

Child Protection Policy & Procedures

Grace Christian Community

June 27 2016

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement

Grace Christian Community located at 234 Elgar Rd, Box Hill South is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all its members, leaders and particularly to children.

The Church's Policy & Procedures aims to reduce the risk of abuse occurring, and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur.

1.2 Scope

The Policy & Procedures apply to:

- All ministries authorised by or under the control of the church, including those ministries undertaken at the church's premises or away from the church's premises.
- All leaders within the church or engaged by the church.

1.3 Authority

These are the Policy & Procedures of Grace Christian Community and were adopted for use by the Board of Grace Christian Community on June 8 2015.

The Board of Grace Christian Community are committed to implementing the Policy & Procedures and training our leaders in its content and application.

1.4 Definitions

Child - Any person under the age of 18.

Abuse Can consist of one or more of but is not restricted to the following:

Physical abuse– Any non-accidental physical injury resulting from practices such as: Hitting, punching, kicking (marks from belt buckles, fingers), shaking (particularly babies), burning (irons, cigarettes), biting, pulling out hair. Alcohol or other drug administration.

Sexual abuse - Any sexual act or threat to perform such upon another person. It occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. It does not necessarily involve genital contact but is any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.

Emotional abuse – The chronic attitude or behaviour of one person which is directed at another person or, the creation of an emotional environment which erodes a child's development, self esteem and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include: devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising or chronic and extreme domestic violence in the child's presence.

Neglect - Characterised by the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a person's development.

Helpers - Any unpaid person over the age of 16 who is invited by a leader to assist them in their ministry.

Leader - Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of members placed in their care whilst holding a formal position in a recognised ministry of the church. A leader could include but is not limited to:

Religious practitioner, Small group leaders, Music drama or other ministry leaders, Counsellors, Youth leaders, Sunday school superintendents, Teachers, Kid's club leaders, Scripture teachers, Sports coaches and organisers.

Members – Any person, including children, who attends or participates in church ministries.

Ministry - Any organised activity that is authorised by the church.

Ministry Leader - The person recognised and authorised by the church as head of a ministry.

2. External policies

We acknowledge that some ministries in the church might have external affiliation with other organisations. These organisations will possibly have policies governing the issues of member and/or child safety and abuse. The church's policy & procedures are not intended to replace or conflict with other policies, but instead to operate in conjunction with them.

3. Policy review

It is the responsibility of the Senior Pastor and Overseers/Elders to ensure that this policy and the Incident Response Process is implemented, maintained, and reviewed every two years or as required.

4. Obligations

4.1 Spiritual

The core beliefs of the church require us to treat all people with love and dignity and to care for those who are less powerful and in need of nurture and protection.

4.2 Legal

The church and its leaders are subject to Federal and State legislation and principles established through common law.

4.3 Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as Abuse, but are unacceptable behaviour for church leaders. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature.
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.

- Inappropriate touching.
- Inappropriate literature (e.g. PG, M, MA, R or X rated material used with young children).
- Recording or filming without prior consent
- Acts of violence committed by a leader in the course of an activity.

The age of individuals is recognised as one of the determinants in deciding what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is. Ministry leaders will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

5. Selection & Screening

5.1 Leaders

Leaders involved in children's ministry must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to leaders commencing child-related ministries, the following precautions will be taken:

1. Volunteer leaders will be members of the church and have regularly attended the church for at least 6 months.
2. Candidate leaders will complete an application form which requests details of relevant past experience, positions held, details of two referees and permission to contact them.
3. Referees will be checked and spoken to, using an agreed set of questions which have been drafted by the church. The questions will seek to establish the applicant's suitability for the role or position and the conversation will be documented and retained on file.
4. Short listed candidate leaders will be interviewed by an experienced and responsible member of the church prior to being accepted as a leader
5. A Police and/or Community Services and/or Working with Children check which complies with the legislative requirements of Victoria will be requested and received prior to the leader commencing their proposed role.
6. Where the church has identified that an applicant has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence they cannot, under any circumstances, be considered for child related ministries.
7. These offences do not preclude the applicant from serving in other ministries and the church, after careful consideration, might welcome the applicant's contribution in more appropriate areas.

5.2 Helpers

Any helper who provides assistance in a children's ministry must be fully supervised at all times by an appointed leader and will be accountable to that leader. Helpers are expected to be screened prior to commencement and should have the following:

1. An awareness of the content of the Church's Child Protection Policy & Procedures and Code of Conduct and a commitment to work within them.
2. A Working with Children Check
3. A leader is satisfied of the helper's maturity and their suitability for children's ministry.

6. Training

All leaders will be issued with a copy of this policy and training in the content and application of the Church's Member Protection Policy & Procedures, Reporting procedures and the associated legal requirements.

In addition, ministry leaders responsible for recruiting leaders for child related ministries will undertake further education on child/member protection.

7. A Safe environment

- Incidents of abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, two leaders will always be present when working with or supervising children.
- Leaders will not visit children in their homes unless a parent is present or another leader accompanies them.
- When transporting children, leaders should never be alone with a child in a car. Where this is not practical, leaders will take children directly to and from arranged venues and will not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.
- All personal counselling is to be carried out within sight of another leader.
- Leaders will respect a member's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.
- Adults and children are expected to respect each other's privacy during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No leader will be alone in a room with a child while either is changing.
- Initiations and secret ceremonies are prohibited. All aspects of every child-related program will be open to observation by parents/guardians.
- Leaders have the right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at child-related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

8. Disciplining children

It is not the responsibility of the church or its leaders to discipline a child. If a child does not abide by the rules set down by the leader, or is an obstruction to the care of other children or may cause harm to other children, the child will be removed and referred back to their parent or guardian.

At no time will a Leader administer any form of physical, emotional or mental discipline.

9. Reporting procedures

It is the responsibility of all volunteers and Church employees to report reasonable suspicion¹ of sexual abuse to the Board and the independent person named below. The details of anyone who reports such abuse will be kept private and confidential.

An independent person will be appointed by the church with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations that arise. The name, address and contact telephone number will be freely available to all leaders. The person appointed as the independent moderator is:

Name:	John Diacos
Address:	5 Lane Crescent Reservoir VIC 3073
Contact number:	0403 074 755

¹ *Reasonable suspicion means fair and practical reason to believe an incident involving sexual abuse has occurred based on either verbal communication, hearsay, rumour or observance of behaviour

Documented reporting and escalation procedures will be established by the church for handling allegations of abuse. If there are reasonable grounds to suspect a child has been or is suffering abuse, the police and the church's insurer will be contacted immediately.

The phone number for the police (Box Hill) is: 03 8892 3200

The phone number for our church insurer: 03 9890 6851

Reasonable grounds can be assumed when:

1. A child discloses that he or she has been abused, and/or
2. Someone close to a child (e.g. sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of that child. The police will also be notified if a child discloses an incident of abuse that has occurred somewhere other than the church (e.g. home or school).

If a disclosure of abuse is made, the person who receives the disclosure will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure. This will include:

- Treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim. The matter should not be swept under the carpet.
- Not pushing the child to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation.
- Assuring the child that they are understood: that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault, and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- Reporting the abuse to the police and the church's insurer.
- Not making contact with the alleged perpetrator. If the leader is already providing counsel to the alleged perpetrator, it may be advisable for another person to assume this responsibility for the duration of any investigation.
- If the alleged assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the child should be retained and handed to the police for forensic examination.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Any disclosures by a child, reports of suspected abuse and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.
- The church reserves the right to carry out church disciplinary procedures in accordance with the constitution of the church.
- Where an allegation is made the accused leader will be removed from all children's ministry pending the outcome of all investigations.
- Where a leader is found guilty of committing sexual abuse (either by an internal investigation or a court) their role and, if employed their employment, will be immediately terminated.

10. Alcohol & drugs

The inappropriate use of alcohol or drugs on church grounds or during an activity is not to be allowed or condoned by any leader. Any Child found to be under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so the child can be returned home immediately.

Any child required to take prescription medication will provide a letter from their parents/guardians to the ministry leader.