



## Information Session

Uniting Church Australia National Safe Child Policy  
Framework

## Prayer – say together

Gracious and healing God, we thank you for the many ways that you enrich our lives - giving us hope in the midst of despair; comfort and strength to live, when we are at our most vulnerable. Be with all those today who are suffering - living with brokenness and pain.

We particularly think of people who were sexually abused as children. May your Spirit be a comforting and healing presence in their lives. May they find peace and nurture within relationships and communities of safety and trust.

Open our eyes and give us wisdom to see where we can bring your healing and hope in our relationships, neighbourhoods and communities as your hopeful and compassionate people.

Give us courage, insight, power and passion that we might work with you for justice and liberation of all those who are abused and oppressed.

Lord, Hear us Lord, Hear our Prayer.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!



# Contents

- Welcome
- Safe Child Project Officer Role
- Understanding of the UCA VicTas, Synod'd Keeping Children Safe Policy
- Relationship to the Victorian Child Safe Standards
- New Legislation/Criminal Law Reform
- How to implement the policy to comply with 7 standards
- How to achieve congregational compliance with the policy
- Working With Children Check/Registration



# Safe Child Project Officer

- Short Term contract job appointed by the Presbytery and Synod
- Gather initial information and find out the status and awareness level of each congregation regarding child safety matters
- Review provided information & source out initial information/resources/relevant documents about the new legislation and requirements
- Fully support and assist congregations in implementing the policy and complying with new legislation
- **Presbytery co-ordinator**-provide communication and consultation on behalf of the Presbytery, plan and communicate with project officer and provide local information and resources



# The Facts

## Child Abuse in Australia:

### In 2015

- Almost 10,000 children were physically abused
- Over 16,000 suffered neglect
- Over 23,000 experienced emotional abuse (that we know)
- about 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys will be sexually abused as children
- Indigenous children are 7 times more likely to experience neglect or abuse
- Children with a disability are 4 times more likely to experience abuse
- 95% of child abuse is by someone a child knows and trusts





# Background & Context of Keeping Children Safe Policy

In 2012, the Victorian Parliament embarked on a landmark inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other non-government organisations.

The inquiry was launched in the context of growing community concern about not only the extent of child abuse occurring within organisations, but also the lengths to which some bodies would go to **conceal or minimise this abuse**.

The inquiry heard of the devastating and often life-long consequences for abuse victims.

The Betrayal of Trust report was tabled in Parliament in late 2013.

This report contained a number of **recommendations to prevent child abuse** from occurring within organisations and **ensure allegations of abuse are properly handled**.



## Background & Context of Keeping Children Safe Policy (cont'd)

In responding to these recommendations, the Victorian Government is committed to introducing ***Child Safe Standards*** for organisations (over 26,000 organisations), with direct and regular contact with children.

The Synod's Keeping Children Safe Policy sets out processes and procedures which will enable each UCA congregation to implement these standards.

Synod are following the UCA Assembly National Child Policy Framework and requirements to include 10 standards from the Royal Commission in addition to the Child Safe Standards (CSS).



# The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to *Child Sexual Abuse*

- Has investigated how institutions such as churches, schools, agencies, camping and recreational clubs have responded to allegations of child sexual abuse
- The Royal Commission's research on best practice has outlined *ten elements* for child safe organisations to prevent, identify and improve responses to child abuse





# Child Safe Standards (CSS)

- **Compulsory** minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children to help protect children from abuse.
- The Commission for Children and Young People will be the oversight body for the Child Safe Standards (CSS).
- In Victoria, the phased approach was introduced from 1 January 2016 with all institutions and the CSS were legislated and required implementation **from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017**.
- Nothing in these standards changes the responsibility to report child abuse to police.



# CSS: Definitions & Key Points

## Under the legislation:

- A child is defined as a person **under the age of 18**.
- **Child Safe Institution (organisation)** is one that meets the Child Safe Standards by proactively taking measures to protect children from abuse.
- Child abuse is defined as:
  - ✓ **sexual abuse** (including grooming with the intention to sexually abuse a child)
  - ✓ **physical abuse or violence**
  - ✓ **serious psychological or emotional abuse**
  - ✓ **serious neglect.**



# CSS: Definitions & Key Points

**To meet the standards institutions must include the following principles as part of each standard:**

- Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- Promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Promoting the safety of children with a disability

*Resources: Tip Sheet 1,2 & 3*



# CSS: New Criminal Offences

- Grooming offence
- 'Failure to Disclose' offence
- 'Failure to Protect' offence

*Resources: Betrayal of Trust Fact Sheet*



# CSS New Criminal Offences:

## Grooming

- Is now in effect to target individuals who communicate with a child or their parents with the intention of committing child sexual abuse
- Online grooming is the illegal act of an adult making online contact with a child under the age of 16 with the intention of facilitation a sexual relationship or gratification
- Penalty of imprisonment





# CSS New Criminal Offences:

## Failure to disclose

- Failure to disclose requires adults to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child
- All adults must report to police any reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by another adult over 18 against a child under the age of 16
- Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence -  
Penalty of imprisonment



# CSS New Criminal Offences

## Failure to protect

- Failure to protect a child from sexual abuse applies to people within organisations **if**
  - They hold position of authority/responsibility within a relevant organisation that works with children



# CSS New Criminal Offences:

## Failure to protect

- They know of a substantial risk that an adult associated with the organisation may commit a sex offence against a child under 16 within the organisations care
- They have the power or responsibility to remove or reduce that risk
- BUT they negligently fail to do so
- Penalty of imprisonment

*Refer to BETRYAL OF TRUST FACT SHEETS*



# Understanding Keeping Children Safe Policy

- A **Whole Church Policy** to provide the overarching child safe framework for all Uniting Church employees, volunteers and institutions
- Each of the Victorian compulsory minimum standards and the Royal Commission elements (standards) of a child safe institution outlined in this policy are required to be implemented by the Church and its entities.
- A binding and public commitment to the provision of safety of children
- A development action to incorporate the **Child Safe Standards**



## Understanding KCS Policy (cont'd)

- *“The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse advises that to achieve a child safe organisation it is critical to have a competent and committed leadership and governance which develops and maintains a child safe culture (Interim Report 2014, Volume 1, p.141). For this policy framework to be effective it requires awareness and knowledge at all levels from Boards through to volunteers and congregational members. It requires a commitment to shared personal responsibility to ensure children are protected “*

Uniting Church Australia National Child Safety Policy Framework.





# KCS Policy Compliance with 7 Standards

1

- Culture & Leadership Arrangement

2

- Formally Adopt/Reaffirm the KCS Policy
- Child Safe Policy/ Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

3

- Code of Conduct

4

- Recruiting, Selection, Screening, Training, Supervision
- Working with Children Check/Registration

5

- Reporting & Responding

6

- Risk Management: Detect & Prevent

7

- Empowering Children

# CSS Standard 1 : Culture & Leadership

## Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership

**Rationale:** The child safe standards aim to drive **cultural change** in organisations so that protecting children from abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice.

To engage in this culture of child safety the church needs to have

- Its culture that protects children from abuse
- Its policies and practices reflect a commitment to child safety
- Leadership be aware of allegations and substantiated cases of abuse and responds to protect children from abuse
- Staff and volunteers know and understand the organisation's commitment to child safety
- Commitment to continuous improvement through regular reviews and updating policies and practices and being open to investigation



# CSS Standard 1 : Culture & Leadership

## Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership

### How to implement?

- Ensure strategic direction, vision and mission includes child safety as a key goal
- Have a section on child safety in the church's annual report
- Have a child safety representative (Culture of Safety Contact Person)
- Provide clear and transparent arrangements for leadership to be aware of child safety issues
- Provide culturally safe environments for children from culturally/linguistically diverse/supportive to disabilities and aboriginal backgrounds
- Maintain adequate record keeping of child safety issues and responses of any incidents
- Have systems to regularly review and improve child safety policies and practices, particularly following any incidents
- Develop a culture where staff, volunteers, children and families feel comfortable and supported when talking about any child safety concerns



## CSS Standard 2 : Implement a Child Safe Policy

### A Child Safe Policy or Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

**Rationale:** Public statements or policies on child safety help raise awareness about the importance of child safety in the church and the community

The church needs to

- Have a publicly accessible child safe policy or public statement of commitment to child safety
- Have a statement with an overarching set of principles guiding the development of policies and procedures to protect children from abuse
- Ensure that the policy (Keeping Children Safe Policy) be endorsed **annually** and accessible to the whole congregation



# CSS Standard 2 : Implement a Child Safe Policy

## A Child Safe Policy or Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

### How to Implement?

- Develop a new (or review an existing) child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- Communicate the statement or policy publicly (website, newsletters, annual reports, mission or vision statement and recruitment advertisements and welcome packs)
- Communicate in child friendly language and design/in community languages
- Ensure it is in accessible methods for people with disability
- Ensure all leaders, staff and volunteers are aware of the church's child safe policy and their duty of care requirements





# CSS Standard 3: Code of Conduct

## Implement a Code of Conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children

**Rationale:** Codes of conduct establish clear behavioural expectations and boundaries for personnel interacting with children

The Code of Conduct has to be

- Providing clear written guidance on interaction with children detailing acceptable/unacceptable behaviours relating to the specific context of your church
- Signed and a copy kept by all adults who are required to have a WWCC/R check
- Set clear boundaries between adults and children
- Providing guidance to children about expectations of their interactions with other children and be clear about what is unacceptable behaviour
- Including instruction on how adults should respond to any risks adults may pose to children or children to each other in both physical and online environments



## CSS Standard 4: Human Resources Practices

Adopt recruitment, screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel

**Rationale:** WWCC/R Check is actively used by churches but they can over-rely on the WWCC/R Check at the expense of other essential recruitment processes

- All newly recruited and existing staff and volunteers understand the importance of child safety by engaging various recruitment tools and providing staff and volunteers with appropriate training and supervision to minimise the risk of child abuse
- It is important to note that the child safe standards are not intended to alter churches' existing regulatory obligations in relation to the WWCC/R check
- Child Abuse is a preventable problem in institutional contexts if child safe standards are implemented
- Individuals, institutions and communities must understand the concept, dynamics and effects of child sexual abuse, be able to identify it and respond effectively



## CSS Standard 4: Human Resources Practices

Adopt **recruitment, screening**, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel

The minimum requirement of employment or volunteering in child-related roles is:

- **National criminal history checks**
- **Interviews**

Exploration of the person's motivation to work with children, relevant experience, understanding of boundaries, understanding children's emotional and physical needs, and attitudes to children's rights and communication skills

- **Referee Checks (at least two required)**

Address whether the referee was the applicant's direct supervisor, for how long observed applicant in child related work any concerns about the applicant, intention to engage in employment or volunteer work again

- **WWCC/R Checks**



## CSS Standard 4: Human Resources Practices

Adopt screening, recruitment, **supervision, training** and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel (cont'd)

- A legislative requirement in Victoria
- Church needs to regularly provide information, training and education for staff and volunteers about child abuse and child safety
  - ✓ identifying, assessing and reducing or removing child abuse risks
  - ✓ Its policies and procedures (including the code of conduct and child safe policy)
  - ✓ how to handle a disclosure or suspicion of abuse (church's reporting guidelines)
  - ✓ cultural awareness training
- New staff and volunteers need support and information when they begin their new role
- Existing staff need to develop new skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of their positions and expand their career options



# CSS Standard 5: Reporting and Responding

## Implement processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

### **The Policy should be implemented to ensure:**

- A supportive environment for children, personnel or families who report allegations of abuse of child safety concerns
- Staff, volunteers ,families and children know how to report abuse allegations, and feel comfortable doing so
- Clear and comprehensive policies for notifying authorities, including police, of any suspected child abuse
- To indicate that the safety of children is everyone's responsibility





# CSS Standard 5: Reporting and Responding

## Implement processes for responding to and **reporting** suspected child abuse

### **Reporting:**

- Comply with all legal requirements to report child abuse to appropriate authorities
- Have a clear and understood procedure for reporting concerns and allegations
- Publicise and make accessible for families and children avenues for reporting incidents and concerns
- Encourage children to report if they feel unsafe or concerned
- Have immediate action and steps be taken to assess risks, concerns and complaints
- Institute a feedback process on the policies and procedure for reporting

**Call the police on 000 if you have immediate concerns for a child's safety or if you reasonably believe child abuse may have occurred.**

**Investigation of any matter by police must always take priority over internal investigations.**



# CSS Standard 5: Reporting and Responding

## Implement processes for **responding to** and reporting suspected child abuse

### **Responding:**

- Ensure children are safe, the procedures are fair and focus on child safety
- Provide support and comfort to a child reporting abuse or safety concerns
- Contact parents/carers as appropriate
- Provide ongoing support or make referrals for support to alleged victims, families and affected staff
- Provide contact details for internal and /or external expertise to access advice
- Undertake timely reviews of the policies and procedures to be followed if child abuse occurs
- Review organisational responses following an incident to help drive continuous improvement
- Keep consistent, full, accurate and contemporaneous records



# CSS Standard 6: Risk Management

## Implement strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

**Rationale:** organisations that have an active approach to their duty of care in protecting children tend to have a risk management approach and a commitment to continuous improvement.

### The Church needs

- to adopt a risk management approach by identifying and considering their child safety risks based on the nature of their activities with children/physical & online environments/the characteristics of children involved
- have its strategy cover both 'business as usual' risks and risks posed by specific activities (excursion/overnight trips/camps)
- Have the risk management regularly reflected on and improved
- Have specific risks to Aboriginal/culturally diverse background/disabled children

When risks are identified, the church is required to institute measures to reduce or remove them



# CSS Standard 7: Empowering children

## Implement strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

**Rationale:** Children often do not report abuse (uncomfortable/don't know how to)

Lack of simple and accessible processes assisting children to understand their rights and how to report concerns regarding their safety

### **The Church needs to**

- Ensure children feel safe, comfortable, empowered and taken seriously in reporting concerns or allegations of abuse
- Provide child-appropriate and accessible information about what child abuse is/how to raise their concerns/their rights (age appropriate)
- Give children opportunities to provide any feedbacks about their involvement and then act on that feedback
- Recognise the importance of friendships and support from peers in helping children feel safe and connected



# How to achieve congregational compliance with the policy

1. Formally adopt or reaffirm the Synod's KCS Policy and procedures, and record a statement of commitment in CC meeting Minutes.
2. Advertising KCS Policy Make the KCS Policy and Statement of Commitment accessible to the congregation.
3. **Appoint a Culture of Safety/Safe Church Contact Person**
4. Their role is to assist in undertaking leadership in child safe church, to support all parties in responding to reports or concerns as well as assisting with required administrative components.





## How to achieve congregational compliance with the policy

5. WWCC/R Ensure that Church Councilors, Elders, Lay Preachers, worship leaders, music leaders, organists, Bible study leaders, as well as those involved in programs with children and young people have a valid WWCC and have signed the Code of Conduct.
6. To keep an up to date WWCC register locally as well as enter the information on the Synod's WWCC secure data base.

*Nominate a person to take on this role*

*(may be a different person to Culture of Safety Contact person)*





## How to achieve congregational compliance with the policy

7. **Report immediately** a **Negative Notice** is received (ie. a failure to obtain or cancellation / suspension of WWCC) by contacting

The Synod General Secretary who will advise on the appropriate action in accordance with UCA Guidelines

### 8. **Safe Church Training**

Ensure that all people requiring WWCC attend Safe Church Training at least every 2 years (records of this need to be kept)



# How to achieve congregational compliance with the policy

## 8. Engage in rigorous recruitment processes

- Engage in rigorous screening, and selection processes when people are employed or engaged as volunteers.
- This includes interviews, referee checks, WWCC, and CC ratifies and minutes this appointment.  
(records of this need to be kept)

## 9. Risk Assessment

- Risk assessment plans must be developed for each regular and occasional child and youth activities.
- CC is responsible for assessing and approving activities and programs.
- This includes risk assessment and management plans.
- Approval to be recorded by CC prior to the activity being undertaken, and the activity granted written permission to proceed.



# Working With Children Check

- <http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/home/applications/apply+for+a+check/>
- Organisation details: your congregation & UCA, Synod of victoria and Tasmania (130 Little Collins St Melbourne 3000  
T 9251 5200 )
- Register onto Synod's Database
- Contact Amy Wyld

[Amy.Wyld@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:Amy.Wyld@victas.uca.org.au)



# WWCC/R Check vs. Police Check

- The Working with Children Check/R Check is not the same as the Police Check.
- The WWCC/R check screens your criminal and professional conduct records for sexual, violent and drug offences going back over your lifetime. The Police Check does not disclose all offences and does not go back over your lifetime.
- Your criminal and professional conduct records are monitored for the life of your WWCC/R Check, but not with the Police Check.
- Organisations require these Checks for different purposes. **If you are doing child-related work, you will need to pass the Check, even if you have a Police Check.**



# Self Audit Tool

- Self-audit tool is designed to help organisations assess their progress in meeting the child safe standards and becoming a child safe organisation.
- For further information,  
please contact the Department of Health and Human Services:  
Email: [childsafestandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:childsafestandards@dhhs.vic.gov.au)  
Phone: 9096 0000 or 1300 650 172



# The child safe standards self-audit tool

- Name: (person completing audit)
- Position:
- Contact details:

Standards 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements

Activity	In Place	Partially in place	Not in place	Action required	Timeframe for actions
Child safety is a core part of public and internal messaging.					
Policies and practices exist that prioritise child safety and promote shared responsibility- not just at a leadership level – by outlining all staff responsibilities					
A culture exists of supporting cultural safety for aboriginal children					



# Key Contacts

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- ANY QUESTIONS?

