader.
- The consumption or alcohol or illegal drugs on the church grounds or during a church activity is not to be condoned by any leader<sup>13</sup>. Any child found to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so the child/young person can be returned home immediately.
- Any alcohol or illegal drugs found on the church grounds are to be removed and the location of such alcohol or illegal drugs reported to an Elder.<sup>14</sup>
- If any child/young person is required to take prescription medication, a letter, or verbal assurance<sup>15</sup> from their parents/guardians will be provided to the leader who will document this communication.

## 2. INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR BY LEADERS

Whilst some actions are not regarded as sexual assault, they are nonetheless regarded as unacceptable behaviour by Christians. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks

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<sup>8</sup> Possibly recommend to Presbytery that “Biblical” is unnecessary and be removed

<sup>9</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “expected” be removed

<sup>10</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “should” be changed to “are to”

<sup>11</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “direct family / guardian relationship” be changed to “direct family or legal guardianship relationship.”

<sup>12</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “Preferably” be deleted

<sup>13</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “not condoned by any leader” be changed to “forbidden”

<sup>14</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that this sentence may need to be reworded to avoid unnecessary tampering with evidence, eg. “Any alcohol or illegal drugs found on the church grounds are to be made inaccessible to children and young people and the matter immediately reported to an Elder. Where illegal drugs are found, they should not be touched or moved (unless there is danger to children) and the matter should be immediately reported to the police.”

<sup>15</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that “verbal assurance” be changed to “other written instruction”

- Jokes of a sexual nature
- Inappropriate literature or videos or DVD's
- Any act of violence committed by a leader in the course of an activity

## **THE SELECTION PROCESS INVOLVING THOSE WHO ASSIST IN CHILD RELATED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CHURCH**

The session is ultimately responsible for how church-based child-related activities are conducted.

The session therefore, or the responsible elder appointed by session, is held responsible for the selection of those who will lead, or assist in leading, any such activity.

The session (or responsible elder) is to ensure that anyone who leads, or assists in leading, is suitably qualified to do so, and has ~~(or has applied for)~~<sup>16</sup> a "Blue Card".

## **IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY**

All those required to comply with this policy shall be given a copy, and shall be required to sign a form of agreement stating:

I agree to uphold the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct, and to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined. I will work to contribute positively to the spiritual growth and development of the church, the children and young people it provides services to, as well as their parents and carers.

- they have read the policy
- they have understood the policy
- they agree to uphold the policy, and to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined in it.

With respect to those required to comply with this policy (see "Who must comply with this policy?") the Session is responsible to notify them of all changes to this policy.<sup>17</sup>

Any non-compliance with the policy must be reported to the Session which is responsible to follow up the complaint with the reportedly offending party.

If the Session deems the offence to be<sup>18</sup> minor (eg. there was little likelihood of any harm coming to a child) the offender should be counselled to be more careful in the future.

If the Session deems the offence to be<sup>19</sup> more serious, but it appears the offender was ignorant or careless, the offender should be warned and may need to be removed from his position of trust.

If the Session deems the offence to be<sup>20</sup> serious (eg. there was a real likelihood of harm to a child), the offender must be removed immediately from his position of trust, pending a review of the case by the Session.

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<sup>16</sup> Remove part in brackets. The law is now that, while paid workers only need to have applied for, volunteers workers must actually have, a Blue Card

<sup>17</sup> This sentence has been re-worded. It may be possible to simplify it further if Melbourne's suggestion (WB p31) to number paragraphs similar to the Code is adopted.

<sup>18</sup> "If the offence is" changed to "If the Session deems the offence to be"

<sup>19</sup> "If the offence was" changed to "If the Session deems the offence to be"

<sup>20</sup> "If the offence was" changed to "If the Session deems the offence to be"

## PROCEDURE FOR THE NOTIFICATION OF CHILD ABUSE

All reports of child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional) are to be taken seriously. Child sexual abuse is any sexual act or threat to perform such an act upon a child or young person. It occurs when a person with greater power or authority uses his or her power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve genital contact. It can be any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.<sup>21</sup>

Where a child discloses that he, or she, has been assaulted/abused<sup>22</sup> in the context of a church sanctioned activity and/or where someone close to the child (eg. sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of the child, or where inappropriate behaviour is observed, the designated leader for the activity, or an elder, is to be informed immediately. He or she is to quickly gather the available facts (in line with the guidelines set out below) concerning any reports of suspected abuse of children and/or of any serious incidents involving those named or observed.<sup>23</sup> If the leader is not an elder, he, or she, is then to pass the available facts on to an elder (preferably the responsible elder), who will immediately consult as many other elders as possible.

The elders are to consider the facts concerning an alleged abuse, weighing the evidence carefully. If there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a criminal offence may have been committed, whether by a person outside the church or by a member of the church, they will inform the child's parents and report the matter to the police and appropriate children's services (see Appendix).<sup>24</sup> A complete record is to be kept of the incident on the form provided. Copies of the form are to be readily accessible for any activity; further copies are available from the session clerk. If the parents themselves are the accused, the elders are to exercise their discretion as to whether to inform them before reporting the incident to the authorities.

In cases where there do not seem to be sufficient grounds to suspect that an offence has occurred or that a child is at risk to warrant reporting the matter to the police or involving the appropriate children's services<sup>25</sup>, a record must still be kept. In this case, the person accused will normally be informed of the accusation and a response sought from him/her; also, he/she<sup>26</sup> should be told that the child's parents will need to be notified.

All records of such incidents are to be kept for as long as a charge could be brought.<sup>27</sup>

The same procedure shall also be followed if a child discloses an assault (sexual or otherwise) that has occurred apart from a church sanctioned activity (e.g. at home or school).

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<sup>21</sup> Recommend to Presbytery that this para be reworded. Adelaide (WB p47) have suggested including here or elsewhere a definition of abuse which would then obviate the need for this para, viz:

### DEFINITION OF ABUSE

Child Sexual Abuse, is any sexual act or threat to perform such an act upon a child or young person (under the age of 18). It usually occurs when a person uses his or her power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. Sexual abuse does not necessarily involve genital or physical contact. It includes any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear to be consensual, but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.

Child Physical Abuse, is any deliberate physical violence by an adult or adults to any child that causes lasting injury of such a nature as to require any medical attention to remedy, by Australian standards.

Child Neglect is any criminal neglect (as defined by state legislation) on behalf of its responsible parents/carers that deprives a dependant child of a sufficiency of food, adequate housing, and hygiene, which as a consequence causes that child to suffer a health deprivation differential\* between itself and its responsible carers.

<sup>22</sup> "/abused" added

<sup>23</sup> Change "involving those involved" to "involving those named or observed."

<sup>24</sup> "social services" changed to "appropriate children's services (see Appendix)"

<sup>25</sup> "local social services" changed to "appropriate children's services"

<sup>26</sup> "him" changed to "him/her"; "he" to "he/she"

<sup>27</sup> This sentence has been added

### Guidelines for those involved in gathering facts

The elder to whom the original disclosure is made known shall maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure, and this will include:

- Not pushing the child to disclose details of the alleged assault.
- Assuring the child that they are understood and that their disclosure is being taken seriously.
- Assuring the child that any abuse that has occurred is not the child's fault and that the child is correct in disclosing the incident.
- Providing counsel and support to the alleged victim. It may be advisable for a different elder to assume responsibility for counselling the alleged perpetrator for the duration of any investigation.
- Seeing that the clothing worn by the child/young person is not discarded, but delivered to the police for possible forensic examination, if the alleged assault was of a sexual nature and has taken place recently,
- Maintaining confidentiality – only speak to other elders, parents/guardians (unless they are the alleged perpetrators), appropriate child welfare unit and the Police (or appropriate authorities).

Where a church member, or adherent, is involved the church will carry out its own investigation and carry out discipline against the offending party/ies in accordance with the constitution of the church in addition<sup>28</sup> to any action by the civil authorities.

## **POLICY REVIEW**

At its first meeting each year the Session shall review, and if necessary, make recommendations to revise this policy document. The congregation shall review and endorse those recommendations, and/or make further recommendations of its own, at its AGM each year.

The core of [this policy document and the conditions specified in are to be reviewed annually by Presbytery at its second meeting each year.](#)

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<sup>28</sup> The words: “in addition...” have been added

## ATTACHMENTS

### 1. AGREEMENT FORM

#### **PRESBYTERIAN REFORMED CHURCH, EVERTON PARK**

NAME: .....

POSITION: .....

I have read the Child Protection Policy of Date....., and understand the church's commitment to establishing a safe, friendly and spiritually helpful environment for children and young people.

I agree to uphold the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct, and to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined. I will work to contribute positively to the spiritual growth and development of the church, the children and young people it provides services to, as well as their parents and carers.

SIGNED: .....

DATE: .....

WITNESS: .....

DATE: .....

**2. REPORTING FORM**

**PRESBYTERIAN REFORMED CHURCH, EVERTON PARK  
INCIDENT REPORT FORM**

Date of report:

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Time report written:

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Name/s of the person or people involved in the incident:

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Description of the incident:

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Date incident occurred:

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Time incident occurred:

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Location where incident occurred:

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Nature of the incident:

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Summary of events:

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Immediate action taken:

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If no action taken – reason:

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Name of person completing form:

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Contact telephone number:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person report submitted to:

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