

Family Violence Policy

Village Church seeks to be a safe and loving church that strengthens healthy families, is free of family violence, holds accountable any person using family violence, and provides help, support and if possible, a way out for victim survivors.

[Family violence](#) is any behaviour in an intimate or family relationship which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It includes physical, emotional/psychological, sexual, social, verbal, spiritual and economic abuse. Any behaviour which causes a child to hear, witness or be otherwise exposed to such abuse is also a form of family violence.

Regrettably, violence of this kind occurs not only in society but also in local churches. It often remains hidden and many victim survivors feel too afraid to ask for help. Churches are often ill-equipped to recognise or respond to instances of family violence in their communities.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to protect and promote the safety and well-being of all members and regulars of Village Church. It expresses our condemnation of family violence in the church and the broader society, and it sets out the principles of how we will respond to incidents of family violence with sensitivity, justice and love.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all pastors, elders, employees, members and regulars of Village Church. In circumstances where a family violence concern is raised about a pastor, elder, or employee, this Policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct and Review Policy.

3. Affirmations and Commitments

Because we are committed to living in godliness and holiness by the grace, joy and freedom that are in Christ Jesus, Village Church affirms and commits to the following:

- Every person who is part of Village Church has the right to expect to live in an environment of safety and care that is free of family violence.
- Family violence in all its forms is contrary to the biblical pattern of mutual love and care of each other in marriage and the home; it is never justifiable and any person using family violence must stop.
- Family violence is contrary to the standard of conduct required of disciples of the Lord Jesus and Village Church's values and Code of Conduct; it is also a crime under NSW laws.

- In our words and public statements, Village Church will teach that family violence is wrong and the Bible should never be used to justify or excuse any form of abuse.
- We will publish this Policy, the Code of Conduct, the Review Policy and contact details for professional assistance regarding family violence, on our website.
- We will ensure that all pastors, elders, employees and members who serve in leadership positions receive appropriate training in recognising and responding to family violence.
- Any pastor, elder, employee or member of Village Church who uses family violence is acting in breach of the Code of Conduct and may be subject to church discipline.
- The pastors, elders, and employees of Village Church are legally required to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities in NSW.

4. Creating a Safe and Loving Church

Village Church is committed to being a safe and loving church that:

- Recognises the inherent and equal dignity and worth of all people, including husbands, wives and children in the family.
- Promotes a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility and respect in marriages, families, dating relationships and the church community.
- Ensures that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from violence in the home and the church.
- Strives to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing family violence.
- Refuses to condone, justify, tolerate, overlook or conceal any form of abuse.
- Enables concerns about family violence to be raised and responded to clearly, consistently and confidentially.

5. Responding to Family Violence

Where Village Church becomes aware of an instance of family violence within our church community, the following principles will be followed:

- (a) The victim survivor's experiences will be taken seriously, and he or she will be encouraged to seek help and support. This assistance will not be limited to pastoral care channels that exist within the church community. Where appropriate, the victim survivor will be encouraged and supported to seek professional help. Where the family violence constitutes criminal conduct, the victim survivor will also be encouraged to report the matter to the police.
- (b) Only with the knowledge and consent of the victim survivor wherever possible, a member of the Staff Team and if necessary, an appropriate member of the Review Panel may be informed about the victim survivor's experience of family violence.
- (c) Where the person using family violence is also a member or regular of Village Church, the Staff Team may engage him or her for the purposes of pastoral care or discipline but only if it is deemed safe for the victim survivor according to the factors set out in Appendix B.

Any pastoral interventions will be undertaken with a focus on the well-being and safety of the victim survivor and his or her family. Appropriate disciplinary actions will be taken if the person using family violence holds a leadership position in the church. Any person using family violence will be encouraged to seek professional help and support as necessary.

In responding to allegations or instances of family violence, Village Church commits to:

- **Prioritising safety first:** ensuring that victim survivors can find safety and help as a first priority.
- **Taking it seriously:** ensuring that any disclosures of family violence are taken seriously and not dismissed.
- **Getting help from outside authorities:** working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into family violence.
- **Keeping it confidential:** respecting the need for confidentiality within the bounds of safe ministry practice and mandatory reporting obligations.
- **Challenging with care:** carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour but only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim survivor, at increased risk.

At all times, the safety of the victim survivor is our primary concern. Village Church will seek to ensure that distance is kept between the victim survivor and the person using family violence and other than in mandatory reporting situations, will never take any action without the victim survivor's consent and involvement.

6. Reporting Family Violence Related Crimes

If there is a family violence intervention order in place and the intervention order is breached either on church premises or in the course of church activities, Village Church will, with or without the victim survivor's consent:

- (a) immediately contact the police; and
- (b) inform the victim survivor that we are contacting the police. If a family violence related crime has been committed by someone against a victim survivor either on church premises or in the course of church activities, Village Church will immediately report the matter to the police.

If a member or regular of Village Church discloses that he or she has committed a family violence related crime, a member of the Review Panel or Staff Team will:

- (a) contact the victim survivor; and
- (b) refer the person to an appropriate support and counselling service; and

if the crime involves a child or presents a serious or immediate risk of harm to any person, may contact the police with or without the victim survivor's consent.

7. Responsibilities and Review

The Senior Pastor is primarily responsible for publicising, implementing, enforcing and monitoring the effectiveness of this Policy.

This Policy is to be reviewed every three years by the Senior Pastor in consultation with and approved by the Review Panel leaders.

Last Reviewed: 18 August 2024

Next Review: 18 August 2027

Appendix A: Who can I contact for help?

Village Church contacts

Senior Pastor Tim Canosa – 0417 685 340 - tim@myvillagechurch.net

Pastor Adam De Rooy - 0402 521 979 - adam@myvillagechurch.net

Village Church Review Panel Members:

Tim Murray - 0421 957 292 - tmurray@tigs.nsw.edu.au

Michael Plaege - 0412 916 709 - michael@saltchurch.info

Andy Milne 0402 242 762 - milne.57@gmail.com

Chris Rudens - 0490 296 838 - rudensfamily@gmail.com

Gary Eastment - 0409 725 193 - garye@pobox.com

Sam Wheeler - 0431 982 424 - samwheeler100@gmail.com

Emergency helplines

Police 000

In an immediate emergency, call the police.

Child Protection 1300 360 452 or 13 12 78 (after hours) If you have concerns that a child is at risk of significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. Lifeline 13 11 14 | lifeline.org.au

A 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention helpline.

Sexual Assault Crisis Line 1800 806 292 | sacl.com.au A 24/7 crisis line for

victims of sexual assault

Support and counselling contacts

1800RESPECT 1800 737 723 | 1800respect.org.au A 24-hour national sexual assault, family and

domestic violence counselling line. InTouch 1800 755 988 | intouch.org.au Offers services, programs and

responses to family violence in migrant and refugee communities. Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491 |



ntv.org.au

Free call the NSW Domestic Violence Line on **1800 65 64 63 - external**

site. Available 24/7.

Connects you to services that can help, including counselling, accommodation, legal help, etc. Safe

Steps 1800 015 188 | safesteps.org.au

Appendix B: When is it safe for the church to engage a person using family violence for pastoral care or discipline?

Where the person using family violence is a member or regular of Village Church, it is deemed safe for the church to engage him or her for the purpose of pastoral care or discipline only if all of the following criteria are met:

1. The victim survivor is consulted and provides consent at all stages of this process once a disclosure has been made.
2. The person using family violence personally contacts the Staff Team and demonstrates genuine repentance by:
 - a. indicating a desire to change their family violence behaviour;
 - b. taking full responsibility for their behaviour;
 - c. asking to be held accountable for their behaviour; and
 - d. disclosing if he or she is being investigated for or has been charged with a family violence related criminal offence.
3. The person using family violence agrees to regularly engage a recognised behavioural change program within a reasonable period of time. The details of a family safety contact person from that program must be provided to the Care Team or Staff Team, and the person using family violence must consent to the church contacting that person.

4. If any of the following risk-based factors have been committed by the person using family violence at any time whether against the victim survivor or any other person, both the behavioural change program and the victim survivor's specialist family violence support service must be made aware of and be actively addressing those factors:

- a. coercive, controlling or dominating behaviour;
- b. misuse of alcohol or drugs;
- c. threatened or attempted self-harm or suicide;
- d. obsessive jealousy;
- e. use of physical violence;

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- f. assault of a person who is pregnant;
- g. threats to kill;
- h. attempted or actual choking or strangling of a person;
- i. threatened or actual use or use of a weapon in an assault;
- j. sexual assault or forced sex acts;
- k. threatened or actual harm of a pet or animal;
- l. the victim survivor believes that the person could kill or do serious harm to them;
- m. recent separation from the victim survivor; or
- n. current unemployment.

Appendix C: What do I do if someone discloses family violence?

A person discloses family violence

RESPECT & LISTEN

- Listen with acceptance
- Don't ask for proof
- Assure the victim survivor it's not their fault
- Be honest about your ability to help
 - Reassure normal confidentiality will be maintained but explain its limits

Is there an immediate risk of harm?

If yes, SAFETY FIRST

- Ask the victim survivor to assess their risk level: low risk, at risk or at elevated risk? Do you feel safe leaving here today?

- If there is a reasonable belief of imminent danger of serious physical harm or death, call the police immediately with or without consent (000)

If no...

- You can't make a victim survivor take any action. You can only listen and provide information (but note mandatory reporting).
- You may be able to offer other chances to meet and talk.
 - You may be able to suggest referring more generally to a GP, psychologist or counsellor.
- You could supply appropriate information, phone numbers, and websites.
- Record what was disclosed, your safety concerns, your actions and advice. Date and keep confidential.

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Are there children involved?

If yes, CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

- Call the Child Protection Helpline on 13 12 78
- Call the police (000)

Has further help been requested? If no... If no... If yes...

- Advise that any action needs care and can heighten risk.
 - Always be guided by what the victim survivor wants.
- Outline realistic options: police, FVIOs, FV services, safety planning, GPs, counsellors, refuges, etc.
- Supply appropriate information, phone numbers, websites, Daisy. • Encourage victim survivor to consult a service or make a referral on their behalf.
- Record what was disclosed, your safety concerns, your actions and from whom you receive advice. Date and keep confidential.