

# Southern Community Church of Christ Safe Church Policy for Working with Children and Vulnerable People

Southern Community Church of Christ (SCCC) is committed to protecting the safety of all people within its programs, ministries and events.

All people, regardless of age, gender, race, culture, disability and family/social background have equal rights to this protection. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability. Our policy has been developed to uphold this commitment to safeguarding and to adhere to Federal and State legislation. We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

All people (including children) have the right to be respected and valued as well as feel emotionally, physically and spiritually safe at all times.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously

## **Our child protection policy**

This policy applies to all staff, including senior leadership, manager, coordinators, paid staff, volunteers, students or anyone working on behalf of SCCC.

### **The purpose of this policy:**

To protect children and young people who receive SCCC services.

To provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide our approach to child protection.

SCCC believes that a child or young person should never experience abuse of any kind. We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people and to keep them safe. We are committed to practice in a way that protects them.

## Our policy aims to:

- Minimise the risk of abuse, misconduct and the misuse of positional power.
- Ensure that all cases of suspected abuse and misconduct are handled thoroughly.
- Ensure that leaders and programs are safe.
- Ensure that all people are respected and valued.

## Definitions:

**Abuse:** Abuse and neglect includes but is not limited to:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Family Violence
- Neglect
- Bullying
- Spiritual
- Financial
- Child Sexual offences are legally defined as:
  - Indecent treatment of a child
  - Carnal knowledge with, or of, a child
  - Rape of a child
  - Incest with a child
  - Grooming a child (or their parent or carer)
  - Making child exploitation material
  - Maintaining a sexual relationship with a child

**Child:** a person who is under the age of 18 years. (eg: Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997, Tasmania; The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012, Victoria)

**Person of Concern:** a person of concern is a person whose presence or interaction with SCCC and their current or historical behaviour and/or actions, create a risk of a child sexual offence being committed. A person of concern includes, but is not limited to a person who:

- Has pleaded guilty to, been convicted of, or has admitted to a sexual criminal offence and/or is on the Sex Offenders Register
- Has been found to have sexually offended, arising through due diligence checks related to recruitment (screening)
- Is currently charged with a sexual offence
- Has been the subject of an allegation of a sexual offence and this was not appropriately

investigated

- o Has received an adverse risk assessment arising from sexual misconduct
- o Is deemed to be a risk to the safety of children and/or vulnerable adults because of an adverse risk assessment relating to sexual misconduct
- o Exhibits constant wandering across other peoples' sexual boundaries
- o Exhibits behaviour consistent with grooming children and/or vulnerable adults

**Safe Environment:** discharges duty of care by taking steps to keep all those in our care safe, including e.g. spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse (including bullying) or neglect.

**Safe Leader:** has been through a recruitment process, understands responsibilities, is supervised and is an accountable team player.

**Safe Program:** all risks have been assessed and events thought through and planned.

**SCTA:** Safe Church Training Agreement under the National Council of Churches in Australia – Safe Church Program.

**Vulnerable Persons:** a person who is unable to care for themselves or they are unable to protect themselves from being exploited or harmed because of an illness, mental health, trauma or because of a disability, or because of their age (elderly or under 18).

## Statement of commitment to child safety

SCCC is committed to ministering to children and vulnerable adults by providing a Church environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe. The safety of a child or children will be prioritised above the interests of any individual, service or entity connected with SCCC.

SCCC is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children and vulnerable adults by providing a safe and supportive environment for children, ~~young people~~ and vulnerable adults where the following safeguarding measures are utilised: Recruitment processes (screening, selection, interviews etc.), Working with Children Check, Training, Induction, Supervision and Reviews.

The following values reflect the culture that we are committed to promoting within SCCC: Due diligence, Integrity, Duty of Care, Transparency, Inclusivity, Collaborative Ministry, Christian ethics and the Gospel principles.

### We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount, and is everyone's responsibility as outlined in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have a right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse
- some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues

- working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and other organisations/agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare

## **We commit to:**

### **a) Safe recruitment of leaders.**

We will screen all prospective leaders in our ministries before they are appointed. (ie. relevant working with children's check/vulnerable people/police check and referee checks).

### **b) Adequate training of leaders.**

We require that all leaders attend a safe church training workshop such as a SCTA workshop (Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection Training) before commencing in their role and attend a refresher workshop every 3 years.

We require all leaders to attend additional specific training as required.

### **c) Have a clear Code of Conduct**

We will adopt and implement a Code of Conduct for all leaders and volunteers, including boundaries of behaviour and expectations of interactions with children.

All leaders will agree to follow our Code of Conduct.

### **d) Continued supervision of leaders**

We commit to ongoing training, supervision and support for leaders.

### **e) Responding to allegations of risk of harm (abuse) and serious misconduct.**

All leaders will report disclosures or suspicions of child abuse, according to our procedure. We will listen to and believe children who raise concerns.

We will ensure that procedures are clear and appropriate in responding to allegations of abuse.

Where a leader has an allegation of misconduct made against them, we will provide support to alleged victims and perpetrators and seek appropriate denominational help for a just and fair resolution.

Concerns or allegations involving suspected, disclosed (current) or historical abuse or harm of children will be reported to the Victorian Police Service or the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT)

### **f) Provide an open safe environment**

We will afford participants a say in the programs and the activities in which they participate by fostering and valuing their ideas and encouraging participation. We will be accountable and transparent.

We will create a child-friendly environment, allowing people to raise their concerns in an appropriate manner. We will obtain appropriate information relating to the program participants, including children's health and family situation, to ensure that we are able to care for their physical and emotional needs.

Where the suitability of a volunteer or leader cannot be satisfactorily determined by SCCC leadership, the church will ensure that person is not involved in Child-related Activities in anyway.

### Safe Church Officer:

Name:	Monique ten Hoopen
Phone number:	03 8541 9710
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Church office:	03 9584 8499

### Policy Review:

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice annually. The review will be conducted by the most senior person at SCCC.

Version 1	Policy approved	Anne Spoelder	21 July 2021
Version 2	Policy reviewed	Alison Barnett	19 October 2022

## Legal framework

This policy reflects legislation and guidance that seeks to protect children, namely:

### National Guidelines

- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children "Protecting Children is Everyone's Business" 2009 – 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia)

### Victorian Legislation

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Working With Children Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Child Safe Standards 2022 (Vic)