

Safe Ministry Policy

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Statement of Commitment to Safe Ministry

Village Church are committed to the Biblical call¹ to care for the vulnerable by actively preventing harm and abuse, and by seeking to provide safe programs. We are also responsible and accountable to fulfilling our obligations under State and Federal law to protect children and vulnerable people. We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable people (including children, families, the disabled and elderly and other vulnerable adults) are informed and involved in decisions that considerably affect them. We recognise the diverse needs of vulnerable people should be taken into account and that their concerns be taken seriously. We are committed to embedding this care into all levels of our leadership and culture. We are committed to ensuring that our programs and events are safe and appropriate for those attending. To help maintain appropriate standards, we will give all relevant leaders access to ongoing training and adequate supervision in their roles and responsibilities.²

We are committed to creating a culture where people feel safe to speak out about inappropriate behaviour without fear of being rejected or ridiculed. We are committed to listening and responding appropriately to concerns and complaints about behaviour and safety at Village Church. Throughout this process we are committed to protecting the confidentiality, dignity, health and well-being of all individuals involved. Any child-related issues will be managed with a focus on the interest of the child and will be reported to the relevant New South Wales Child Protection body.

¹ Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 10:13-16

² As per Points 2, 3 & 4 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Obligations

This policy is in accordance with the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157, (including the amendments made on 1 March 2020) and the Child Safe Standards, published by the NSW Children's Guardian in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This legislation mandates organisation's responsibilities in regard to working with children checks, reportable conduct, and mandatory reporting.

Stakeholders

Vulnerable People

For the purposes of this policy, a "Vulnerable Person" is defined as one who is in need of special care or protection due to their age, disability or at risk of abuse or neglect. The legislation that applies to churches currently only mandates obligations for children and young people, however Village Church recognises that there are many ways a person may be vulnerable in addition to young age. This policy, therefore, is a child protection policy, however it extends to encompass all people who are vulnerable for any reason, to encourage a culture of safe ministry for all members of Village Church, regardless of age.

Children with Disabilities and serious health needs

While the sign-in form for a child's participation in Village Church programs has space to provide information about a child's specific needs, in some cases this may not be enough and there may be further planning and training required for a child or vulnerable person to participate in a program (e.g. in the case of diabetes or mobility issues, Autism or Down Syndrome). The family and/or vulnerable person should always be consulted. Team leaders are responsible for ensuring this happens, but can ask for support from the Kids Ministry Coordinator/Safe Ministry Supervisors.

Consultation and feedback

At Village Church, vulnerable people (including children) and those responsible for their care, are asked to participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously. All members of Village Church are made aware of behaviour expectations of leaders (by age appropriate means), and have the opportunity to provide feedback or complaints about the program. Reports of inappropriate behaviour by a volunteer or staff member are to be handled in accordance with the Incident Management Process.

Staff and Volunteers/Leaders

“Volunteers” refers to anyone who serves in any organised capacity at Village Church. These people are subject to the Volunteer Code of Conduct and are required to complete the Awareness level of courses, but are not subjected to referee or WWCC checks. (e.g. band members, welcoming team, host team, cleaning team). It is likely that most members of Village serving in some way will be in this category.

“Volunteer leaders” – refers to those who have responsibility for a team or the day to day running of a team or ministry (e.g. A band team leader, host team leader, all people who lead programs involving children.) These leaders must provide at least one referee check (can be a member of the “Ministry” team at Village), and also agree to the Volunteer Code of Conduct. If working with children, they must also provide a WWCC, and are considered “employees” under the Children's Guardian Act 2019.

“Staff” refers to those leaders who are in paid positions at Village. The term “Leader” also applies to them, unless the expectations and requirements are exceeded in other relevant policies.

Recruitment

While all members of Village Church are encouraged to serve and support each other naturally as part of being members of the Christian family, there are specific considerations for recruiting for more formal leadership positions. Volunteers at Village Church must be determined as suitable for their specific role, and be willing to agree to a Volunteer Code of Conduct (Note - staff have a Staff Code of Conduct - see separate documents).

Village Church are committed to ensuring all relevant Volunteer Leaders are screened, appropriately supported and trained through the process outlined below.

1. Volunteer Leaders must be committed Christians, who trust Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
2. Anyone considered to be a leader, including all those working with children & youth on a regular basis must be Members of Village Church. They will have their potential roles and responsibilities clearly outlined for them as they start their role
3. All leaders must provide referees who can confirm the proposed leader is suitable to work with vulnerable people and that there is no reason the proposed leader should not be appointed in such a role, ⁴
4. All leaders must complete an Ansvar approved Safe Ministry Training Course (e.g. <https://villagechurch.safeministrycheck.com.au/> or equivalent) which outlines appropriate behaviour including how to minimise the chances of harm and abuse, as well as training in how to identify and report cases of abuse, and this must be refreshed regularly
5. All leaders must commit to the leader's Code of Conduct and behave as followers of Jesus and be willing to be held accountable for their behaviour, and
6. Anyone working with children & youth specifically must have their New South Wales "Working With Children Check" (WWCC) verified. No-one with a criminal record of child abuse, molestation or similar offences is allowed to be involved in children's or youth ministry at Village Church. ⁵

When recruiting for a paid or unpaid staff position, job advertisements should note that Village Church is committed to Safe Ministry practices, and questions about a candidate's behaviour and commitment to safe ministry should form part of the interview and referee process.

⁴ People who are members of other churches may provide programs for children at special events, where it is desirable that all adult members of Village Church participate (e.g. at a church camp or conference, or a hosted college mission team). Consideration of the person's connection and commitment to Village Church should inform this decision.

⁵ While there are legislated exemptions to requiring a WWCC, Village Church has determined that it is beneficial for ongoing consistency and management that all who work with children be requested to provide a WWCC.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporters are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the authorities. On 1 March 2020, mandatory reporter groups in NSW expanded to also include: “A person in religious ministry or a person providing religion based activities to children (e.g. minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, religious brother or sister)”

All staff and members of Village Church volunteering in child related roles are legally mandatory reporters, and a report must be made if it is suspected that a child is being abused or neglected. Training in how to recognise abuse and how to respond will be provided, as outlined above, to all people in these positions. Reports can be made independently, but it is advised that concerns be reported to a Ministry Team Coordinator or a Safe Ministry Supervisor, and that the report is made formally on behalf of the church.

While it is not mandatory, there are also processes to report abuse to vulnerable adults, and any behaviour that is criminal should be reported to the police. Safe Ministry Supervisors may be contacted if someone needs support in making a report.

Reportable Conduct

Reportable conduct obligations apply to “employees” of Village Church who work with children. An “employee” is considered to be anyone who must provide a WWCC to perform their duties, even if they are not paid. The OCG defines ‘Reportable conduct’ as any of the following conduct (whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the conduct has been commenced or concluded):

- a sexual offence with or in the presence of a child,
- sexual misconduct with, or in the presence of a child,
- ill-treatment of a child,
- neglect of a child,
- an assault against a child,
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child,
- any offence under section 43B or 316A of the Crimes Act 1900, whether or not with the consent of the child ⁶

Conduct of this nature is reportable whenever it is alleged to have occurred, even if it is not committed while performing work as an “employee” of Village Church (i.e. We must report if we are informed of the alleged neglect of a volunteer’s own child in their own home). Allegations of reportable conduct will be investigated by the Safe Ministry Supervisors or other suitable external advisors in accordance with the Incident Management Process, and must be reported to the Children’s Guardian.

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<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/reportable-conduct-scheme/organisations-in-the-scheme/identify-reportable-conduct>

Safe Ministry Supervisors

Safe Ministry Supervisors are nominated people who can be contacted by members of Village Church if they have a concern about the safety of a program, the behaviour of a staff member or leader, or the safety and wellbeing of a vulnerable person. A Safe Ministry Supervisor can listen to concerns, and will follow appropriate processes to respond to the concerns. Safe Ministry Supervisors can help to ensure our processes and programs are safe, supportive and compliant with relevant legislation. They can support Safe Ministry training, and referee and WWCC record keeping and compliance.

Safe ministry supervisors are members of Village Church who are appointed by Admin Committee, through the recommendation of staff. They must agree to the code of conduct, and be selected based on their suitability for the role. It is beneficial for there to be several types of people as Safe Ministry Supervisors, to provide more opportunities for people to feel comfortable to report their concerns. There should be at least one male and one female Safe Ministry Supervisor, one Safe Ministry Supervisor should be a staff member and at least one should be someone who is not on staff or related to a staff member (one person may fit two or more of these categories), and there should be someone available at each gathering.

Safe Ministry Supervisor contact details are to be available on the Village Church website, and are also provided to all those who complete Safe Ministry Training.

Whole of church family

Safe Ministry is the responsibility of all members of Village Church. Opportunities for members to be trained and made aware of the value and priority of Safe Ministry at Village Church should be provided when people join, as well as regularly for all members of the church when appropriate. Safe Ministry Supervisor details should be easily accessible by all members of Village Church.

Other measures that encourage Safe Ministry practices in a church should form part of the planning process when beginning a new program or activity. Safe Ministry practices and risk assessments should be reviewed regularly as part of team and staff meetings.

Records

Records are to be kept securely by Village Church of all leaders and children participating in programs. Once stored, these records are only to be accessible by Safe Ministry Supervisors, The Admin Committee and relevant area leaders for use in maintaining WWCC compliance and responding to complaints or incidents, and may be provided to the Children's Guardian when required.

Incident Reports

Incident reports are used to ensure that accidents, injuries, or potentially dangerous situations and harmful behaviours are noted and handled effectively. Incident reports are to be forwarded to the relevant coordinator in charge of the ministry at which the incident occurred and also to the Safe Ministry Supervisors, to ensure the incident is responded to appropriately and any further required risk management strategies may be implemented. Incidents involving alleged abuse or inappropriate behaviour by a volunteer or staff (i.e. reportable conduct as outlined above), must only be forwarded to a Safe Ministry Supervisor and handled in accordance with the Village Church Incident Management Process.

Leader WWCCs and training

Records of those who serve as leaders in programs for children or vulnerable people must be kept for a minimum of period of 7 years. The record should include the nature of the work, the place of work and location, the name, address and telephone number of the leader, as well as WWCC details and referee responses.

Participation records

Participation records of children's programs (including leaders present) are to be kept to ensure adequate supervision and transfer of duty of care during the program (i.e. signing in to programs). These records may be kept indefinitely, as long as it is practicable, as they can be used as evidence should an incident need to be investigated.

Risk Management Strategies

Kids Ministry Guidelines

As our spaces and demographics constantly change, our procedures and processes often need to be modified to suit the needs of the people attending and the space being used. The latest guidelines outlining expected leader behaviour and processes to do with activities chosen, the venue, safe ratios of supervision, appropriate toileting practices, transportation and other situation-specific considerations. Guidelines are also to be discussed in team meetings, and it is both the relevant ministry coordinator and the team leader's responsibility to ensure their team is aware of the expectations. Off site and overnight activities with children and vulnerable people require particular consideration, and should be discussed and documented as a team prior to any activity of this type.

Occasions that typically present greater risk of a vulnerable person being abused or harmed are:

- Situations where an adult may be alone with a vulnerable person
- Situations that enable vulnerable people to form specific emotional attachments and trust with individual adults, and may often include insignificant boundary crossings (grooming).
- the transport of vulnerable people
- Camps and overnight or late night activities,
- At points of transfer of responsibility (e.g. start and end of children's programs)
- Situations where the supervision of vulnerable people is vague or inconsistent
- Cultural practices and situations where people in positions of power use coercion and manipulation to direct behaviour of others.

This is not to say that camps or emotional connections or placing people in positions of power (for example) must be avoided. Many of these things are valuable and integral to how churches run and care for each other. It is however important to acknowledge that these situations have, in the history of churches, presented opportunities for vulnerable people to be taken advantage of, and therefore they do require deliberate and specific consideration, planning and monitoring to ensure that these situations are safe and risks are managed.

Environmental Safety

Many of our spaces are multi purpose and Bulli PCYC is surrounded by public land. All spaces should be checked every time before a program for vulnerable people use the space (e.g. outside areas need to be checked for broken glass or needles, creche areas should be checked for choking or fall hazards, ramps must be cleared and dry). Regular maintenance can be completed at working bees and in cooperation with Bulli PCYC, but safety concerns about spaces should be raised with team leaders as they arise and be addressed in a timely manner.

This is not limited to physical risks, ensuring our spaces are safe may also include protecting vulnerable people from the behaviour of others. (e.g. if it is observed that an unknown adult is hanging in-or-around Bulli PCYC and appears to be agitated, it may be safer not to use that area for a children's program). Team Leaders can make decisions about the safety of a space and alternate locations or actions that can make a space safer before a program begins.

Online ministries

Traditional Safe Ministry practices rely on activities and interactions between leaders and vulnerable people being in the "line of sight" of others, however there may be situations where face to face ministries are not possible and may move to online platforms. It is not possible to rely on being able to be observed by others while leading, as a risk management protocol for web based forms of communication, and so there are specific guidelines that apply for leaders of programs that use online platforms, including consent from parents/guardians, appropriate behaviour while using video based communication, time and location of contact.

Appendix A – Code of Conduct for Volunteers and Volunteer Leaders at Village

As part of being a volunteer at Village Church you are asked to commit to the Code of Conduct. If you have any questions or hesitation about being able to commit to these please talk to a Safe Ministry Supervisor.

- I commit to conducting myself in a manner consistent with the safe ministry training awareness course (and Leadership Course if applicable) when serving at Village Church.
 - I will treat adults, children and young people with respect and value, without favouritism.
 - I will behave appropriately, being faithful to my appointed tasks, being an example to others and being careful in how I physically interact with others.
 - I will never use physical punishment or abusive language, even as a form of discipline.
 - I will act transparently, as far as possible, ensuring that another adult is present or within eyesight when I am with a vulnerable person (including other people's children).
- I commit to ensuring that the spaces and activities I'm responsible for are safe and do not put people at risk of significant harm
- I commit to including vulnerable people (and/or their carer's/significant others) in discussions about decisions that will significantly affect them
- I commit to encouraging openness by listening to people's concerns about the safety of our programs and the members of our community with a willingness to support them and help them."
- I commit to reporting any concerns or suspicions about harmful behaviours and significant risks to the Village Church Safe Ministry Supervisors without bias or partiality
- If working with vulnerable people (including children), I will submit to the Village Church Leader screening process, to ensure I am a suitable person to work with vulnerable people

- I will submit to the authority of the Village Church leadership and any disciplinary steps if I am found to violate these commitments or act in an otherwise inappropriate or illegal manner at Village Church.

Appendix B – Training levels and Village Leadership Structure

Village Church currently uses the online based courses from Safe Ministry Check (SMC) to train our leaders in safe ministry principles and practices, as well as reviewing these in team meetings and at other opportunities. There are 4 levels of SMC courses – Awareness, Leader, Supervisor and Board, and are meant to be completed consecutively, with the exception of the Board course. Different levels of responsibility should do different levels of training.

In general the following leadership positions at Village should complete these levels of courses (but it is always acceptable to do a level higher than advised):

- SMC Awareness course – all members of Village Church are invited to complete this when they join Village Church and can have refreshers/ongoing access to it as required. Safe Ministry Principles are also discussed as part of our Beginnings course, for people who are considering joining Village Church formally. If serving in ministry at any level, you should do this course. Team leaders discuss this course and the Volunteer code of conduct with their team.
- SMC Leaders course – Anyone who has a “leadership” position at Village Church, whether the program is specifically for vulnerable people or not. All adults who are in “Team leader” position, such as children’s program leaders, small group leaders, band leaders. Admin staff not working in face to face positions with vulnerable people should complete up to this level.
- SMC Supervisor course – This course is for people who are responsible for recruiting and managing other leaders, making decisions about programs and how things will affect those who attend. All adults who are in an “Area Leader” and “Department Leader” position, such as small group coaches, kids ministry section leaders etc. and all Ministry Staff and MTS who should complete to this level.
- SMC Board course – This course is for those that have a legal responsibility for what happens at Village Church, and should be completed by the Admin Committee, Pastoral and Safe Ministry Supervisors.

If you have a concern about a situation, please discuss with the leaders, or the Safe Ministry Supervisors listed below. All people serving in Kids Ministry at Village Church have been screened and trained for Safe Ministry, and have a mandated responsibility to report serious safety concerns to the relevant authorities.

Current Safe Ministry Supervisors are:

Ryan Potts – 0431 521 493 – ryan@myvillagechurch.net

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

Rosie Milne – 0423 639 247 – rosie@myvillagechurch.net

At Village Church we love and keep our members safe by:

- Faithfully teach and submit to the authority of the bible
- Valuing and caring for all members as equals
- Welcoming feedback and discussion about teaching, programs and our constitution
- Holding all volunteers and leaders accountable to a code of conduct
- Following a complaints and incident response policy
- Encouraging and supporting members to seek help and professional advice, especially in
- situations where safety or someone's welfare is of a concern.
- Following work health and safety procedures
- Encouraging everyone to be "safe ministry aware"

If you would like to learn more about what "safe ministry" means at Village, you are welcome to check out a short awareness course at:

<https://villagechurch.safeministrycheck.com.au>

If you have a concern about a situation, please discuss with the leaders, or the safe ministry supervisors.

Appendix C – Useful Resources

Village Church Safe Ministry Check Training courses

<https://villagechurch.safeministrycheck.com.au>

Child Protection Helpline

Anyone can call for advice or to make a report

13 2111

The Helpline is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Wollongong Police

Corner of Church and Market Streets, Wollongong

Phone: 02 4226 7899

Open 24 hours

Mandatory Reporter guide

(decision tree for whether you need to make a report about something)

<https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>

NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

Reportable conduct, WWCC information, Child safe standards, child protection obligations training for organisations,

<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/>

Disability and Aged people abuse

To report allegations of abuse or neglect of frail aged or adults with disabilities:

1800 628 221 (9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

<https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/>

Indicators of Abuse of vulnerable adults

<https://officeofsafeguarding.org.au/reporting-abuse/indicators-of-abuse-neglect-of-vulnerable-adults/>

A. Review

This Policy shall be reviewed every two (2) years.

B. Document Properties

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