



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

**Creating a safe environment for
children and vulnerable adults in
our Church - Safe Leaders Guide**



Culture of Safety

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





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Note: This guide has been compiled using material from the Safe Church Training Manual 2012, Safe Ministry Training Manual 2012 and the Child Safe Church UCA Queensland Synod

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Introduction

For anyone working with children, issues of care, protection and safety have always been complex, but are increasingly so. More than ever, we are aware of issues of safety, our duty of care, the vulnerability of children and the possibility of abuse.

In addition, standards of care now expected as a matter of law and of community practice are higher than they were in the past. The Church must enforce these standards of care.

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (Synod) has developed a policy on the prevention of child abuse because it has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that children are safe.

This Safe Leaders Guide should be read in conjunction with the Policy on the Prevention of Child Abuse which can be downloaded at <http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>.

Our policy for keeping children safe in our church

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is committed to provide safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained. The Uniting Church commits itself to the care, protection and safety of all children relating to it or its agencies.

We seek to provide a safe environment for children to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community, and to grow in faith (A Safe Place for Children, Uniting Church Press, 1999).

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, in particular children

- Provides clear and appropriate guidelines for managing the safety of people, in particular children and vulnerable adults, and its programs.

Keeping children safe in our Church through our leadership

Having opportunities to use God-given gifts through leadership can be one of the most satisfying and growing experiences for a person in the life of the Church.

When considering someone for a leadership role, it is important to value and support them by making sure:

- The task uses their gifts and talents
- They are able to work as a part of team, and are well supported
- The position has clearly defined expectations
- The person is able to work in a safe way with children.

In order to achieve the goal of keeping children safe through leadership in the Church, we commit to:

Safe recruitment of leaders

- We will screen all prospective leaders in our ministries before they are appointed
- For those working with children we will recruit using the Working with Children Guidelines 2006 or equivalent for Tasmanian leaders
- We will have a minimum church attendance policy for all prospective leaders, eg, that they attend on a regular basis for six months before being able to be offered the opportunity to serve in a leadership role

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Adequate training for leaders

- We require that all leaders attend Synod endorsed training within the first year of their holding a leadership role and subsequently attend refresher workshops.
- We require all leaders to attend additional ministry-specific training as endorsed by our church leadership.

Continued supervision of leaders

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

All leaders will agree to follow the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse which can be downloaded at <http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>

Responding to all allegations of risk of harm (abuse) and serious ministry misconduct

All leaders will report disclosures or suspicions of child abuse according to state legislation by using the procedures in the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse (2013).

Where a leader has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them the Synod Discipline Process for Congregations will be followed¹.

Potential leaders

Congregations through their Church Councils should not accept leadership offers without question, no matter how well intentioned. Congregations must exercise care when inviting individuals to fulfil leadership positions within their children's and young people's programs.

A leader will be 18 years or older to be part of a leadership

team with significant responsibility. A young person under 18 years of age can be a 'helper' or 'junior leader' if they work under the direct supervision of an adult leader.

Recruiting the right type of people

Recruitment and selection of team leaders and members is an important task since leaders are representatives of the Church. They are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for others, often with little direct supervision from the Minister and/or other key leaders.

We need safe leaders - leaders who respect other people's boundaries, receive regular supervision, have other people's best interests at heart, who are led by God and who are in accountable and transparent teams.

The right type of leaders and legal due diligence

Due diligence is a legal term referring to the care that must be taken when:

Appointing leaders: This includes properly screening, interviewing, checking a potential leader's background and contacting a potential leader's referees.

Supervising leaders: This includes setting clear roles and expectations, providing support for leaders, practising the implementation of the Code of Conduct and having a commitment to team leadership. For example, a church may exercise sufficient care in the hiring of an individual but still be legally accountable for acts of abuse on the basis of negligent supervision. Negligent supervision is a failure to exercise sufficient care in the ongoing supervision of a leader.

Pre recruitment

Identify the role and length of time the role is to be filled. Leaders should be appointed to clearly defined roles with clearly defined start and end dates.

¹ http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/assets/5007/Fact_Sheet_-_Discipline_Process.pdf outlines the Synod's Human Resources discipline process for congregations. Further advice from HR (03) 9251 5477.

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Form recruitment teams

It is good practice for the recruitment team to include representatives of both genders. The team needs to be no more than 2-3 people including the team leader.

Minimum attendance policy

If a person is not known to the congregation, and has had no previous leadership experience that can be substantiated, it is advisable that they are part of a congregation for at least 6 months before being considered for a leadership position within that congregation.

Recommended recruitment process

Position information and suitability interview

The applicant meets with team leaders to find out more about the role and explore whether the applicant is suited for the role.

This process is intended to assist in further identifying the applicant's skills, gifts and talents and how these can best be used to further the Church's mission.

Selection of leaders should take into account the applicant's:

- Relevant leadership skills and experience
- Personal standards and character
- Ability to develop appropriate relationships
- Maturity in faith
- Awareness of and willingness to work within the Uniting Church ethos and the Church's policies to ensure the safety of children and young people
- Working with Children Check card status (Victoria only) – which needs to be registered with the Synod

- Police records check (Tasmania only)
- Reference checks
- Guidance provided in the Synod's HR documents.

Working with Children Checks – Victoria only

Every person who works or volunteers with children must undergo a Working with Children Check.

Who needs a Working with Children Check?

- All ministers
- Paid employees, volunteers and students or trainees working with children

Each Victorian congregation or those VicTas congregations geographically located in NSW must maintain a register to keep track of each person involved in children's activities, their Working with Children Check numbers and expiry dates (Synod policy WWCC). This data should be entered into the Synod's WWCC database.

Congregations also need to confirm the validity of a Working with Children Check held by individuals who have transferred from another congregation.

Download application forms for Working with Children Checks from www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren
Refer to the Synod Working with Children information for guidance about completing the form, specifically Section E.

Police Checks (Victoria and Tasmania)

Every person who works or volunteers with children in Tasmania must undergo a Police Check. This includes parents involved with children other than their own. Ministers must also have a current valid police check. In Victoria this is in addition to the Working with Children Check.

Formalising the appointment

Once an individual is selected for a position and a confirmation of a positive Working With Children Check and police check are obtained the appointment needs to be formally recognised as endorsed by the Church Council in its meeting minutes.

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Recognising this person's leadership role through commissioning or other act in a service or worship may also be appropriate.

Leaders should also be asked to sign an agreement to comply with all Synod policies and procedures including policies for the safety of children and young people.

Appointment with orientation

Ensure all leaders have received appropriate training and information to enable them to successfully share in their ministry, and the fact that they are an endorsed leader has been communicated to people.

Unsuccessful applicants

If an applicant is considered unsuitable for leadership, it may be helpful to attempt to identify other roles for them within the congregation. The decision to deem an applicant unsuitable for a leadership role should be communicated in a sensitive way and the person should be followed up pastorally.

Ministry reviews

Appointments will be reviewed periodically. As part of the review process, the Church Council and/or leadership team may consider whether any further training is needed.

Working with Children Checks must be renewed every 5 years. It is up to the individual to apply for a new card and to inform the appropriate member of their congregation when they receive their renewed card. The details of the WWCC should also be registered with the Synod.

The designated person in the congregation responsible for maintaining an updated list of valid Working with Children Checks should regularly check the expiry dates on the register and follow up leaders whose cards are due to expire to ensure they are in the process of applying for a new card.

A person may continue into a second term as a leader but this expectation should not be implied at the initial appointment.

Supervision for leaders

Although thorough recruitment is essential, it is equally important that leaders are supported through ministry supervision.

The Church Council has responsibilities not only to those involved in church activities but also to those who help with programs or offer leadership. A vital part of this involves providing adequate supervision of leaders to minimise any potential physical risk or damage to their reputations.

Leaders should be provided with adequate supervision to ensure that certain situations do not arise. This can be done by ensuring that two leaders are present at all activities so that the possibility of inappropriate behaviour, or allegation of such behaviour, is minimised. Plans should be in place to ensure appropriate resources and support is available during all activities.

The components of healthy ministry supervision are: clear expectations, adequate ministry support for leaders, a commitment to develop leaders, a clear set of boundaries (code of conduct) for leaders, and a well communicated process for conflict resolution and complaints handling.

Supervision will also help to identify areas where future training is required.

Clear boundaries

The Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse is helpful for ensuring that leaders understand appropriate boundaries, given the position of power they have as those who may spiritually influence others.

Expectations

Supervision cannot take place unless there are clearly understood expectations in both directions.

As a **ministry leader** you could be expected to:

- Commit to the aims of your ministry
- Support other ministry team leaders

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- Fulfil your ministry role as described to you by your ministry coordinator
- Undergo any training required for your ministry position
- Attend ministry team meetings as required
- Embrace the Church Code of Conduct.

As a **ministry coordinator** you could be expected to:

- Commit to the aims of ministry
- Support ministry team leaders and supervise them in their role
- Fulfil your ministry role as described to you by your senior church leader
- Undergo any training required for your ministry position
- Embrace the Church Code of Conduct
- Ensure that all leaders are screened, appointed and inducted effectively into ministry roles
- Ensure that your ministry program has been approved by your Church Council
- Ensure that your ministry program meets the requirements for Safe Leaders and Safe Programs.

As a person in a **ministry role** with the Church you could expect that your Church Council will:

- Provide mechanisms to support and supervise all leaders and ministry coordinators in their roles
- Ensure resources (people, financial, administrative access and equipment) are available for approved ministry programs
- Provide opportunities to access approved ministry training.

Support for leaders

It is important that the Church ensures that formal or informal support is provided for all leaders. It is important that all leaders and team members have a clear understanding of lines of responsibility, to whom they can go for support and how to address conflicts and concerns.

Commitment to leadership development and training

Developing leaders is another way to ensure healthy teams. This development can include things like regular team meetings, praying together and planning together. It is also advisable to invest in leadership development both through in-house services and external training events.

Regular training should be offered to assist leaders in their role. This is also a way in which congregations can fulfil their duty of care responsibilities to leaders. To best equip leaders for their task in caring for children and young people, training needs to be undertaken in areas such as:

- The Synod's policies on keeping children and vulnerable adults safe
- First aid
- Age specific leadership training
- Leading bible studies and devotions.

Spiritual formation of leaders

Being an effective leader is not just about what a person does and the programs they run. It is also about the leader being in a healthy relationship with God.

Strategies for helping leaders keep a balance between nurturing their own spiritual life and the demands of being in ministry may include meeting regularly with a mentor or spiritual director, retreats and regular devotional reading and reflection.

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Leaders should also be encouraged to regularly attend a worship service within a congregation. A mentoring relationship can support spiritual formation and should be encouraged for all leaders.

Recognition of leaders

An important part of caring for and affirming leaders is to provide opportunities for recognition by the congregation. Recognition at the beginning and end of a period of service and at significant stages along the way demonstrates a clear commitment from the congregation to prayerful and consistent support, and affirmation.

Responsibilities of leaders

Leaders are required to keep the Church Council informed of the activities planned in the youth and children's ministry calendar.

Leaders should report regularly on activities of the group including risk management processes that have been documented.

The Church Council needs to be made particularly aware of any planned activities which have a high risk factor. These activities must be assessed prior to the activity being run.

Leadership ratios

There should always be a minimum of two leaders at any event organised for children and young people. There should also be an appropriate gender balance in a leadership team especially when the event or activity involves people of both genders.

An appropriate ratio of leaders to participants will vary from one activity to another. The Synod recommends where possible a ratio of 1 leader for every 6 children/young people in the activity for participants aged 5 and over, and 1 leader for every 4 children/young people for children under 5. This ratio not only assists in keeping children and young people physically safe, but aids in the pastoral care of all individuals.

Managing behaviour

Leaders working with children and young people are responsible for developing and implementing warm, inclusive and supportive group dynamics. All leaders must seek to provide a safe environment for children and young people to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community and to grow in faith.

It is essential for all groups to have clear expectations about behaviour standards. It is helpful to ask the group to assist in establishing behaviour guidelines and committing to them.

Some areas to be particularly sensitive to and aware of include, but may not necessarily be limited to:

- Cultural diversity, attitudes and expectations
- The wide variety of family structures
- Use of inclusive/non-sexist or racist language or humour
- Appropriate, equitable inclusion of those with disabilities and special needs
- Appropriate, equitable inclusion of all participants regardless of gender, culture or appearance
- Warmth, empathy and appropriate teaching, guidance, care and nature
- Positive, empowering and encouraging uses of power and authority
- Appropriate use of all forms of electronic contact/communication with participants.

Children and young people learn as much from what adults do as what they say. Leaders must be aware of this and act accordingly.

Behaviour, attitudes and language are as important as what is taught during an activity or program. It is vital to use appropriate language and ways of relating that affirm the worth, dignity and significance of team leaders, members and participants.

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Behaviour management strategies should include ways to deal with bullying, offensive language and attitudes. The following strategies may have a positive influence on group behaviour:

- Strong, suitably trained, well prepared leadership
- Clarity of expectations for behaviours in a particular situation
- Consistency
- Appropriate, interactive and well-planned activities
- Clear explanations and answering of questions
- Setting appropriate boundaries which are understood and accepted
- Close supervision and consistent monitoring of behaviour
- Early intervention strategies and established consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

Exit interviews - An opportunity to reflect

Exiting leaders should, in supervision, be afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experience of holding that leadership role and invited to comment on the role's further development/improvement. This information may lead to modifying the role.

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>