

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Purpose

This Policy outlines how Ringwood Church of Christ (RCoC) prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Statement of commitment to child safety

At Ringwood Church of Christ we believe that all children are loved by God and we follow Christ's example in loving, protecting and respecting everyone. We are committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. We have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse, racism, harm or discrimination. We are committed to creating and maintaining a child-safe and child-friendly organisation where all children and young people are valued and protected from all forms of abuse.

All children and young people have the right to be protected from harm and to be treated with dignity and respect. We are an inclusive organisation that recognises and respects diversity, and we are committed to proactively supporting and building the cultural safety and inclusion of all children and young people.

We recognise the distinctive history and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and respect and observe their cultural rights. We are committed to creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment in which the diverse and unique identities, experiences and cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are respected and valued.

As a child safe organisation, we are committed to providing welcoming, safe and accessible environments where all children and young people feel valued, are listened to, and are genuinely considered and involved, in age-appropriate ways, in decisions that affect them.

Scope

This Policy applies to all staff, leaders and volunteers and their conduct both within and outside of their work for RCoC, irrespective of whether they work with or have direct contact with children or young people.

Definitions

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 RCoC related to one or more of the following:

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

Responsibilities

RCoC is governed by the Eldership made up of a minimum of six elected volunteer Church members. They oversee the governance of RCoC and approve the appointment of staff.

The Director of Ministries (DoM) is appointed by the Eldership and oversees the running of RCoC in regards to staffing, operations, pastoral care, programs and ministry content, and is responsible for the response to allegations according to the *Responding to Allegations* Process.

The Safety Officer is a secondary person to the DoM in being responsible for the response to allegations according to the *Responding to Allegations* Process or in place of the DoM should a complaint be directed to the DoM.

Children's empowerment and participation

RCoC is a child-friendly organisation that actively seeks to include children's views and ideas in our programs, events and worship services.

We want children to develop new friendships and existing ones during their time at RCoC and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate racism, harm, discrimination, bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and discuss their rights with them in age-appropriate ways, including the right to be safe at RCoC and display these rights publicly. RCoC values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families and/or carers.

We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our Church. We communicate at least yearly with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe and make reference to steps they can take, as displayed on our noticeboards. Children's and families' views are collected by staff and considered in the decision-making process.

We seek to provide information to children and families in suitable and accessible ways about RCoC operations, staffing and programs.

Families and communities

Parents, carers and families play a significant part in our Church community and are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our Office or Ministry staff and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

RCoC provides information to families and the wider community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing our Privacy Policy on our website
- having this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and the Code of Conduct freely available by request from our Office
- periodically including information about our child safety approach, our programs and feedback options in our monthly newsletter

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families

RCoC is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is celebrated and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country prior to public gatherings, such as worship services
- external signage acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands we are on
- supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day, NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week

Valuing diversity

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

- seek to provide training for all staff 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/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ+ and/or gender diverse children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 unfair exclusion is identified
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our participants, their interests and cultures
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates where possible in our worship services and programs
- have a physical and online environment that supports diversity by including a range of people
- work hard to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities whenever possible

Code of Conduct

The RCoC Code of Conduct includes child safety. Staff, leaders and volunteers 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 RCoC.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

RCoC puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteer leaders. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the Elders must also be screened.

We require a Working with Children Check (WWCC), Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and WWCC and referee checks for volunteer leaders 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 Elders must hold a valid WWCC and a national Police Check is required.

Supporting staff and volunteers

RCoC is committed to ensuring that all staff and volunteer leaders receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with

children. RCoC assists its staff and volunteer leaders 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 RCoC staff and volunteer children and youth leaders are required to complete initial Child Safe Training and then at least every three years. Attendance at the training is recorded in the Safety Management Online program. Ministry staff are required to attend CCVTs Safe Church Awareness Full Workshop initially and then the Refresher Workshop every three years.

We aim to recruit staff and volunteers, working directly with children, who have a passion to work with young people. We will train these people by explaining compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy during the induction process and during Child Safe training.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, Complaint Handling policy and Corrective Action & Disciplinary Procedures.

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.

RCoC has a Complaint Handling Policy for anyone who feels they have a complaint or concern regarding a person not respecting a child or person during one of our programs, services or while using our facilities. An easy-to-understand complaints process sheet is available to children, families and the community to know about the complaints process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at RCoC must report it in accordance with the Complaint Handling Policy. RCoC staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potential criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

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

Complaints can be emailed to office@ringwoodchurch.org.au or made by speaking with the Director of Ministries or the Safety Officer.

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

Safety Officer

RCoC has a Safety Officer who is responsible for responding to any safety related complaints or concerns, including child safety.

The Safety Officer has been introduced to children so they know and understand who to contact and how to make contact. A photo and name of the Safety Officer is displayed on our noticeboards.

If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to the Safety Officer, they may report their concern to the Director of Ministries, a staff member or an Elder.

Record Keeping

RCoC 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 on an incident report and filed in our cloud-based 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 RCoC for at least 45 years.

Information Sharing

RCoC takes personal privacy very seriously but may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. RCoC 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

RCoC recognises the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by RCoC.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a Risk Management Policy (currently in draft form) to address the risk of child abuse and harm at RCoC. The Risk Management Policy will be developed by our Facility and Risk Management group (FARM). The Eldership is responsible for approving the Risk Management Policy.

Each one-off event and our regular programs involving children and young people have Permission to Proceed Risk Assessments completed by the program leader and signed-off by the Administration Manager. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at RCoC.

Non-compliance with the Policy and the Code of Conduct

RCoC 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 Corrective Action & Disciplinary Procedure (currently in draft form).

Access to the policy

The Policy will be available upon request at the Church Office. Our statement of commitment to child safety is available on our website and on our noticeboards in the foyer, downstairs and portable.

Policy status and review

The RCoC Eldership will review all child safe practices according to the Child Safe Standards and review this Policy at least every two years. RCoC will 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 organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the Director of Ministries and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

Supporting documents - Related organisational policies and procedures

Privacy Policy

Code of Conduct

Complaint Handling Policy (draft form)

Risk Management Policy (draft form)

Dispute Resolution Policy (draft form)

Corrective Action & Disciplinary Procedure (draft form).

Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy (draft form)

Supporting legislation - Relevant legislation and standards

- 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)

Policy Approved

14/12/2022

Policy Review

July 2023