



OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

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SAFER CHURCHES GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

These **Safer Churches Guidelines** (“Guidelines”) have been developed by the ACC National Executive as part of the implementation of the **ACC Child Protection Policy** (“Policy”).

These Guidelines include the Child Protection Practice Guidelines referred to in section 7 of the Policy.

The Guidelines contained herein are both introductory foundational thoughts which are then built upon in the SMR Safe Ministry Manual (“Manual”) and **ACC Safer Churches Awareness Workshops** (“Workshop/s”), as well as good practice procedural suggestions for churches.

These Guidelines are not written as a replacement for participation in the Workshops, rather as a prompt or reminder of some of the key topics from the Workshops.

The Guidelines, Manual and Workshops assist church leaders in abiding by Work Health & Safety (WHS) legislation, applicable in all states and territories of Australia apart from Western Australia and Victoria. This legislation requires safe emotional and physical workplaces for all workers including volunteers. As such, the content of the Guidelines, Manual and Workshops are useful to all workers, both volunteer and paid, whether *ACC People* as defined in the Policy or not.

These Guidelines are divided into two categories:

- those considered to be legal, biblical and/or moral imperatives, denoted by the word “**shall**” must be implemented, and
- those considered as good practice, denoted by the word “**recommended**”, are nevertheless strongly recommended.

As part of adopting the ACC Child Protection Policy, Constituent Churches are required to adopt the Guidelines, or an alternative guideline that is at least consistent with these Guidelines. In any legal proceedings, Constituent Churches may be asked if any such Guidelines existed and if so, whether or not they were followed.

Visit the Safer Churches section of Pastor’s Login for more information and tools.

GUIDELINES

1. ACC Safer Churches Awareness Workshops

All people who have a Direct Role (as defined in the ACC Child Protection Policy) with children in ACC churches **shall** receive adequate training in the concepts of Child Protection at minimum every 3 years.

ACC Credential and Certificate holders **shall** complete ACC Safer Churches Workshop (or recognised equivalent) every three years at a minimum in order for Credentials or Certificates to be renewed.

2. Motive for ministry

Our primary motive for establishing and maintaining Safer Churches environments for Children or Young People and all vulnerable people, is God's love for us. ACC People are committed to providing Children or Young People with positive and nurturing experiences and as such **shall** minister out of the love God has for everyone. We commit to church ministry events and programs built on solid Safer Churches foundations.

3. Maintaining appropriate boundaries

ACC People **shall** abide by the relevant **ACC Code of Conduct** applicable to their role, as part of being respectful of the boundaries of everyone. See the Ministerial Code of Conduct and Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct at Pastor's Login.

4. Team ministry

We establish and maintain Safer Churches environments for each other and those to whom we minister when we work as the 'body', or minister in 'team' context. All ACC People **shall** minister in transparent and accountable teams e.g. avoid unsupervised 1:1 contact with Children or Young People.

5. Promoting empowerment and participation:

ACC People and constituent churches **shall** actively promote the empowerment and participation of all people at church in the protection of Children and Young People.

It is **recommended**, for example, that ACC People actively assist Children or Young People to

- Trust their feelings,
- Say 'no' when they feel unsafe,
- Understand when to be confidential and when to talk to others about concerns,
- Find safe people to talk to,
- Raise concerns about abuse,
- Find safe people to talk to,
- Know when they feel vulnerable.

It is recommended that ACC People actively assist the families of Children or Young People to

- Access information about what child abuse is,
- Feel welcome and have a say in the activities and programs in which their Children or Young People participate as far as is practical,
- Engage in two-way communication between families and the church.

6. Being aware of Child Abuse Indicators

All ACC People **shall** learn the indicators of Child or Young Person abuse and neglect and report to their Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team when they have concerns about a Child and/or Young Person who is involved in the church.

7. Safe Online and Digital practices

The use of electronic media for communication is part of everyday life. ACC People **shall** be mindful of the position of trust they hold by actively being safe in all online and digital interactions, including maintaining transparency and accountability in the use of electronic communications with Children or Young People as far as is practical, that is as a team, not as individuals, e.g. group emails/text messages/Facebook.

ACC People **shall** not transmit, download or store any communication that is: discriminatory or harassing, derogatory, obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic, defamatory, threatening, for any purpose that is illegal or contrary to the Code of Conduct relevant to their position. In the case where ACC People receive such communication, they will report this to their Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team.

ACC People **shall** not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide their identity or represent the sender as someone else.

It is **recommended** that communications with Children under 16 occur with the full knowledge of the parent/s or carer/s of the Child or Young Person.

8. Reporting concerns of Children or Young People who may be at risk of harm

It is **recommended** that Constituent Churches appoint a **Safer Churches Person/Team**, whose roles include: receiving reports, assisting in the process of reporting of Child Protection concerns and keeping accurate records permanently and securely in accordance with privacy legislation.

ACC People **shall** report concerns when:

- a Child or Young Person discloses they have been or are at risk of being abused
- someone else (regardless of age) discloses that they know of a Child or Young

Person who has been/is at risk of being abused

- there are concerns that the Child or Young Person may have been or is at risk of being abused based on their physical appearance or behaviour.

ACC People are not required, as an initial response, to establish or investigate if abuse has occurred, but rather report reasonable suspicions or concerns of abuse, including the grounds for concerns, to Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team (or equivalent). If a Local Church Safer Churches Person is not available and the abuse is currently occurring, or there are reasons to believe that a Child or Young Person is at risk, a report should be made immediately to the police and appropriate authorities.

Process for Reporting:

- a) Report to Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team

Report concerns to one of the appointed Local Safer Churches People, except when a disclosure occurs at a program or event, or a Child's/Young Person's immediate safety is at risk (sexual and physical abuse). In this case, immediately phone the police and organise appropriate support for the Child/ren. This can be done with the help of the most senior on-site Leader, who will also need to assist with managing the immediate situation.

- b) Complete applicable form/s and/or online reporting, e.g. Safer Churches anecdotal record and/or state government online reporting tool. The Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team will keep a Local Church log, upholding privacy principles.

- c) Take the appropriate action with your Local Church Safer Churches Person - including:

- Police/government Child Protection agency reporting (police, government agency).

NOTE: In South Australia, individuals must report directly to CARL (Child Abuse Report Line).

- Contact the **National Safer Churches Helpline** for advice and assistance.
- Initiate the correct complaints handling processes if the allegations are about ACC Leaders/Certificate Holders.

- d) Provide ongoing support, pastoral care and risk management processes

It is the role of the Local Church Board to implement pastoral care and support for all parties involved, including the Child or Young Person and family, as much as is practical. There may also be Local Church risk management action plans that need to be implemented, e.g. stepping aside a Leader/Certificate Holder who has been accused of harming a Child or Young Person whilst the investigation occurs.

9. Appointment of Volunteer Workers (including ACC people)

All people who have a Direct Role (as defined in the ACC Child Protection Policy) with children in ACC churches **shall** be screened, appointed and inducted using a formal accountable / transparent process (For paid workers and leaders, additional steps may be required as part of the Local Church's written employment process).

As a minimum, it is **recommended** that:

a) Prior to Serving

The Volunteer Church Workers Declaration should be completed. This declaration refers to the working with children checks and the Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct.

b) Induction

WHS legislation requires that all workers are provided with appropriate information/induction training to enable them to safely fulfil their role/s, i.e. share in the ministry. This induction process should include prayer for the leader and clear communication with those who need to know that this person is an endorsed leader of the church.

c) Ministry Review

It is recommended there be a process of annual review of roles for Volunteer Workers. This process should be made clear to applicants at the time of appointment, as part of the induction process. This provides an opportunity for leaders to say they will or will not be available next year/time, which is important for the health of committed teams.

10. Supervision of Volunteer Workers (including ACC people)

All people who have a Direct Role (as defined in the ACC Child Protection Policy) with children in ACC churches **shall** be appropriately supervised in their roles, including being provided with clear behavioural expectations for their role through a code of conduct. (For paid workers, additional supervision may be required as part of the Constituent Church's written employment procedures.)

As a minimum is it **recommended** ACC Constituent churches:

a. Provide adequate support

It is recommended that the Local Church Board make adequate provision for formal and informal support for all ACC People.

b. Develop skills

It is recommended that the Local Church Board make adequate provision for developing Volunteer Workers. This may include things like regular team meetings, praying together, eating together and planning together. It is also advisable to invest in leadership development, both through in-house in-services and external training events.

c. Apply the relevant Code of Conduct

See the Ministerial Code of Conduct and Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct at Pastor's Login. The applicable ACC code of conduct provides clear behavioural boundaries for representing the church.

11. Responding to conflicts, and/or allegations against ACC People

- ACC People **shall** make an appropriate report to the relevant government department and to the relevant ACC State or National Executive, in respect to a Child or Young Person at risk of harm.
- ACC People **shall** use the ACC Grievance Procedure when responding to allegations of misconduct and/or abuse by ACC Credential or Certificate holders.
- When responding to allegations of misconduct and/or abuse by those who are not ACC Credential or Certificate holders, ACC People **shall** work through an appropriate process which affords natural justice to all parties; your ACC State Safer Churches Officers can provide assistance working through such a process.
- In all instances, the Local Church **shall** consider the pastoral, legal and insurance implications of the conflict or allegation and respond with transparency and accountability.

12. Compliance with WHS legislation

It is **recommended** even in states where there is no legislated WHS requirement that each ACC Church:

- Elect a **Health & Safety Team** to oversee implementation of WHS compliance.
- Write and implement Health and Safety policies, including privacy policy and evacuations procedures.
- Keep Health and Safety on the agenda at the Local Church Board team meetings.
- Notify incidents such as serious events and dangerous incidents within a prescribed period to the Health & Safety Team.
- Address health and safety concerns within a timely manner of the concern being communicated to the Health & Safety Team.
- Notify incidents such as serious events and critical incidents within a prescribed period to the Health & Safety Team.

- Use incident report documentation to report serious incidents to your insurer and your ACC State Safer Churches Officer.
- Ensure all workers know and follow the church's abuse reporting and grievance procedures.
- Have the Health & Safety Team undertake a safe environment audit of the church centre at least twice a year.

Note: In States & Territories where the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Legislation applies to churches this guideline is written to assist with compliance to the WHS Act.

13. Annual program approval

It is **recommended** that all Children or Young People's programs be approved by the Local Church Board through a formal, annual written approval process.

14. Managing event and/or program risks

It is **recommended** that ministry coordinators manage individual program risk according to risk management good practice, including annual risk management as part of the annual program approval process.

15. Safe spiritual and emotional environments in ministry programs and events

ACC constituent churches **shall** provide safe spiritual and emotional environments including a commitment to:

- servant leadership in our ministry to all people,
- upholding National Privacy Act principles,
- respect for diversity culturally, e.g. the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds,
- the safety of children with a disability.

The ACC Child Protection Policy states that ACC people **shall**:

- *put the rights of a Child or Young Person to the protection from harm ahead of any cultural and religious practices of families who come to our Churches.*

No cultural or religious belief will take precedence over the right of Children or Young People to protection from harm.

- *understand and respond to the special needs of Children or Young People with developmental delays or disabilities.*

We acknowledge that Children or Young People with developmental delays or disabilities have special needs. We expect ACC People to act in ways that communicate effectively with and are supportive of Children or Young People with developmental delays or disabilities. We also understand that we will need to be proactive in recognising the additional

vulnerability to harm that Children or Young People with developmental delays or disabilities experience.

- *to be respectful of Children or Young People.*

As part of our commitment to Children or Young People, we will facilitate opportunities for Children or Young People to tell us their views and feedback about the services we provide to them. We will treat Children or Young People as individuals and respect their unique abilities and vulnerabilities. We expect ACC People to express attitudes and engage in behaviour that respects and supports Children or Young People (ACC Child Protection Policy)

16. Safe physical environments

It is **recommended** for the safe running of Children's and Young People's programs and events that the following matters are considered:

FIRST AID including:

- At least one on-site leader should have current first aid training, e.g. St John Ambulance.
- A suitable, up-to-date and accessible first aid kit is to be available at all times.

TRANSPORTATION including:

- Responsible, road-rule abiding transportation is to be provided.
- Never be alone in a car with a Child or Young Person.
- At no time should there be more passengers in a car than the number of seat belts that are in working order and available for use.
- All cars will be registered, in good working order and driven by licensed drivers abiding by any licence restrictions (e.g. Provisional licence passenger conditions)
- If a Child/Young Person is travelling in a vehicle driven by a worker who possesses a provisional licence, prior written consent should, wherever possible, be given by a parent/guardian, except in the case of emergencies.

FOOD SAFETY including:

- Prepare a Food Preparation & Storage Practices Guide
- Display Food Preparation and Storage Practices Guide in the kitchen or food preparation area.
- Checking with local council to ensure compliance with local requirements in relation to food handling.

SUPERVISION NUMBERS including:

ACC People should ensure that adequate numbers of leaders are present to supervise the program.

Precise numbers of leaders are hard to determine and will depend greatly on the size of the group, their age and the level of physical and or emotional risk inherent to the activity.

Programs aimed at younger Children and the disabled require more supervision due to the increased level of risk involved.

No matter what size the group is, ensure enough leaders so as to cope with any accidents and/or critical incidents that may occur.

An example may be requiring a minimum of two adult leaders on site for all programs in addition to the leader to participant ratio of 1:10. This will allow for safe supervision if and when accidents or critical incidents occur. Of course, many more leaders will be needed for high-risk activities such as taking Children or Young People off-site, swimming, bushwalks, games nights or the like, or if the group is large.

It is **recommended** that ACC People running Children's or Young People's programs:

- make the distinction between those adults who are part of the team, and who are junior leaders (under 18 years). Junior leaders are not to be counted in the supervision ratios.
- use adult helpers over the age of 18 who are not leaders of the group, but rather are present on-site for supervision purposes. Such adult helpers, though still Volunteer Workers, would not actually run activities, whereas junior ministry leaders may run many. Adult helpers are important to help ensure the safety of the Children or Young People.
- do not allow leaders or helpers to be alone, one-on-one, with a Child or Young Person. One adult with a small group may be fine as long as there are other adults on site. Where possible, have both male and female leaders to provide support for both boys and girls.
- In relation to camps or overnight settings, it is not advisable that leaders sleep in the same room as Children or Young People. Leaders should be sleeping in a designated leader's space (cabin) nearby.

MANAGEMENT OF HIGH RISK ACTIVITIES including:

- For high risk and off-site activities: e.g. water sports, swimming excursions, white water rafting/caving/bungy jumping, inflatable sumo suit wrestling, gladiator games, horse-riding, high ropes activities, roller blading/skating, skateboarding or activities involving live animals, an employee/leader with appropriate (certified) training for the event should be running the activity.
- Active supervision is also required at all times. Supervisors must not be involved in any additional activities that will distract from their role as a supervisor.

- All participants involved in high risk activities should have a signed liability release from each parent/guardian. However, it is important to note that a liability release form does not actually indemnify against an accident. Individual leaders may be protected where all due care has been taken, but a church may still be deemed liable, where duty of care failures are proven.
- Contact the church's insurance broker/company contact for advice before running high risk activities as some high risk injuries may be excluded from the Church's liability cover.

17. Responding to incidents

ACC people **shall**

- respond to incidents appropriately and promptly and take adequate follow up action.
- Use of report forms: Injuries or accidents requiring secondary medical attention, e.g. visit to a doctor or medical centre, are to be written up on an incident report.
- Incidents of a serious nature need to be reported to your local church insurer.
- Report all incidents to parents and/or care-givers of Children or Young People, and in instances where the impact has been felt by a wider group, report, with the permission of those involved in the incident, to the wider concerned group.