



Fitzroy North Church of Christ Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Fitzroy North Church of Christ is a church affiliated with Church of Christ Victoria and Tasmania. We have a number of families in our community who attend our Sunday services.

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Fitzroy North Church of Christ acknowledges the Wurundjeri-Willam People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate. We acknowledge and respect their contributions, experience and knowledge as First Nations people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the Board on 22 November 2022. It demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our community keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Commitment to child safety

All children who come to Fitzroy North Church of Christ have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel seen and valued.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how Fitzroy North Church of Christ prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Board members, children and other individuals involved in our community. This policy applies to all activities conducted by Fitzroy North Church of Christ.

Definitions

Board means the Chair, A representative of the Collaborative Pastoral Leadership Team (CPLT), four other church Representatives.

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to Fitzroy North Church of Christ related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with Fitzroy North Church of Christ
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at Fitzroy North Church of Christ
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Role of the Board

The Board has the role of making sure Fitzroy North Church of Christ prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

The Board will champion and model a child safe culture at Fitzroy North Church of Christ. We encourage anyone involved with our community to report a child safety concern. The Board will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at Fitzroy North Church of Christ has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The Board will make sure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The Board will conduct an annual review of how effectively Fitzroy North Church of Christ is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with Fitzroy North Church of Christ will be sought as part of this review.

Children's empowerment and participation

Fitzroy North Church of Christ is a child-centred church. We actively seek to include children's views and ideas in our church planning, and in particular in the planning of church activities focused on children and young people.

We want children to develop new friends through Fitzroy North Church of Christ and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at Fitzroy North Church of Christ. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our church. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Fitzroy North Church of Christ values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families. Fitzroy North Church of Christ supports children's participation in the following ways:

- Regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- Consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing. Children's views are collected by children's volunteers provided to the Board and considered in the decision-making process.

- Information provided to children and families about Fitzroy North Church of Christ staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children.

Families and communities

Fitzroy North Church of Christ recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

At the annual general meeting each year, we elect the Chair and new members of the Board and all community members are invited to share their thoughts on the direction of Fitzroy North Church of Christ for the next year.

Fitzroy North Church of Christ provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website
- including information about our child safety approach, our operations and Board and staffing structure.
- including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures, in our weekly notes.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

Fitzroy North Church of Christ is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all services
- providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children
- celebrating Aboriginal Sunday, NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

- provide training for all Board members, staff and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families
- offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our services
- have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Code of Conduct

Fitzroy North Church of Christ has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, volunteers and the Board must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the church.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

Fitzroy North Church of Christ puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers as outlined in the recruitment and screening policy. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the Board must also be screened.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. Members of the Board must hold a valid Working with Children Check and a national Police Check is required.

Supporting staff and volunteers

Fitzroy North Church of Christ is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. Fitzroy North Church of Christ assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

All Fitzroy North Church of Christ Board members, leaders, staff and volunteers are required to complete annual child safety training. Training will be recorded in the Child Safety Training Action Plan.

Staff and volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Fitzroy North Church of Christ has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet will be provided for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at Fitzroy North Church of Christ must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. Fitzroy North Church of Christ staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response

and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at Fitzroy North Church of Christ
- not allowing unsupervised contact with children at Fitzroy North Church of Christ
- removing their access to the Fitzroy North Church of Christ IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to jackie@fitzroynorthchurch.org.au or rod@fitzroynorthchurch.org.au or you can speak directly with Jackie Martin, our Child Safety Person.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Child Safety Person

Fitzroy North Church of Christ has a trained child safety person with responsibility for responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns.

Child safety persons are introduced to children so they know and understand who the appointed officers are, and how and when they may contact them. Photos and names of the child safety persons are displayed on our website.

If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a child safety person, they may report their concern to the Rod Begbie, who is the member of the CPLT with responsibility for Children's Ministry.

Record keeping

Fitzroy North Church of Christ is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by Fitzroy North Church of Christ for at least 45 years.

Information sharing

Fitzroy North Church of Christ may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Fitzroy North Church of Christ will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

Risk management

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Fitzroy North Church of Christ.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at Fitzroy North Church of Christ. The risk management plan will be developed in

consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at Fitzroy North Church of Christ. The Board is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us to ensure child safety. See also Code of Conduct above.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

Fitzroy North Church of Christ will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies (see list below). Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action. More information can be found in our disciplinary policy.

Review

Fitzroy North Church of Christ will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our church and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the Board and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

Supporting documents – Fitzroy North Church of Christ child safety and wellbeing system

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all of our operations:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Code of Conduct
- complaint handling policy
- recruitment and screening policy
- disciplinary policy
- risk management plan
- child safe training plan.

Supporting legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)