

# Child Safety Policy

## Synod Wide

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# Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 3
- 2. Purpose ..... 3
- 3. Scope ..... 3
- 4. Our Commitments ..... 3
- 5. Responsibilities..... 6
- 6. Policy Review ..... 6
- 7. Version history..... 6



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT (Synod) is a child-safe organisation and we welcome all children, young people and their families.
- 1.2 We believe that all people, including children, are made in the image of God, and that our relationships with each other should express love, integrity, compassion and respect. As a church, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people including children. Through our Church services, activities and programmes, we promote positive, respectful relationships with our children and young people and between our children and young people.
- 1.3 We are committed to providing an environment in which children can thrive and feel safe knowing that their participation is valued, their views are respected and their voices – about things which affect their lives – are heard.
- 1.4 Preventing and responding to child abuse is both an individual and collective responsibility of the Uniting Church, and all who engage with it. This policy applies across all Synod entities and to all church staff, ministry agents, volunteers and members.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 We keep children and vulnerable people safe primarily because of our understanding of God's desire for love and justice. We also safeguard children in response to a range of external standards and regulations such as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the relevant legislation in NSW and the ACT.
- 2.2 The purpose of this Policy to clearly demonstrate our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children through:
  - a. establishing policies, processes and procedures that aim to safeguard children and young people in our communities
  - b. Ensuring that our complaints processes are child-friendly
  - c. Requiring training to enable the identification of children at risk of harm and appropriate response
  - d. Identifying, addressing and preventing Reportable Conduct

## 3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all Synod entities. \*See Synod Policy Framework for Entity requirements by category.
- 3.2 Presbyteries, congregations and other entities may adopt additional specific Child Safe Policies, but these must be consistent with this Policy.

## 4. Our Commitments

- 4.1 All children and young people involved in any of the Synod's activities, services, events or programs have a right to feel and to be valued and safe.
- 4.2 All Synod entities will have measures in place to establish systems and to create a culture which promotes child wellbeing and prevents harm. As relevant and appropriate, entities will consciously and systematically:

- a. create an environment where children and young people are cared for, respected, nurtured and sustained and their safety and wellbeing is the central to thought, values and actions
- b. place emphasis on genuine engagement with, and valuing of children
- c. create conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people
- d. create conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm
- e. support the active participation of young people in Synod programs and provide a range of ways for children and young people to provide feedback or raise concerns and responds to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions.
- f. ensure that any policy, practice or decision- making which affects the safety of children and young people considers child safety as a primary need.
- g. take steps to ensure that relevant environments are safe, including online environments.
- h. safeguard children and young people from any forms of abuse, harm and neglect
- i. uphold the law and Child Safety Standards including the reporting of abuse, allegations of abuse, harm and neglect to the appropriate authorities

## Participation

- 4.3 The views of children and young people will be taken seriously. We will, as far as is practicable, involve children and young people when decisions are being made about matters that directly affect them.
- 4.4 We promote positive respect-based relationships between children, young people and adults and between children, young people and their peers.
- 4.5 We commit to respecting the important role of parents, carers and families in promoting the safety of children and young people and will seek and consider their feedback where appropriate.
- 4.6 We acknowledge and commit to support the needs of children and young people with diverse needs and contexts including :
  - a. those who live with a disability
  - b. are neuro-diverse
  - c. those who live away from home
  - d. First Nations people
  - e. culturally and linguistically diverse
  - f. those who identify as LGBTQIA+
  - g. those who may be challenged with their self-identity or feelings of discomfort in their own body.

## People

- 4.7 We are committed to ensuring that all our people are suitable and supported, especially those who work with children and young people.
- 4.8 We will ensure that there are sufficient leaders and supervisors for all Synod programs involving children or young people to support the safety and wellbeing of all people involved.
- 4.9 We will ensure that anyone working with children and young people:
  - a. has been appropriately screened (See Screening Policy)
  - b. have completed an appropriate child safe induction process
  - c. has, at all times, completed Child Safe training within the past three (3) years. The Synod reserves the right to move or stand down anyone who has not completed mandatory training within the specified timeframe, until such training is adequately completed.

## Complaints and reporting

- 4.10 We have zero tolerance for any actions which may cause harm to children or young people and we commit to proactive steps to identify and manage any risks of harm to children and young people.
- 4.11 We commit to implementing child-focused complaints processes and addressing any child safety concerns in a timely manner.
- 4.12 We commit to upholding our responsibilities in relation to mandatory reporting and reportable conduct and will ensure that all relevant Ministers, employees, and volunteers are sufficiently trained to do so.

## Risk Management

- 4.13 We commit to proactively identifying potential risks and taking all reasonable steps to mitigate those risks, whether in the physical or online environment.
- 4.14 All Synod entities must have a documented risk strategy and will maintain records of risk
- 4.15 assessments and the steps taken to mitigate identified risks.
- 4.16 All Synod entities will implement a Persons of Concern risk management strategy.

## Communication

- 4.17 All policies and procedures relating to children and young people will be publicly available on the Synod's website.
- 4.18 Parents and families will be provided with access to all relevant policies and procedures, including complaints processes, relating to the specific programs that their child or young person is enrolled in or attending.

## Documentation and Review

- 4.19 Child Safety is a standing agenda item at Synod Board meetings and leadership meetings.
- 4.20 We commit to creating and maintaining appropriate records in a way that balances transparency of practices with confidentiality of personal information.
- 4.21 The Synod commits to reviewing policies and procedures related to child safety
  - a. every two years; and
  - b. whenever relevant legislation or regulation changes; and
  - c. in response to relevant root cause analyses of incidents where appropriate.

## 5. Responsibilities

### 5.1 Synod Board:

- a. Child safety strategy and policy oversight
- b. Oversight of organisation-wide child safety practices
- c. Ensuring appropriate resourcing is allocated to implementing child safe practices
- d. Advocating for child safe practices across the Synod and its entities
- e. Monitoring of organisational compliance to legislative requirements and key frameworks

### 5.2 All Synod entities:

- a. Ensure child safety policies, procedures, and practices are implemented, including risk management, screening, training, reporting and persons of concern.
- b. Support practices that consider the diverse needs of children and young people
- c. Facilitate and support regular child safe training for employees and volunteers
- d. Communicate transparently with the Synod's Culture of Safety Team (and appropriate authorities as required) in relation to their internal processes, reporting mechanisms, record keeping, and other matters as required.
- e. Foster an environment where complaints or concerns about the safety of children or young people can be readily raised

### 5.3 Leaders in Councils of the Church and in Synod Mission Services:

- a. Ensure Synod policies are implemented across the organization
- b. Ensuring processes are appropriately followed when there is a concern of child abuse or harm
- c. Prioritise child safe practices at an operational level
- d. Ensure all workers (including contractors) are suitably screened, trained and competent.
- e. Model a child safety culture

### 5.4 All employees and volunteers:

- a. Participate in child safety training provided by the Synod or their nominated provider
- b. Always uphold and abide by Synod policies, guidelines and procedures
- c. Promptly raise any identified concerns about the safety of one or more children or young people
- d. Ensure the views of children and young people are taken seriously and that their voices are heard.
- e. Promoting child safe practices across the organisation.

## 6. Policy Review

- 6.1 This policy is to be reviewed biannually by the Culture of Safety Team and amendments approved by the Synod Governance Committee.

## 7. Version history

Version	Approved by	Approval date	Effective date	Sections modified
1	General Secretary	December 2020		
2	Synod Board	August 2024	27 August 2024	