



D06 PR 0008 Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns (NSW)

Purpose:

The Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns (the Procedure) sets out a procedure to follow when a complaint or information about any form of child protection concern is received. In NSW this includes a child abuse offence, child sexual abuse, sexual misconduct involving a child, or that a child is at risk of significant harm. Ettalong Church and its staff and volunteers have legal obligations to report certain information to government authorities, this includes duties under the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW), Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW), Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) and the Children's Guardian Act 2019. Some of these duties apply to the church as an organisation or to church leaders, some of the duties apply to individuals. In some circumstances, failing to report knowledge of child abuse incidents to NSW Police may be a criminal offence. Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT have developed this Procedure to address all relevant duties in a way that is both thorough and practical.

Scope:

This Procedure applies to all staff and volunteers of the Church and should be read in conjunction with:

- The Safe Ministries Policy
- Procedure for Handling Complaints
- Incident Report Form

If you have any doubt as to whether a complaint or information would fall within the scope of the Procedure, or about any of the steps set out in the Procedure, contact the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager (1300 647 780).

1. Receiving a complaint or identifying a child protection concern:

A child protection concern may include one or more of the concerns regarding:

- a child at risk of significant harm
- a child abuse offence
- child sexual abuse
- sexual misconduct involving a child
- physical abuse of a child
- serious neglect of a child



- behaviour which may psychologically harm the child
- inappropriately personal or intimate communication and/or behaviours which may constitute grooming
- exposure of a child to domestic and family violence
- or any other reason for concern.

A child protection concern may be received:

- from a child who has been directly involved
- from an adult who has been directly involved (including personal disclosures of wrongdoing)
- from another person with information about a child or adult
- from another organisation with information about a child or adult
- from staff or volunteers who have concerns based on their observations and interactions with one or more children or adults

If someone raises a concern or reports an allegation:

- ensure the Senior Pastor is notified (unless it is against the Senior Pastor) and the Safe Church Team is notified.
- DO NOT attempt to assess the validity of the concern, or seek to investigate any allegation yourself
- DO clarify information reported to you if appropriate (for example, 'Can you tell me more about that?' Or involve someone in authority (Pastor, Elder, Deacon) immediately
- if a child, DO reassure them that they are not at fault and that they will not be in trouble for sharing this information.
- if a Ministry leader or volunteer has a concern about a child's wellbeing, but have not received any specific information, involve someone in authority (Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Safe Church Team) immediately

2. Consider whether there is an immediate danger to a child:

Where there is an immediate danger to a child, or where a source of harm has occurred external to Church operations:

- contact the Police immediately on (131 444 or 000) and report the information
- follow any instructions given by the Police



Where source of harm occurred during Church ministry operations:

- contact the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Manager (1300 647 780).

Always:

- address any immediate safety needs of others present; and
- organise support for the person who has disclosed the complaint or information.

3. Reporting:

a) Complete an Incident Form:

- If a staff member or volunteer has or is notified of a child protection concern, they should complete a Form as soon as possible.
- This form should include relevant details of the concern, contact information, and the signature of the person completing the form.

b) Notify the Safe Church Team:

- If a staff member or volunteer has or is notified of a child protection concern, they must inform the Safe Church Team as soon as possible. The Safe Church Team is responsible for ensuring the church fulfils its legal obligations and ensuring that all concerns are managed appropriately.
- If there is any delay before the Safe Church Team can be contacted, the individual should consider whether it is necessary to report their concerns to external government agencies as outlined in step 4 below. They may contact the Ministry Standards Hotline on 1300 647 780 for advice.
- Staff and volunteers should ensure they do not discuss any concerns raised with the accused person at this point in time. Doing so may impede future investigation processes.
- If the concern raised would create a conflict of interest for a member of the Safe Church Team, consider contacting the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Hotline on 1300 647 780 for advice.



4. External Reporting to Government Agencies:

a) Safe Church Team responsibilities

The Safe Church Team should

- ensure all necessary reports are made. Reports to different government agencies is required for different purposes and therefore multiple reports may be required.
- keep detailed contemporaneous notes of all information and steps taken.
- should also follow all relevant steps outlined in the Procedures for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers.

b) Report Risk of Significant Harm to Department of Communities and Justice (formerly known as FACS or DOCS)

- If the Safe Church Team determine that there is a child at risk of significant harm, then they are to make a report as soon as possible to the Child Protection Helpline via 132 111 or via an e-report.
- If there is any doubt whether a concern would be considered a risk of significant harm, then the Safe Church Team should complete the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>
- If the MRG results in 'Immediate Report to the Child Protection Helpline', make a report as soon as possible via 132 111 or an e-report.
- The MRG result may suggest other actions be taken. Please contact Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Ministry Standards Hotline on 1300 647 780 if any assistance is required.
- The Safe Church Team should keep a copy of the MRG report for their records.