

Form 4

Our Parish Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures



1. Valuing our young parishioners and vulnerable individuals

Children have a very important place in our parish. We celebrate their faith at Baptism reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation; they are the life and focus of our parish schools; their energies and initiatives play a vital role in many of our parish activities. We are always eager to encourage their active participation in parish life. Towards this end, we are committed to doing everything we can to create a safe and welcoming environment for our young parishioners, where their welfare is paramount. It is our parish policy to ensure that our children will be listened to, included, protected and supported in all activities.

We realise that valuing young people means valuing volunteers as well: insisting on safe practices, eliminating the necessity for people to take risks, designing out crime by improved Church environments and providing support for a healthier and safer gathering. This parish policy, addressed to parish clergy, lay employees and Church workers (paid and unpaid), covers all Church-related activities and circumstances involving people under the age of eighteen and vulnerable individuals.

Activities involving our parish schools are governed by each school's Child Protection Policy, ratified by the Board of Management and the Catholic Education Office.

It is important that, from the outset, we make and emphasise the following confidentiality statement in accordance with the guidelines of the civil authorities:

Where safeguarding children concerns arise, information must be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the best interests of the child. Sharing information in this regard is not a breach of confidentiality. It is best practice that parents and children are informed when personal information is being shared, unless doing so could put the child at further risk.

2. Our Parish Safeguarding Officers

Some adults in our parish have undertaken child protection training and have been appointed to the role of Parish Safeguarding Officers. They can be contacted through the parish office or via the posters in the church entry. The Parish Safeguarding Officers have been selected because they have good listening skills and sufficient knowledge about safeguarding children issues. They are familiar with parish activities and are available to our volunteers and parishioners to help us create an ever more child-friendly and child-safe environment in our parishes.

The Parish Safeguarding Officers will be required to:

- be a source of support, advice and information on all matters of safeguarding children and vulnerable individuals in the parish
- be the first point of contact for children, vulnerable individuals and other members of the parish community regarding suspicions of abuse and other safeguarding concerns
- respond to all safeguarding concerns in line with the Archdiocese's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure manuals, reporting these concerns to the Director Safeguarding Program and/or other authorities, as needed

- keep the Director Safeguarding Program informed of all concerns, responses and activities relating to safeguarding children and other members of the parish community. Only when applicable will the parish priest be informed
- raise the profile of safeguarding in the parish, ensuring that it remains a high priority, and report any issues or concerns with the implementation of the safeguarding policy and procedures
- assist with proactive measures within parishes to safeguard children
- ensure all Church workers (paid and unpaid) who are in child-related work have been provided with safeguarding policies and procedures, as contained in the Safeguarding Handbook
- ensure that all statutory requirements are met within parishes in respect to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable individuals.

The contact details of the Parish Safeguarding Officers can be found on the Safeguarding Children notice in the church entry or on the parish website.

3. Good practice for working with children

Our parish is fully committed to the guidelines outlined in **Form 7 Developing safe practices** and all relevant Church policies on child protection. The **Form 6 Code of Behaviour for all Church workers (paid and unpaid) working with children** must be adhered to by all Church workers.

4. Recruiting and supporting our parish volunteers

When recruiting or selecting parish volunteers, we will ensure that the **Form 2 Declaration** is completed by all staff and volunteers (paid and unpaid) who work with children in Church-related activities.

Training will be provided, not only for new recruits but for all volunteers, in order to maintain standards and good practice. Our Parish Safeguarding Officers will assist in facilitating this support.

If a grievance issue arises, refer to the Archdiocese of Perth Dispute Resolution Policy and also follow the procedures listed in the **Form 9 Guidance on dealing with non-compliance with the Safeguarding Policy**.

5. Developing safe practices for involvement in parish activities

A guidance document is available for Church workers (paid and unpaid) on what to do to keep children safe before, during and after their involvement in Church-related activities. The document is included as **Form 7 Developing safe practices**.

The form used to obtain consent from parents or carers prior to children participating in an activity or event is included as **Form 10 Parental Consent**. When asking parents / carers to complete this form, please provide a copy of **Form 12 Code of behaviour for children taking part in Church activities** to discuss with their children.

6. Responding to safeguarding children concerns

When concerns are raised about the welfare of any child taking part in parish-related activities, whether suspected or disclosed, these will be brought to the attention of a Parish Safeguarding Officer or directly to the Director Safeguarding Program who will report to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, if necessary. These concerns can be in five different categories: neglect, emotional, family violence, physical and sexual abuse. All parish clergy, staff and volunteers (paid and unpaid) will be given copies of this guidance document - **Form 5 Procedures for responding to concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse**.

If members of a parish disclose concerns to parish staff or volunteers, it is our aim that they will feel comfortable about voicing the matter in a safe, supportive, understanding and sensitive environment.

We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality to a person who wishes to speak about a situation of abuse or suspected abuse; however, every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality.

We will ensure that the procedure on **Form 5 Procedures for responding to concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse** is followed in responding and will complete the **Form 3 Child concern referral**.

All Church workers are expected to deal with concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse by bringing the information to a Parish Safeguarding Officer, who will refer the matter to the Director Safeguarding Program. (This does not apply to situations involving the Sacramental Seal, which is inviolable.)

7. Responding to complaints against a parish worker

Any concerns or grievances about how a parish provides for child safety, supervision and protection will be taken very seriously and dealt with appropriately. Please note:

- it is paramount that precedence is given to the care of children above all other factors
- advice will be sought to ensure fair procedures
- all efforts will be made to deal with these matters with justice for all and within an appropriate timescale.

Complaints / concerns raised about a Church worker should be forwarded to the Director Safeguarding Program who will report the matter to the appropriate authority. In the event you cannot contact the Director Safeguarding Program and the matter is urgent, individuals should contact the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australian Police or the Professional Standards Office, after which a report **Form 7 Incident report form** and or **Form 3 Child Concern Referral** is to be provided to the Director Safeguarding Program as soon as possible. The Director Safeguarding Program will also report the matter to the appropriate diocesan Church authority and / or the Vicar General, if necessary.

Where a **Form 3 Child Concern Referral** implicates a Church worker, a **Form 15a Cessation of child-related work** will be issued. The Church worker must refrain from contact with any children until after an assessment is completed by the Director Safeguarding Program and / or the Professional Standards Office. The Church worker will be advised of the outcome.

8. Parish record keeping

Application forms, declaration forms, Working With Children cards and all other documentation associated with recruitment and selection are to be stored securely. Access is to be restricted to the parish priest, and/or the Parish Representatives, and/or the Parish Safeguarding Officers.

Records of each activity involving children must be stored securely. This will include: parental consent, program / activity details, attendance, incident records, necessary medical details etc.

Written confidential records of all complaints are to be forward to the Safeguarding Program Office where they will be stored securely. These documents will be available upon request, if and when required.

9. Audits

All parishes will be required to undergo an annual self-audit which will ensure that relevant Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures are followed. The self-audit will be carried out in accordance with **Form 11 Parish Self-Audit**.

10. Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement, demonstrating accountability, best practice and transparency is reflected in the ongoing adherence, audit and evaluation of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures contained in the Safeguarding Handbook.