



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

**Creating a safe environment for  
children and vulnerable adults in  
our Church - Code of Conduct for  
the Prevention of Abuse**



**Culture of Safety**

<http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>





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Adopted by: \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Chairperson

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Child Protection Advisory Group consult date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child Protection Advisory Group Review: \_\_\_\_\_

**This policy was approved by the Standing Committee of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania in April 2013, resolution SC 13.26.2.**

# 03

## Policy statement underpinning the Code of Conduct

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people are made in the image of God, and as such we accept every individual regardless of race, age, creed or gender. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love and respect and not be abused. As a community of faith we are committed to providing a place in society where human beings can explore what it means to be made in the image of God. As an expression of this commitment, the Uniting Church in Australia recognises its responsibility to provide worshipping and pastoral communities that are free from abuse and that provide safe environments for all people to explore and express their faith in the Gospel. (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997)

We commit to being a community which:

- Provides and maintains a welcoming and safe environment
- Offers suitable and well-equipped leadership
- Provides a level of resourcing that reflects the value of all people, particularly children and vulnerable adults
- Provides clear and appropriate guidelines for managing the safety of people, particularly children and vulnerable adults, within its activities and programs.

## Statement of Ethical Principles for Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia

The Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse is supported by the Uniting Church's Statement of Ethical Principles for Congregations.

The Uniting Church seeks to be a Christian community which develops its life around worship, prayer, witness, Biblical study, pastoral care, deep friendships and mutual accountability.

Being a part of the Uniting Church in Australia is open to all who are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Membership is about a relationship with other members both individually and collectively. Members, as part of a congregation, promise to participate in God's mission to the world, witnessing to Christ in word and deed as their gifts equip them and as recognised by the Church. As members we are encouraged to exhibit the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5).

Such participation is characterised by:

- Commitment to God
- Participation in worship
- Faithful study of the Bible
- Ethical Christian conduct within the community
- Commitment to, and respect for, the polity of the Uniting Church
- Participation in, and respect for the councils and agencies of the Uniting Church
- Sharing and communicating information from councils and agencies of the Church
- Willingness to use and share individual gifts and skills
- Accountable, honest, ethical and non-abusive relationships
- Confidentiality
- Sharing resources.

# 04

As a Christian community, if we speak of the power and wonder of faith in God without love, the community means nothing. Therefore a Christian community's faith and action shall be nurtured by love that never ends; that is faithful and kind; that does not insist on its own way; love which is not resentful but rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13). It is this love which informs our belief that each member and adherent of the community has the right to:

- Be listened to attentively and sensitively
- Have personal and sensitive information treated with confidentiality
- Receive ministry which fulfils the expectations of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, which ministers to their needs and not the needs of the carer
- Participate in ministry and work which recognises the giftedness of each person, with access to sufficient training
- Participate in safe ethical community where questions, fears, celebration, vulnerabilities or breaches of ethical behaviour may be named
- Informed referrals to other professionals or agencies where there are limitations to the community's or individual's skills<sup>1</sup>.

## Ensuring children and vulnerable adults are safe in our Church

We want everyone who interacts with our church communities to experience them as safe places.

People who attend worship or other activities of our congregations, in particular children and young people and their parents or guardians, need to be confident that they will be cared for, nurtured and encouraged as they grow, and, at the same time, protected from

physical, mental, and emotional harm, forming inappropriate relationships and bullying.

It has become evident to both Governments and to the Church that children are not the only vulnerable group of people in need of protection. A definition of a vulnerable adult is people who may be considered to be susceptible to abuse or exploitation based on factors such as their health status (physical or mental), age, grief, social isolation or financial hardship. Vulnerability may be temporary or permanent.

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are safe.

This Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse provides a clear set of behavioural expectations for ministry (lay and ordained leaders, Members and Adherents, and volunteers) in relation to children and vulnerable adults. It gives expression to the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania's policy on Creating a Safe Environment for Children and Vulnerable Adults for Church Councils and Presbyteries<sup>2</sup>.

## Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse

### A. We minister out of relationship with God

We maintain a healthy relationship with God by:

- Joining regularly in the life and ministry of the Church
- Studying the Scriptures in private and corporately or as a community
- Praying regularly in private and in fellowship with and for the people and ministry of the Church
- Giving of our time and resources to the work of the Church as an expression of our gratitude to God.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Statement of Ethical Principles for Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church 1999

<sup>2</sup> The Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Child Abuse has been adapted from the National Council of Churches in Australia, Safe Church Training Agreement, page 39 and Safe Ministry Resources Training Manual 2012 p39.

# 05

## **B. We serve others in the context of healthy relationships**

We will engage in healthy relationships with those to whom we minister, in particular children and vulnerable adults, by:

- Loving and caring for all; paying attention to the effect of ministry on them
- Treating others with respect; teaching and exercising power respectfully, responsibly and with accountability
- Upholding confidential information; not disclosing to anyone (including one's spouse) any confidential information without the consent of the person providing the information. There is an exception where there is a legal or obvious moral obligation or duty of care to do so
- Being a member of a team cooperating with others in ministry; there will be areas that overlap and someone else may have the advice that you need
- Using words that build up others; not ridiculing or embarrassing people
- Avoiding professionally counselling people with whom you have a personal relationship
- Being mindful of maintaining a relationship with any person if you feel there is a risk of it becoming inappropriate.

## **C. As Christians involved in ministry with children and vulnerable adults we will:**

- Not engage in bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical, sexual or spiritual abuse of any person, of any age, including family members, including the use of electronic media such as e-mail and social media
- Utilise the Synod resources to actively seek to learn about how to prevent child abuse and the abuse of vulnerable people and become familiar with the Synod's Creating a Safe Environment for Children and Vulnerable Adults policy.
- Put what we have learnt about the prevention of abuse into action
- Take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of those in our care
- Respect, listen to and attempt to meet individual needs in an appropriate and safe way
- Be sensitive and respectful of family and cultural traditions that are different from our own
- Ensure adequate supervision of children (those under age 18) and vulnerable adults as appropriate
- Undertake vigilant screening and selection of all people who work and/or volunteer with children and vulnerable adults to ensure their suitability
- Provide clear behavioural expectations for leaders and participants in Church activities
- Refrain from any form of corporal punishment. This behaviour is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated
- Ensure that physical contact is of a non-intimate nature
- Ensure that the content of any printed, media, music or digital material to be used is suitable and appropriate to the age and maturity of the group being taught or entertained
- Obey the law
- Disclose to the Church leadership if we are or have been investigated for any criminal offences, especially offences against children
- Report concerns about the safety of children and vulnerable adults to the relevant authorities.

# 06

## **D. We are accountable and transparent in our interactions**

As leaders of integrity we hold ourselves accountable to each other and recognise that we are responsible for our words and actions and how they might impact on others. Part of our desire to be accountable relates to using transparent practices in our ministry to others. We are seen to be doing the right thing and are responsible for our actions.

In our interactions with children and vulnerable people we:

- Avoid working alone or in isolation e.g. avoid being alone with a child
- Ensure ministry occurs in a public place or location with visibility
- Attend training to develop and be equipped as a leader
- Obtain and maintain a current Working with Children Check, registered with the Synod database (for Victoria) or a National Criminal History Check and Police Record Check (for Tasmania)
- Receive supervision.

## **Assistance to implement this policy**

If you need assistance to implement this policy, please contact the Culture of Safety unit on (03) 9340 8810.

Download this document at:

<http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>