

# Reporting Child Abuse



This guideline is to assist congregations of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT with responding to and reporting child abuse, and suspected child abuse.

## 1. Our commitment to child safety

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to the safety, nurture and wellbeing of children across the life of all its church communities and agencies. A National Child Safe Policy Framework was developed by the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly as a framework for implementing the lessons of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, developing child safe policies and supporting best practice for the care, service and support of children in all parts of the Uniting Church. This guideline supports one of the key elements of a 'Child Safe Church' endorsed by the National Child Safe Policy Framework, which is comprehensive reporting of child abuse or suspected child abuse to government authorities.

## 2. What is child abuse?

Children and young people have a right to be safe in their own homes and in the community, and live without violence and abuse. Child abuse and neglect is a crime, yet it continues to be an issue in Australia. There are different forms of child abuse including neglect, sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

Type of child abuse	Indicators in children
<p><b>Physical abuse</b> – refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bruising or injury that is not explained or explanation is not consistent</li> <li>• Abdominal pain which might indicate internal damage</li> <li>• Burns and scalds (including from cigarettes)</li> <li>• Aggression to others</li> <li>• Fear or discomfort of physical contact</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sexual abuse</b> – refers to any sexual activity between a child and an adult (or in some cases an older child where by age or development they hold a relationship of responsibility, trust or power over another child).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviour</li> <li>• Becoming overly sexual or seductive</li> <li>• Going to bed fully clothed</li> <li>• Regressive behaviour such as bedwetting</li> <li>• Self-destructive behaviour</li> <li>• Sexually transmitted infections or adolescent pregnancy</li> <li>• Unexplained accumulation of gifts or money</li> <li>• Bruising or bleeding in sensitive areas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional abuse</b> – refers to a parent or caregiver's inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts toward a child and/or a pattern of failure over time to provide a child with adequate non-physical nurture and emotional availability. Such acts of commission or omission have a high probability of damaging a child's self-esteem or social competence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention-seeking behaviour</li> <li>• Running away from home</li> <li>• Lack of trust</li> <li>• Lack of interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Behavioural extremes</li> </ul>

<p><b>Neglect</b> – refers to a failure by a caregiver to provide the basic requirements for meeting the developmental needs of a child, such as lack of food, shelter, clothing or medical attention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor hygiene/health, i.e. thin or low weight for their age</li> <li>• Inappropriate clothing</li> <li>• Extended absence from home to stay at other places</li> <li>• Anxiety about being abandoned</li> <li>• Lack of supervision</li> <li>• Focus on survival, i.e. stealing food</li> <li>• Delays in personal development</li> <li>• Untreated physical problems</li> </ul>
<p><b>Exposure to family violence</b> – refers to a child being present (hearing or seeing) while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical or sexual abuse or psychological maltreatment, or is exposed to the damage caused to persons or property by a family member's violent behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displays of aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• Diminished self-esteem</li> <li>• Reduced social competence skills, including low levels of empathy</li> <li>• Displays of emotional distress</li> </ul>

Note: definitions of types of child abuse credited to the Australian Institute of Family Studies ([www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au)).

### 3. When to report

Any one of the three instances below is enough information to require a report to Community Services.

1	If a child tells you they are being harmed (disclosure)
2	If another person tells you that a child is being harmed (2nd hand or 3rd party disclosure)
3	If you have a reasonable belief that a child is at risk of significant harm (based on observations, using indicators of abuse)

The Uniting Church supports a culture of voluntary reporting where all incidents of child abuse or suspected child abuse are raised and reported as appropriate. Anyone can make a report, but reports will need to meet a threshold of risk of significant harm. The child protection hotline or website tools can help you make this determination.

### 4. Mandatory Reporters

Some professionals, known as mandatory reporters, are required by law to report child abuse to government authorities. In the church, Ministers/Pastors and all paid workers whose role includes working with Children (eg. Youth/Families worker, community pastor, etc) are mandatory reporters.

<p><b>NSW</b></p> <p>For more information on mandatory reporting in NSW, see the Communities and Justice website <a href="https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters">https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/mandatory-reporters</a></p>	<p><b>ACT</b></p> <p>For more information on mandatory reporting in the ACT, see the Access Canberra website <a href="https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocys/keeping-children-and-young-people-safe">https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocys/keeping-children-and-young-people-safe</a></p>
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## 5. Handling a disclosure of abuse

When a child or young person discloses abuse, there are some important things to remember.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen carefully</li> <li>• Reassure a child who discloses directly that they did the right thing by speaking out about the abuse</li> <li>• Reassure a child who discloses directly that you believe them</li> <li>• Inform a child who discloses directly that you need to tell people who will try to help them</li> <li>• Make a record of the disclosure</li> <li>• Contact your congregation Safe Church Contact Person to assist with reporting, or inform them after you have made a direct report</li> <li>• Maintain confidentiality</li> <li>• Self-care by recognising that receiving a disclosure of abuse can be confronting and seek pastoral and/or personal support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate into the information that has been disclosed</li> <li>• Make promises such as that you can stop the abuse, or that you will not tell anyone about the disclosure</li> <li>• Tell anyone that does not need to know for pastoral, risk management, legal and reporting purposes</li> <li>• Fail to report the matter to police by calling 000 if the child is in immediate danger</li> <li>• Fail to report the matter to child protection authorities, even if the abuse is no longer occurring</li> <li>• Think that you need permission from a parent or caregiver to make a report.</li> </ul>

## 6. Making a report

**If a child is in immediate danger, ring 000 and report to police.**

**Inform your Safe Church Contact Person that you have made a report.**

If a child is not in immediate danger, contact your Safe Church Contact Person who will assist with making a record of the disclosure (or your observations) if you have not already done so and advise on reporting.

You can also make a direct report to state or territory child protection authorities and inform your Safe Church Contact Person afterwards. These contacts are listed below.

<b>NSW Government Community and Justice:</b> <b>Child Protection Helpline</b> <b>(available 24 Hours) 13 2111</b>	<b>ACT Government Care and Protection Services:</b> <b>Reporting Lines (available 24 Hours)</b> <b>General public: 1300 556 729</b> <b>Mandated reporters: 1300 556 728</b>
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