SAFE CHURCH HEALTH CHECK

May 2024

churches of Christ in NSW & ACT

Unity. Restoration. Life.

Creating Safe Spaces

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Dear Church Leader,

Thank you for considering this Safe Church Health Check.

Churches of Christ in NSW & ACT (CCNSWACT) is committed to modelling the love of Christ by promoting physical, emotional and spiritual safety in all that we do. We recognise that the growing number of recommendations and legal requirements may leave you feeling apprehensive or overwhelmed. We are confident, however, that the Safe Church Health Check will support you as you navigate these challenges.

Our heart is to equip and support local churches for ministry and so we have sought to provide suggested structures and resources to reduce the burden on you as much as possible. However, your local church leadership will need to take some steps to implement these Safe Church practices as appropriate to your local church context. We encourage each local church to delegate this important task to appropriate individuals. The church pastor is not necessarily required to undertake these tasks themselves.

In 2013, the Australian Government called a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (**Royal Commission**) in response to community concern about widespread reports of cases where Australian institutions failed to protect children from child sexual abuse. The work of this Royal Commission has emphasised that members of the public, children, young people, parents, carers, families and communities should be confident that organisations working with children provide safe environments. The Royal Commission operated for over four years, making 409 recommendations for the federal government, state jurisdictions as well as numerous sectors, including religious entities.

A key outcome of the Royal Commission was the development the Child Safe Standards. The Child Safe Standards collectively show that a child safe organisation is one that creates a culture, adopts strategies and takes action to promote child well-being and prevent harm to children and young people.In February 2022 the NSW government legislated compliance with the Child Safe Standards for organisations that provide services to children, including churches. The ACT government is expected to follow suit in the near future.

The Safe Church Health Check has been designed to assist churches to meet the Child Safe Standards as well as other legal obligations. In addition to legislative requirements to implement the Child Safe Standards, churches have existing legal obligations when it comes to providing activities and services to children and young people, including:

- Common law and statutory duties to take reasonable precautions to prevent child abuse
- Requirement to ensure that people doing certain defined work hold relevant clearance checks;
- Reporting to government authorities in accordance with their obligations, if any, under:
  - Mandatory Reporting Legislation
  - Reportable Conduct Legislation
  - Criminal Legislation
  - WWCC Legislation in NSW

- WWVP Legislation in ACT

Of course, mere legal compliance is not our aim, rather we hope to promote a culture that reflects the love of Christ, loves and protects individuals, and fosters missional engagement with local communities.

There are a range of resources relating to the Safe Church Health Check available in the CCNSWACT Ministry Portal: www.ministryportal.org.au/myresources. Access to this site requires authorisation from CCNSWACT.

I wish you well as you embark on this important endeavour to reassure compliance with the Child Safe Standards.

Blessings,

Ross Stewart
Safe Ministry Practices Leader

churches of Christ in NSW & ACT
Unity. Restoration. Life.

The ten Child Safe Standards

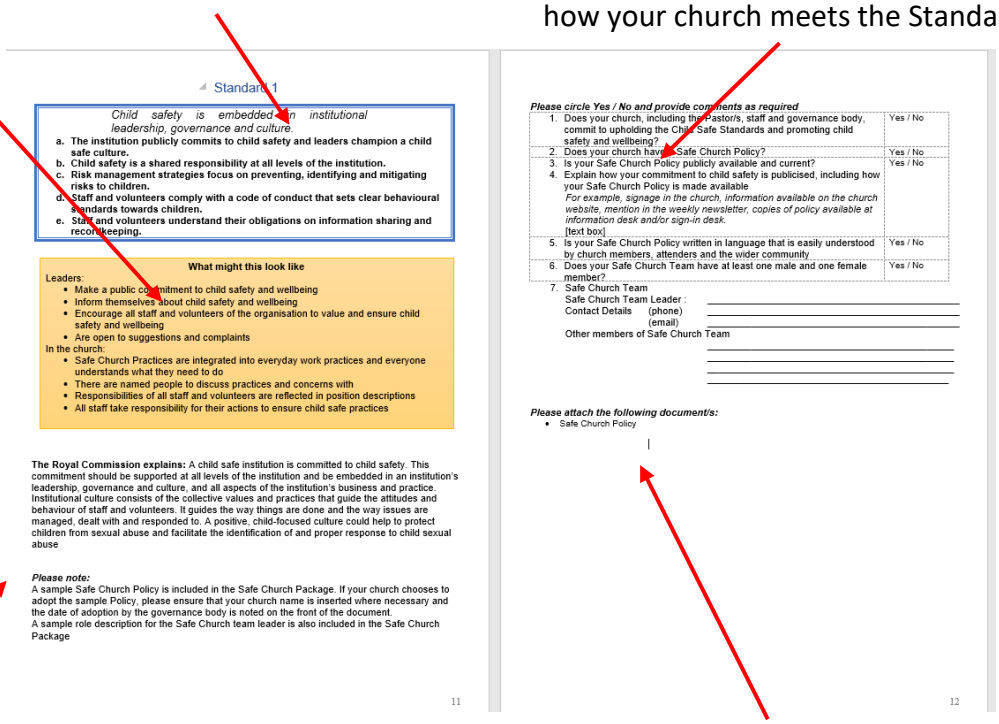
How the Safe Church Health Check works

The Safe Church Health Check has been designed to assist your church to meet legal obligations regarding child safety. It will also assist your church to adhere to the Child Safe Standards as recommended by the Royal Commission. The NSW Government has now established the Child Safe Scheme to ensure all organisations that provide services to children and young people will implement the Child Safe Standards. The ACT government is expected to do something similar in the future.

Whilst many insurers have not yet mandated participation in a Safe Church Health Check (or similar audit), participation should reassure your insurer that your church is able to make a declaration regarding child safe policy and practice required to maintain continued insurance coverage for sexual molestation claims, if required.

There are ten sections of the Safe Church Health Check. Each section addresses one of the Child Safe Standards and adopts the following structure:

- the Standard and core components identified by the Royal Commission;
- Some indicators for identifying the standard in practice
- a series of questions asking you to set out how your church meets the Standard; and



Standard 1

Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.

a. **The institution publicly commits to child safety and leaders champion a child safe culture.**
b. **Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the institution.**
c. **Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children.**
d. **Staff and volunteers comply with a code of conduct that sets clear behavioural standards towards children.**
e. **Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and recordkeeping.**

What might this look like

Leaders:
- Make a public commitment to child safety and wellbeing
- Inform themselves about child safety and wellbeing
- Encourage all staff and volunteers of the organisation to value and ensure child safety and wellbeing
- Are open to suggestions and complaints

In the church:
- Safe Church Practices are integrated into everyday work practices and everyone understands what they need to do
- There are named people to discuss practices and concerns with
- Responsibilities of all staff and volunteers are reflected in position descriptions
- All staff take responsibility for their actions to ensure child safe practices

The Royal Commission explains: A child safe institution is committed to child safety. This commitment should be supported at all levels of the institution and be embedded in an institution's leadership, governance and culture, and all aspects of the institution's business and practice. Institutional culture consists of the collective values and practices that guide the attitudes and behaviour of staff and volunteers. It guides the way things are done and the way issues are managed, dealt with and responded to. A positive, child-focused culture could help to protect children from sexual abuse and facilitate the identification of and proper response to child sexual abuse

Please note:
A sample Safe Church Policy is included in the Safe Church Package. If your church chooses to adopt the sample Policy, please ensure that your church name is inserted where necessary and the date of adoption by the governance body is noted on the front of the document.
A sample role description for the Safe Church team leader is also included in the Safe Church Package

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Please circle Yes / No and provide comments as required

1. Does your church, including the pastor/s, staff and governance body, commit to upholding the Child Safe Standards and promoting child safety and wellbeing?	Yes / No
2. Does your church have a Safe Church Policy?	Yes / No
3. Is your Safe Church Policy publicly available and current?	Yes / No
4. Explain how your commitment to child safety is publicised, including how your Safe Church Policy is made available *For example, signage in the church, information available on the church website, mention in the weekly newsletter, copies of policy available at information desk and/or sign-in desk.* [text box]	
5. Is your Safe Church Policy written in language that is easily understood by church members, attenders and the wider community	Yes / No
6. Does your Safe Church Team have at least one male and one female member?	Yes / No

7. Safe Church Team
Safe Church Team Leader : _____
Contact Details (phone) _____
(email) _____
Other members of Safe Church Team
_____
_____
_____
_____

Please attach the following document/s:
- Safe Church Policy

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- further information regarding the Standard and how it might be met
- if required, a request for appropriate supporting documentation

All the information you need to complete your Safe Church Health Check is included in the Safe Church Package. This includes:

- Model Safe Church Policy
- Model Procedure for Staff and Volunteers
- Model Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers
- Model Procedure for Conflict Resolution
- Model Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns (NSW or ACT version)
- Model Code of Conduct
- Model Person of Concern Policy
- Model Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Policy

- Model Conflict of Interest Policy
- Other Model documents to help you implement the Policy and Procedures

Your church is encouraged to adopt and implement the provided model *Safe Church Policy* and associated documents. This means that your governance body will need to consider and formally adopt the policy, noting the date of adoption on the cover of the policy document. Space is also provided to add your church logo – this is particularly useful for documents that will be distributed, such as the *Code of Conduct*, *Safe Church Policy* and *Ministry Information Forms.*

It is not mandatory to adopt the provided model Policy and Procedures. If your church already has comprehensive policies in place, you may choose to retain these. Alternatively, your church may choose to amend the model documents to suit your local context. However, if you make any changes to model documents you will be asked to provide an explanation.

In order to comply with the standards set out in the Safe Church Health Check, you will need to:

- Answer 'Yes' to each of the questions;
- Provide comments or explanations where required; and
- Attach the appropriate supporting documentation;

You can submit your church's Safe Church Health Check

- By email to Ross.Stewart@ccnswact.org.au
- post a copy of the completed form and documents to

  churches of Christ in NSW & ACT
  Suite 301, 1b Homebush Bay Drive
  PO BOX 3561
  RHODES NSW 2138

For churches affiliated with Churches of Christ in NSW, there is no cost for participation in the Safe Church Health Check

After your Safe Church Health Check documentation has been reviewed and considered to be satisfactory, a certificate will be issued to your church. The certificate lasts for three years. At the end of the three year period, you will be asked to apply for a new Safe Church Health Check. We recommend displaying the Safe Church Health Check certificate on your church noticeboard or street signage. You will also have permission to use the Safe Church Health Check logo on your church website and/or printed materials for the duration of the certificate.

If there are any areas considered not to be satisfactory in your Safe Church Health Check application, we will provide feedback to assist your church in making the necessary changes or improvements and invite you to resubmit the relevant documents.

Please address any questions to Ross Stewart (Safe Ministry Practices Leader)
Ross.Stewart@ccnswact.org.au
(02) 8753 6000

Where do we start?

1. Appoint a Safe Church Team

If you are a church leader or church administrator, the first step is to have the governance body of your church appoint a **Safe Church Team**. The Safe Church Team may include paid staff and/or volunteers, we have provided a Model Role Description to outline their responsibilities. It is a very important role that should report directly to the Senior Pastor and Governance body of the church. It is important that the Safe Church Team has at least one male and at least one female. Where possible, potential conflicts of interest should be avoided.

2. Amend, adopt and communicate relevant Policy and Procedures

These documents will need to be marked with the date they were formally adopted by the governance body. This is important as it ensures that the governance body is aware of the contents of the documents, provides formal authority for the documents and also indicates how recently any particular document was amended. The Safe Church Team may go through the process of identifying policies and amending procedures for your church context, but it is important to understand that the Senior Pastor and Governance body will still have legal responsibility for ensuring that reasonable precautions are taken within the church context.

3. Complete your Safe Church Register

Ensure that all volunteers have been screened, signed the Code of Conduct and that child-related workers have also provided their WWCC and completed Creating Safe Spaces training.

4. Complete the Safe Church Health Check questions

As you answer the questions, be aware that arrangements may differ significantly from church to church – particularly according to church size and resources. We have provided some ideas and examples for any question where details are requested. However, you may have alternative ideas, or in some instances, you may have reasons to suggest that a particular item is not relevant or necessary in your context. If that is the case, please just provide a brief explanation of those reasons.

5. When you can answer ‘yes’ to all the questions, you are ready to submit!

The Safe Church Health Check is designed to provide assistance for churches as they address various obligations. We are here to help! If you have any questions please contact us.

Standard 1

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

a) The organisation makes a public commitment to child safety, and leaders champion a child safe culture both inside and outside the organisation.
b) Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the organisation.
c) Risk management plans focus on identifying, preventing and lowering risks to children.
d) Staff understand and comply with Codes of Conduct that sets clear behavioural standards when interacting with children.
e) Staff understand their obligations in reporting, sharing information and keeping records.

What this might look like

- Leaders inform themselves about child safety and wellbeing
- Staff and volunteers of the organisation are encouraged to value and ensure child safety and wellbeing
- Safe Church Procedures are integrated into church culture and everyday practices.
- There are named people with whom to discuss practices and concerns.
- Responsibilities of all staff and volunteers are reflected in position descriptions
- All staff take active steps to ensure child safe practices

The Royal Commission explains: "A child safe institution is committed to child safety. This commitment should be supported at all levels of the institution and be embedded in an institution's leadership, governance and culture, and all aspects of the institution's business and practice. Institutional culture consists of the collective values and practices that guide the attitudes and behaviour of staff and volunteers. It guides the way things are done and the way issues are managed, dealt with and responded to. A positive, child-focused culture could help to protect children from sexual abuse and facilitate the identification of and proper response to child sexual abuse."
(Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report Volume 6 'Making Institutions Child Safe' Appendix A p413 available at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/)

Included in this package:
A Model Safe Church Policy and model role description for the Safe Church Team is included in the Safe Church Package. If your church chooses to adopt the model Safe Church Policy, please ensure that your church name and/or logo is inserted where necessary and the date of adoption by the governance body is noted on the front of the document.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Does your church, including the Pastor/s, staff and governance body, commit to upholding the Child Safe Standards and promoting child safety and wellbeing?	☑	☑
2. Please attach a copy of the church constitution and a list of individuals who make up the governing body of the church.	☐	☐
3. Does your church have a *Statement of Commitment to Child Safety*?	☐	☐
4. Does your church have a *Safe Church Policy*?	☐	☐
5. Explain how your Statement of Commitment to Safety and Safe Church Policy is publicised. *For example, signage in the church, information available on the church website, mention in the weekly newsletter, copies of policy available at the information desk and/or sign-in desk.*	☐	☐
6. Does your church have a Code of Conduct that includes clear behavioural standards for engaging with children and young people?	☐	☐
7. Does your Safe Church Team have at least one male and one female member?	☐	☐

8. Safe Church Team (add more names if necessary)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please attach the following document/s:

- Safe Church Policy (including the Statement of Commitment to Safety)
- Church Constitution
- List of Individuals who make up the governing body of the church

Standard 2

Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

a) Children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
b) The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, helping children feel safe and be less isolated.
c) Children can access abuse prevention programs and information.
d) Staff are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns.

What this might look like

- Children and young people can recognise safe environments and know how to seek help or raise concerns if they feel unsafe.
- Staff and volunteers put children's best interests first .
- Staff and volunteers take children seriously when they communicate about their feelings, needs and concerns.
- Children and young people are supported and encouraged to take part in various ministry areas in the life of the church (as appropriate).
- There are regular opportunities for children and young people to communicate their ideas and opinions and to contribute to the plans and vision of the church.

Additional Resources:

The Institute of Child Protection Studies has produced a short (10 Minutes) video summarising their research in the Children's Safety Study listening to children and young people. (Available on the Australian Institute fo Child Protection Studies' YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/@instituteofchildprotection7974)

The Office of the Children's Guardian has produced an introductory video (4 mins) regarding Child Safe Standard 2. (The video can be found on the Resources section of the OCG website)

The Office of the Children's Guardian has produced a Guide to Empowerment and Participation, which is available on their website.

Please provide comments:

1. Explain how your church is friendly and welcoming for children and young people.

   For example, by the inclusion of children and young people in church services, consideration of children's and young people's needs when planning programs, child-friendly facilities.

2. How does the church ensure that children and young people have a say in planning and is their input and feedback encouraged in the **groups or ministries that they are directly involved in** (for example, Sunday Kids Programs, Kids Club, Youth Group)?

   For example, via suggestion box, feedback forms, informal discussions

3. How does the church ensure that children and young people have a say in planning and is their input and feedback encouraged, in the activities and ministries of the **wider church?**

   For example, via suggestion box, feedback forms, informal discussions

4. How does your church support positive peer relationships?

   For example, modelling communication strategies, displaying child safe hotline number, discussing friendship

Standard 3

Families and communities are informed and involved.

a) Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting the child.
b) The organisation engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach, and relevant information is accessible.
c) Families and communities have a say in the organisation's policies and practices.
d) Families and communities are informed about the organisation's operations and governance.

What this might look like

- Families and communities are aware of the church's *Safe Church Policy* and associated Procedures
- The Church and ministry leaders actively seek feedback from families and communities
- Ministry leaders consult with parents and carers about their children
- Parents and carers are encouraged and supported to talk to their children about safety and wellbeing.

For churches with significant culturally and linguistically diverse communities, we recommend developing translations of the *Safe Church Policy* and information about who to go to to lodge a complaint or report a child protection concern. If there are staff and volunteers for whom English is not their first language, we recommend providing translations of the *Code of Conduct* and *Screening Questionnaires*.

Additional Resources

Some translated resources are available on the website of the Office of the Children's Guardian.

The Office of the Children's Guardian has produced an introductory video (4 mins) regarding Child Safe Standard 3. (The video can be found in the Resources section of the OCG website)

Translated versions of the Safe Church Package documents are available via creatingsafespaces.org.au/resources

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Is your church's *Safe Church Policy* and associated Procedures available to families and communities in a format that is accessible?	☐	☐

Please comment on how your church makes these documents available to families and communities.
For example, via handouts, posters, available on the church website.

2. Are families encouraged to be involved in decisions affecting their child?	☐	☐

Please provide an explanation of how your church includes families in decisions, planning and policies affecting their child.
For example, parent information nights, parent letters and handouts, informal discussions with leaders… 'Is Johnny enjoying Ignite? Is there anything you'd like to talk to us about?', use of a Ministry Information Form, parental involvement as leaders/helpers, family social events to build connection.

3. Are families able to provide feedback to the church regarding issues concerning their child, programs and child safety practices?	☐	☐

Please comment on how this occurs in your church.

Standard 4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs taken into account

a) The organisation actively anticipates children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities.
b) All children have access to information, support and complaint processes.
c) The organisation pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from CALD backgrounds.

What this might look like

- Physical accessibility is considered in building design and renovation.
- The church actively seeks to consider the needs of people with diverse needs.
- Ministry leaders intentionally seek to create spaces that are welcoming, safe and culturally respectful.
- Staff and volunteers consider how safety and wellbeing, communication and participation might differ for children and young people with diverse needs.
- Display a sign or plaque with an Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Children's Guardian has produced an introductory video (4 mins) regarding Child Safe Standard 4. (The video can be found on the Resources section of the OCG website)

The Australian Human Rights Commission website includes some guidance on cultural safety and children with diverse backgrounds and needs.

SNAICC, the national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, in collaboration with other agencies, has produced a guide to cultural safety "Keeping our kids safe", It is available on the website www.childsafety.gov.au

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Does your church support children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?	☐	☐

Please describe.
For example, written material in languages other than English, culturally appropriate programs, artwork on display, programs and activities celebrating diversity.

2. Does your church anticipates and address accessibility and inclusion issues for children and young people?	☐	☐

Please describe how your church increases accessibility for children and young people.
For example, ramps, toilet access, specific consideration in programming, etc.

3. Does your church pay particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?	☐	☐

Please describe:
For example, art work on display, acknowledgement of country displayed, sensitivity to particular dates and language.

Standard 5

People working with children are suitable and supported

a) Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety.
b) Relevant staff have probity checks.
c) All staff receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations.
d) Supervision and people management have a child safety focus.

What this might look like

- Child safety and wellbeing is emphasised in advertising, referee checks, pre-employment screening and supervision for staff and volunteers
- Church leaders asses the values, motives and attitudes or applicants to ensure a culture of child safety and wellbeing
- The church delivers or provides access to regular training and/or information sessions regarding child safety
- The church actively communicates internal and external supports that are available
- Ministry leaders ensures everyone is informed about policies and procedures and knows how to enact them.

More information about legal requirements for screening

In NSW, a WWCC is required for Staff and volunteers who serve in child-related work, which for the purposes of churches of Christ churches includes:

- as a religious leader or spiritual officer (e.g. pastor, regular preacher, worship leader)
- anyone in a governance role (e.g. elder, board member, deacon, council member)
- anyone in a role that involves direct contact with children and young people (e.g. children's ministry, creche, youth ministry)
- anyone leading a ministry with children or young people in that team (e.g. café, music team)

In NSW, it is a legal requirement to both record and verify the WWCC number for anyone engaged in child-related work. For more information on the WWCC please go to ocg.nsw.gov.au/working-children-check.

In the ACT, current WWVP registration is required for staff and volunteers who serve:

- as a religious leader or spiritual officer (eg/ pastor, regular preacher, worship leader)
- in a governance role (e.g. elder, board member, deacon, council member)
- in child-related work (e.g. children's ministry, creche, youth ministry)
- in ministry with vulnerable adults (e.g. seniors, persons with disabilities)
- as leader of a ministry with children or young people in that team (e.g. café, music team)

For more information on the WWVP please go to www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au In addition to the WWCC/WWVP, civil liability issues require informal screening of all volunteers.

Use of the title Pastor

The Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse concluded that the *'lack of control over who is able to represent themselves as a pastor'* constitutes '*a weakness in the necessary safety controls [churches] should have in place to protect children'* (See page 88 of the Report on Case Study No. 18). Churches of Christ in NSW and ACT have recommended that the title Pastor be restricted to people who have been, or are in the process of applying to be, Endorsed Ministers with churches of Christ in NSW & ACT.

Included in this package:

Model documents (*Procedure for Staff and Volunteers, Screening Questionnaires* and *Code of Conduct*) are available as part of this package. If your church chooses to adopt these documents, please ensure that your church name is inserted where necessary and the date of adoption by the governance body is noted on the front of the document.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Does your church have a Procedure for Staff and Volunteers?	☐	☐
2. How does your church ensure that recruitment and advertising (for paid and unpaid roles) emphasises a commitment to Safe Ministry?.	☐	☐

3. Have all staff and volunteers completed the *Screening Check Questionnaire*?	☐	☐
4. Do you have a role description for all staff and volunteer roles?	☐	☐
5. Are all staff and volunteers aware of the role description for their role/s?	☐	☐
6. Do all staff and volunteers undergo a documented induction process?	☐	☐
7. Have all staff, volunteers and contractors agreed to the *Code of Conduct*?	☐	☐
8. **For NSW churches** Do all of the church's staff and volunteers who are regularly engaged in Child-related Work have a valid and current WWCC AND Has your church verified the WWCC or application number online? **For ACT churches** Do all of the church's staff and volunteers (including young people) who engage in a Regulated Activity (which would include activities or services provided by religious organisations that are specifically for, or mainly used by children), have a valid and current WWVP clearance?	☐	☐
9. Do you have a copy of a National Police Criminal Record Check on file for each member of the Pastoral Staff?	☐	☐
10. Is your Safe Church Register complete and up to date? As this is a crucial element of Safe Ministry, your Safe Church Register will be checked for completeness.	☐	☐
11. Does your church have a practice of ensuring that no one commences a volunteer role until after they have completed the screening questionnaire, signed the Code of Conduct, had their WWCC/WWVP verified (if applicable), completed Creating Safe Spaces (if applicable) and completed an induction?	☐	☐
12. Has your church governance body either (please indicate yes or no and, if yes, tick box as appropriate)	☐	☐

☐ a) Agreed to restrict the use of the title 'Pastor' to people who have been, or are in the process of applying to be, Endorsed by the churches of Christ NSW & ACT*, OR

☐ b) Decided to use the title Pastor in some additional circumstances (If your church has decided to permit the use of the title 'Pastor' in circumstances other than those recommended, please attach a copy of the decision made by your church's governance body, along with the date on which the decision was made.)

Please attach the following document/s:

- The Screening Questionnaire/s used by your church (a blank copy)
- Staff and Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Procedure for Staff and Volunteers
- Your church's Safe Church Register (dates of birth and WWCC/WWVP numbers may be redacted)
- *If you ticked 12(b), minutes of the governance body's decision not to follow the recommendation regarding use of the title "Pastor"*

Standard 6

Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse (or other concerns) are child focused.

a) The organisation has a child focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.
b) The organisation has an effective complaint handling policy that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, and obligations to act and report.
c) Complaints are taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.
d) The organisation meets reporting, privacy and employment obligations.

What this might look like

- The process for raising complaints and concerns about child safety is clear, accessible and prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Staff and volunteers know when and how to report to relevant authorities
- Information about raising and responding to concerns and complaints is available in various accessible formats including child-friendly formats
- There is a clearly defined record keeping system for concerns and complaints

The Royal Commission explains: A child-focused complaints process is an important strategy for helping children and others in institutions to make complaints. Child safe institutions respond to complaints by immediately protecting children at risk and addressing complaints promptly, thoroughly and fairly.

A child-safe institution has clear and detailed policies and procedures about how to respond to complaints. Staff and volunteers understand their responsibility for making a complaint promptly if they become aware of concerning behaviours, as well as their reporting obligations to external authorities. Complaint processes specify steps that need to be taken to comply with requirements of procedural fairness for affected parties, have review mechanisms, and ensure any disciplinary action that is taken withstands external scrutiny in accordance with relevant employment law and other employer responsibilities.
(Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report Volume 6 'Making Institutions Child Safe' Appendix A p426 available at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/)

Included in this package:
Model Procedures are provided as part of the Safe Church Package. If your church chooses to adopt these model Procedures, please ensure that your church name is inserted where necessary and the date of adoption by the governance body is noted on the front of the document. If you make changes to any of the Procedures, please attach an explanation regarding why you have made such changes.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Are all staff and volunteers aware of the Procedure for Conflict Resolution, Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns and Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers?	☐	☐

Please describe how you ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the relevant policies and procedures? *(For example, through induction process and training, keeping copies of the Procedures in prominent place in church office)*

2. Are families aware of the Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers and the roles and responsibilities of all relevant parties?	☐	☐

Please describe how your church ensures that families are aware of the relevant procedures and the persons responsible for their implementation
(For example, through information on your webpage or church noticeboard)

3. Do you have a means of identifying whether children, young people and families would be comfortable making a complaint or raising a concern?	☐	☐

Please describe how your church ensures that children young people and families feel comfortable raising concerns
(For example, through informal conversations etc).

4. Does your church have a child-focused approach to the management of complaints and concerns including communicating to children and young people about who to approach if they feel unsafe?	☐	☐

Please comment on how this occurs in your church
(For example, posters on display, discussion about child safety in ministry program)

Please attach the following document/s:

- Procedure for Conflict Resolution
- Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns
- Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers

Standard 7

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through continual education and training.

a) Staff receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly abuse that occurs in organisations.
b) Staff receive training on the organisation's child safe practices and child protection efforts.
c) Staff are supported to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures.

What this might look like

- Staff and volunteers engage in training which addresses circumstances and experiences that increase a child's vulnerability to harm and how to recognise signs of child sexual abuse.
- Staff and volunteers share skills to allow continual improvement in promoting safe environments.
- Ministry leaders engage in training to develop effective risk management approaches to ensure child safety and wellbeing.

As outlined in the church *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers* completion of Creating Safe Spaces training is required for anyone who serves:

- as a religious leader or spiritual officer (eg/ pastor, regular preacher, worship leader)
- in a governance role (eg/ elder, deacon, council member)
- in a role of significant authority in a church service (eg: regular preacher, worship leader)
- in child-related work (eg/ children's ministry, creche, youth ministry)
- in ministry with vulnerable adults (eg/ seniors, persons with disabilities)
- as leader of a ministry with children or young people in their team (eg/ café, cleaning roster)

For more information on Creating Safe Spaces training please go to
www.creatingsafespaces.org.au

The Royal Commission recommends:
Each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.
(Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report Recommendations available at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf).

The CCNSWACT Endorsement Review Group require that all pastors, ministers and chaplains endorsed after September 2019 to engage in eight supervision sessions per financial year (pro-rated, if required). All pastors, ministers and chaplains in active ministry and endorsed prior to September 2019 will be required to engage in supervision from November 2027 onwards and are strongly encouraged to engage a professional supervisor now. Professional supervisors must be nominated and approved prior to engagement.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Does your church provide ongoing training opportunities for staff and volunteers as appropriate to their needs and role (in-house or external)?	☐	☐

Please describe how ongoing training opportunities are provided.

2. Does your church have a system or preparations to provide support to staff, volunteers or church members who disclose or report Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct involving a child, or a Risk of Significant Harm to children or young people.	☐	☐

Please describe how support is (or would be) provided.

3. Do all your Pastoral Staff engage in professional supervision as recommended by the Royal Commission?	☐	☐

Name of Pastor	**Name of Supervisor**	**No. of sessions p.a.**

Please attach the following document/s:

- Record of CSS training (and renewal dates) if this is not captured in your Safe Church Register.

Standard 8

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur

a) Risks in online and physical environments are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy development.
b) The online environment is used in accordance with the organisation's Code of Conduct and relevant policies.

What this might look like

- The church takes steps to identify places and activities where there may be the risk of harm to children.
- Ministry leaders identify any children or young people who may be at increased risk of harm due to situation or particular vulnerability.
- The church and ministry leaders implement and communicate agreed guidelines for online communication.
- Third party contractors and hirers of facilities are required to have appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Risk Management

Physical risk management is similar to WHS requirements but involves considering physical risks from the specific perspective of child safety. The Office of the Children's Guardian has published a Handbook on Risk Management on their website.

Online safety

Model *Guidelines for Activities with Children and Young People*, including suggestions regarding use of social media, are available as part of this package. The Office of the Children's Guardian has also published a Fact Sheet on their website. Additional resources regarding online safety can be found at https://www.esafety.gov.au/

Third parties and affiliated entities

The Royal Commission recommended that agencies that are affiliated with a church should report their compliance with Child Safe Standards to the church on an annual basis.* This is relevant where a church operates a school, preschool or other services to children and young people. It may also be relevant where the church engages in ministry or ministry partnerships overseas.

ACNC External Conduct Standard 4 requires a charity (including a Basic Religious Charity) to take reasonable steps to protect vulnerable people that it works with when conducting operations overseas. This includes a church conducting short-term ministry overseas, overseas ministry partnerships, or sending a small amount of money overseas.

Persons of Concern

The *Model Persons of Concern Policy* is included with the Safe Church Package. This policy outlines the risk management process for known sex offenders and other persons of concern and the reasonable precautions requires to ensure safe ministry. In adopting and adhering to this policy your church may decide that the most reasonable precaution in your context is to exclude a known sex offender from attending your church services and activities.

* Recommendation 16.35 Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Does your church have guidelines for risk management that address both physical and online risks to children and young people?	☐	☐
2. Has your church's Safe Church Team undertaken an audit of physical environment that might create increased risk of harm to children and young people (for example, offices without windows, basement or other isolated areas, balcony areas) and addressed any concerns?	☐	☐
3. Does your church have a process for approving/authorising church activities and ensuring that no activities take place without appropriate approval?	☐	☐

Please describe (use additional page/s as required)

4. Does your church commit to performing and documenting risk assessments for all ministry activities at least annually?	N/A	☐	☐
5. If the church has residential property that is identifiable with the church, have all regular adult residents provided Police Checks, and agreed to rules regarding their tenancy?	☐	☐	☐
6. Has your church considered whether any ministries you support, including overseas ministries, have appropriate child protection practices in place? (This may include consideration of whether supporting orphanages overseas is appropriate)		☐	☐
7. Does your church have a WHS Team to oversee the implementation of Safe Physical Environments (including emergency procedures, risk assessments, privacy policy and safe food handling)?		☐	☐

Please list the names of your WHS Team Leader and WHS Team members.

8. Do all associated entities who provide services to children (e.g. OOSH, School, Pre-school, Foodbank, Op Shop) report to the church on an annual basis regarding their compliance with the Child Safe Standards?	☐	☐
9. Do any third-party groups who hire facilities (e.g. dance groups or tutoring) agree as part of their lease or licence agreement to abide by the Child Safe Standards and confirm that they have appropriate measures in place to promote the safety of children and young people?	☐	☐
10. Has your church leadership adopted the Model Persons of Concern Policy to manage Persons of Concern in your congregation?	☐	☐

Please provide the date on which your church leadership adopted the Model Persons of Concern Policy to manage Persons of Concern in your congregation:_____

11. **NSW Churches** Do you ensure that any contractors (e.g. cleaners, tradespeople) that have contact with children (and could be considered to be engaged in Child-related Work have a valid WWCC AND that the church has verified this number online?	**ACT Churches** Do you ensure that any contractors (e.g. cleaners, tradespeople) that have contact with children (and could be considered to be engaged in Regulated Activities have a valid WWVP?	☐ ☐

Standard 9

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

a) The organisation regularly reviews and improves child safe practices.
b) The organisation analyses complaints to identify causes and systemic failures and inform continuous improvement.

What might this look like?

- There are regular opportunities to specifically discuss child safe practices in the church e.g. meetings, forums, planning days
- Feedback is sought from children, young people, families and communities about child safe practices
- Any incidents or complaints are reviewed to help improve future plans for child safety and wellbeing.

The Office of the Children's Guardian has produced an introductory video (5 mins) regarding Child Safe Standard 9. (The video can be found on the Resources section of the OCG website)

A review should include:

- Considering and, if necessary, updating your Safe Church Policy and any procedures (this is one reason why you should record the date on which a policy or procedure was adopted by the governance body)
- ensuring that the Safe Church Team is fulfilling their requirements
- awareness of changing legislative requirements
- making any required changes to policies/procedures
- analysis of complaints/incidents
- consideration of feedback from ministry leaders, children, young people and families.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments where required.

	Yes	No
1. Does your Church Leadership (Pastors, Deacons, Elders. Governance Group) have a minuted review of child safe practices at least on an annual basis?	☐	☐

How does your church seek feedback on child safe practices to inform the Church leadership as they condict this review? (For example, by publicising the date of this review to church attendees so that they are prompted to provide any relevant feedback.)

2. Please identify the 3-5 most important potential risks or issues specific to Children and Young People in your church. (For example, the church has not considered risk related to online communication, the youth room is isolated with limited visibility, the church needs to improve our strategies for listening to children and young people.).

3. Please identify the steps your church can take in the next 12 months to address (or begin to address) the issues raised in question 2 above

Standard 10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

a) Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.
b) Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand.
c) Best practice models and stakeholder consultation inform the development of policies and procedures.
d) Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
e) Staff understand and implement the policies and procedures.

What might this look like?

- Church leaders are familiar with the Child Safe Standards.
- Child safe issues are regularly discussed at any leadership or governance meeting, both independantly and in relation to other issues.
- The church has a Safe Church Policy and sufficient clear and accessible procedures to enable the policy to be consistently implemented
- The church keeps copies of all policies, procedures and relevant documents
- The church maintains specific records of adherence to the Safe Church Policy to demonstrate compliance with legal obligations and reasonable responses to any risk (for example, sign-in sheets, training records, risk assessments, records of complaints)

Records (which need to be kept 45, preferably 100, years) include, but are not limited to:

- *Safe Church Policy* (dated versions)
- *Safe Church Register* (dated versions)
- Procedures (dated versions)
- Records of attendance (children, young people and leaders)
- Ministry Information Forms
- Permission and consent forms
- Incident reports
- Contemporaneous notes, where required (including notes regarding consideration of potentially reportable matters even where a report was not made)

Included in this package:

- Model Procedures and Forms are available as part of this package. If your church chooses to adopt these documents, please ensure that your church name is inserted where necessary and the date of adoption by the governance body is noted on the front of the document.

Please indicate Yes / No and provide comments as required

	Yes	No
1. Do all your ministries that involve children (0-18 years) and vulnerable people have a process for gathering permission and consent forms, records of attendance, accident and incident reports and other relevant documents?	☐	☐
2. Are your records securely stored for a minimum of 45, preferably 100, years?	☐	☐

How are records stored? *(For example, in locked filing cabinets, online in secure servers, on a central computer with back up provisions)*

3. If your church uses an online CRM/database (eg Elvanto, Planning Centre, Fluro, PastoralCare) do you regularly download data to allow for historical enquiries in the future?	☐	☐

Please note the name of the CRM/Database and the approach to maintaining historical records.

4. Does your church update the safe church register at least 2-3 times/year and keep a record of all previous versions for future reference?"	☐	☐
5. Does your church have a process for ensuring that staff and volunteers implement the Safe Church Policy and Procedures?	☐	☐

Please comment on how your church ensures that Safe Church Policy and Procedures are implemented *(For example, random checks by Safe Church Team, discussion in staff reviews, discussion with ministry leaders)*

Please attach

- A sample of the forms or describe the method you use for recording:
  - attendance (of leaders and attendees) at ministry events;
  - parental permission and consent;
  - accident and incident reporting
- ***If your church has any other policy or procedure documents that may be relevant for this Safe Church Health Check, attach these also.***

Submission Checklist

Please complete ALL of the following before submitting your Safe Church Health Check:

All questions answered by circling Yes or No ☐

Written explanations and additional information given when requested ☐

Attached documents

	Alternative adopted or changes made*	Model adopted with no changes
Safe Church Policy	☐	☐
Staff and Volunteer Code of Conduct	☐	☐
Procedure Responding to Child Protection Concerns	☐	☐
Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers	☐	☐
Procedure for Resolving Conflict	☐	☐
Procedure for Staff and Volunteers	☐	☐
Ministry Information Form	☐	☐
Ministry Screening Questionnaire/s	☐	☐
Person of Concern Policy	☐	☐

	Copy attached
Record of screening and training of all staff and volunteers	☐
Safe Church Register	☐
Attendance, parental permission/consent, accident and incident reporting forms (blank examples)	☐
(if required) Minutes of the decision to use the title Pastor outside the recommendations of the churches of Christ NSW & ACT	☐
(if required) Explanation of changes to Model documents attached	☐
Final document considered and accepted by governance body	☐
Final declaration completed and signed	☐

*If your church has made changes to a model document, please list changes in an attachment

Declaration

I, _____ (full name)

declare that I am authorised by _____ (name of church)(the **Church**), to complete the Safe Church Health Check, and that the answers and documentation contained herein are a true and accurate representation of the Safe Church Policies and Procedures of the Church.

I understand that this Safe Church Health Check process is offered by the churches of Christ NSW & ACT as a resource to assist the Church to review the Safe Church Policies and Procedures of the Church. I understand that the Safe Church Health Check is only an assessment against the Child Safe Standards and does not constitute an acceptance of legal responsibility by churches of Christ NSW & ACT.

The governance group understand that it is their duty to provide a safe church environment.

The governance group read and endorsed the responses provided in this document on _____(date).

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Church Name : _____

Church email: _____

(the address for follow up information and compliance certificate to be sent to):

Person completing the Safe Church Health Check:

Name: _____

Position in church: _____

Contact number: _____

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the following organisations for their assistance and consultation:

- Anglican Church of Australia
- Baptist CFM (Children and Family Ministries)
- Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Assembly Council
- Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Safe Church Health Check Advisory Group
- Baptist Churches Western Australia
- Baptist Insurance Services
- Baptist Union of Victoria
- Bravehearts
- BYM (Baptist Youth Ministries)
- Catholic Religious Australia (CRA)
- NSW Office of the Children's Guardian
- Presbyterian Church of Australia
- Queensland Baptists
- Rev Peter Barnett, Safe Ministry Resources
- Sam Burnett, Partner Prolegis Lawyers
- Survivors and Mates Support Network
- Uniting Church in Australia

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SAFE CHURCH
HEALTH CHECK