

Safe Ministry Policy

PURPOSE

The Church is committed to the biblical call to care for the vulnerable and acknowledges God's special concern for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. There are many biblical references to this call. We reference the following Bible verses as a specific mandate from God to ensure safety and protection, especially for children, young people and vulnerable adults in our community.

- "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31 ESV).
- "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." (Isaiah 1:17 ESV).
- "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute." (Proverbs 31:8 ESV).
- "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12 ESV).
- "...let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:14 ESV).
- "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (Mark 9:37 ESV).

The purpose of this policy is to enable our church's leaders, staff, and volunteers to develop a safe church culture so that all people involved in, or attending, our church's ministries and services are safe from harm and able to grow in their relationship with God and others.

This document outlines our approach to the protection of people, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults, so that we comply with relevant legislation, engage in best practices, and cultivate a safe church for spiritual growth and wellbeing.

Our Safe Ministry Policy:

- Commits us to providing a safe environment for all people, especially children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Authorises a Code of Conduct for all persons engaged in the service of the church, whether staff or volunteers
- Provides a process for screening and selecting persons who will attend or participate in ministries with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults
- Provides a process for responding to disclosures of harm or misconduct, and for reporting such disclosures to the appropriate authorities
- Sets out the training requirements for all who are engaged by the church, whether staff or volunteers, and who, because of this engagement, are in recurring contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults attending the church

This Safe Ministry Policy applies to the persons listed below:

- Any church leader/volunteer who is making decisions affecting children, young people and/or vulnerable adults
- Any person engaged by the church to provide a service to the church, whether paid or voluntarily, and who will be in contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults while providing that service

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- Any students or trainees undertaking an internship or field placement at the church and who, as part of that internship or field placement, will be in contact with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults

POLICY COMMITMENT AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

It is our policy to respect everyone as unique individuals created by God, and to give special attention to the care, protection and wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults. We will behave towards them in a manner that resembles and represents Christ's attitude and approach, providing an environment and ministry culture that promotes their spiritual, social, and physical safety, as well as their personal growth and development.

To this end we will promote a "safe church" culture throughout our church, constantly communicating and reinforcing our commitment at all levels of our church's life and ministry.

Regarding the church's commitment to providing a safe environment for all, especially children, young people and vulnerable adults, the church commits to upholding the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#). Specifically, Coastal Bible Church is committed to fulfilling our responsibilities under the 10 Child Safe Standards and Principles of the Queensland's Child Safe Organisation system.

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are respected in both policy and practice
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice
6. Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed
9. Implementation of the National Principals for Child Safe Organisations are regularly reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

DEFINITIONS

Abuse – Any form of abuse, exploitation, coercion or ill-treatment. This might include, but is not limited to, physical abuse, verbal or emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual abuse, mental or psychological abuse, harm, or neglect.

Blue Card – The card issued by Queensland Government's Blue Card Services after an application is received, verifying suitability for working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. A positive notice always accompanies a Blue Card approval. Where the term 'Blue Card' is used in this Policy, it also refers to the positive notice issued by Blue Card Services.

Child - An individual under the age of 12 years old.

Safeguarding - Appropriate measures put in place to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm

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Vulnerable Adult - An individual aged 18 years and above who is, or may be, unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason. This includes those who suffer disadvantages, such as social and financial hardship.

Young Person - An individual age between 13-17 years old.

ROLE DEFINITIONS

Volunteer - Refers to an adult (equal to or above the age of 18), who has been approved by a ministry leader (in partnership with the Safe Ministry Team and a Safe Ministry Co-ordinator), to carry out tasks and responsibilities for the church, who is in contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults as they do so. All volunteers must hold a valid Blue Card/Exemption Card that is linked to the church in the Blue Card Services Online Portal.

Youth Volunteer - Refers to volunteers under the age of 18 who have contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults under the supervision of an adult Volunteer. Whilst Youth Volunteers do not have the leadership responsibilities of an adult, it is important that there is appropriate screening, training and management.

Ministry Leader - Refers to the person (staff or volunteer) leading a ministry, team, program or activity which involves children, young people or vulnerable adults.

Safe Ministry Coordinators - Refers to the persons appointed by the Board to manage the Safe Ministry Team in the practical implementation of this Policy. Safe Ministry Coordinators will always be selected among those people who hold the office of elder or deacon within Coastal Bible Church.

Safe Ministry Team - Refers to volunteers that have been given responsibilities (over and above the responsibilities of an ordinary volunteer), to oversee the other Volunteers within a ministry, team, program or activity which involves children, young people or vulnerable adults.

Elder(s) - Refers to a biblically-qualified man in accordance with the descriptions of 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4, who has been duly appointed to the office of elder.

Deacon(s) - Refers to a biblically-qualified individual in accordance with the descriptions of 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3-5, who has been duly appointed to the office of deacon.

Board - Directors appointed according to the church constitution who are responsible for the governance of the church.

Staff - Any individual employed by Coastal Bible Church (whether full-time, part-time or as a contractor) to carry out tasks and responsibilities as outlined in their Role Description and employment contract.

The Church - Refers to Coastal Bible Church Ltd and the community of people, ministries, programs, and activities that take place under its care and authority.

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SCREENING AND ONBOARDING

The Church recognises the importance of screening and onboarding staff and volunteers who have the right gifts, skills, and abilities to fulfill their roles. Whilst this is important for all roles in the church, we especially acknowledge this importance with roles working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

To ensure this, Coastal Bible Church will screen and train all staff, leaders and volunteers involved in any Ministry Program, Event, or activity of the church. All staff and volunteers are to be screened, onboarded, and inducted in accordance with the procedure below. Safe Ministry Coordinators will ensure the below process is undertaken for all volunteers, along with the completion of all relevant documentation.

Screening and Onboarding Process

An individual wanting to join a Ministry/Team at Coastal Bible Church will:

1. Be a member of Coastal Bible Church
 - a. For service in either Youth Ministry or Children's Ministry, prospective volunteers must have first demonstrated regular attendance for a minimum of six (6) months, and must fill out a ministry specific application form.
2. Be regularly participating in meaningful community at Coastal Bible Church
3. Hold a valid Blue Card. If an individual does not hold a valid Bluecard, they will need to complete an online application to receive a Bluecard or Exemption Card (for police officers and registered teachers) and to link Coastal Bible Church as the organisation.
4. Have an interview/audition (Worship Team) with the relevant Ministry Leader to discuss the specifics of the Ministry/Team, including commitments, culture and next steps
5. Complete online training with 'Safe Ministry Check'
6. Complete all necessary induction and training items as represented on the Staff & Volunteer Induction Checklist/Training Record.
 - a. This includes:
 - i. Signing the Staff & Volunteer Induction Checklist/Training Record, and by so doing, agreeing to abide by all policies and procedures listed therein, including the Code of Conduct.
7. Undertake any further induction and training for the specific Ministry/Team
8. Be added to the Ministry/Teams roster and communication channels

Probationary Period

Staff should refer to the probationary period written into their employment contracts.

Blue Cards and Exemption Cards

Persons Requiring a Blue Card

All church staff and volunteers must hold a valid and current Blue Card, linked to Coastal Bible Church, to participate in any church activities that will bring them into contact with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults.

Persons With An Exemption Card

All staff and volunteers who are a police officer or registered teacher must hold a valid and current Exemption Card, linked to Coastal Bible Church, to participate in any church activities that will bring them into contact with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults.

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Expectations To Ensure Blue Card/Exemption Card Is Renewed On Time

All staff and volunteers of the Church are responsible for complying with the regulations outlined by Blue Card Services. This includes maintaining a valid Blue Card/Exemption Card by monitoring its expiry date and promptly actioning its renewal, responding to all correspondence from Blue Card Services as necessary, and notifying Blue Card Services of any changes to personal circumstances, including any circumstances that may affect your ability to hold a Blue Card/Exemption Card.

Record Keeping Of Blue Cards and Exemption Cards

The Church complies with recordkeeping requirements of the Blue Card system and meets the requirements outlined in the Coastal Bible Church Privacy Policy.

Where records contain, or may contain, sensitive information, they will be kept in a manner that protects confidentiality and will only be accessed by a limited number of authorised persons. Where records are kept in hard copy, they will be held in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and physical conditions. Where records are kept electronically, they will be monitored to ensure security and ongoing accessibility.

Changes in Circumstances Affecting a Blue Card

If there is a change in circumstances for a staff member or volunteer that might affect, or has affected, their Blue Card, then that person must:

- Immediately notify their Ministry Leader (who will inform the church's Safe Ministry Coordinators); and
- Immediately notify the Queensland Government's Blue Card Services

The Safe Ministry Coordinators/Safe Ministry Team, and Elders, will require the person to desist from attending or participating in any activities that will bring them into contact with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The Church acknowledges the importance of providing initial and ongoing training and support to staff and volunteers. The Safe Ministry Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that a training plan is set in place and there is adequate recordkeeping of training undertaken. The Safe Ministry Co-ordinators are responsible for the training of all volunteers. Training for all Ministries/Teams occurs on an annual basis. The Safe Ministry Coordinators report to the Board about the training and support of staff and volunteers.

The Church recognises that stakeholders may require support when dealing with issues such as behaviour management, conflict, bullying, child protection concerns or breaches of this Policy. As such, the Safe Ministry Coordinators and Safe Ministry Team will ensure support is available. The types of support that may be made available include, but are not limited to:

- Partnering with external support and counselling services,
- Seeking guidance and advice from the Church's workplace health and safety officer/s,
- Providing additional training,
- Implementing mentoring or discipleship, or
- Mediation or other conflict resolution techniques

RESPONDING TO CHILD PROTECTION/SAFETY CONCERNS

Children, young people and vulnerable adults can only be protected from harm if child protection concerns are reported and dealt with immediately and appropriately. Therefore, the Church will ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all disclosures or suspicions of harm, and any complaints relating to child protection concerns, especially sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child, in accordance with the Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns outlined below.

Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns

What is a Child Protection Concern?

A child protection concern may include concerns regarding:

- A child/young person at risk of significant harm,
- A child abuse offence, including but not limited to -
 - Sexual abuse
 - Physical abuse
 - Verbal or emotional abuse
 - Mental or psychological abuse
 - Neglect
 - Spiritual abuse
- Inappropriate personal or intimate communication and/or boundaries which may constitute grooming,
- Exposure of a child/young person to domestic or family violence,
- Or any other reason of concern

A child protection concern may be received from:

- A child/young person who has been directly involved,
- An adult who has been directly involved (including personal disclosures of wrongdoing),
- Another person with information about a child or adult,
- Another church or organisation with information about a child or adult,
- Staff, volunteers or other stakeholders who have concerns based on their observations and interactions with one or more children or adults

What to do when receiving a complaint

When a child protection concern is raised, the following actions should be undertaken:

LISTEN WELL:

- Move to a suitable environment, free from distraction. Remember, a private conversation still needs to be in a space visible to others. Let your Ministry Leader know where you are
- Be calm and patient – allow time for the person making the complaint (eg: child/young person) to be heard
- Let the person use their own words – avoid asking leading questions
- Avoid 'quizzing' the person about details of the abuse
- Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Listening supportively is more important than what you say

GENTLY REASSURE:

- Reassure the complainant that it is OK that they have told you what's been happening
- Check if there are any concerns about the child/young person's safety, especially immediate safety

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- Reassure the person, particularly if they are a child, young person or vulnerable adult, that they are not at fault, and not the cause of any distress that may be felt by anyone

SHOW RESPECT:

- Respect that the person may only reveal some details
- Acknowledge the person's bravery and strength in sharing the information
- Avoid making promises you can't keep – manage the person's expectations
- Explain to the person that in order for the child, young person or vulnerable adult to be safe, you will need to report this to someone else

IMMEDIATELY REPORT:

- Immediately report the disclosure to a Safe Ministry Co-ordinator. If appropriate, keep the person informed of the reporting process
- As soon as it is practical, make all relevant notes regarding your conversation and observations, and complete the Child Safety Concern Report Form alongside the Safe Ministry Team Member, recording all details about the suspicion or disclosure of abuse
- The Safe Ministry Co-ordinators will be responsible for ensuring the appropriate form of action, that the Church fulfills its legal obligations, and that all concerns are managed appropriately
- A copy of the Child Safety Concern Report Form is to be kept securely by the Church, and a copy sent to relevant authorities as required.

Assessing a Disclosure or Suspicion of Harm (for the Safe Ministry Co-ordinators to assess)

When a child protection concern is raised, the Safe Ministry Co-ordinators will assess what action needs to be taken and record all action steps on the Child Safety Concern Report Form including any reports made to the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services and any other relevant authorities.

If the report is about a Staff member of the Organisation the Safe Ministry Team will notify the appropriate authorities and follow the appropriate steps in the Church Complaints Policy and Procedure.

If the alleged harm, abuse or misconduct was perpetrated by an elder/pastor/board member, then the Safe Church Coordinators will also inform the State Network Co-ordinator (or other board member), of Christian Community Churches of Queensland (CCCQLD).

The person identified by the disclosure as harming and/or being guilty of misconduct will be required to step aside from any activities that will bring them into contact with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults while the matter is being investigated, either by the Church's Safe Ministry Coordinators, the police, or a government department/agency, and until a determination about the matter has been made.

The Safe Ministry Coordinators and Elders of the Church would also determine any potential restrictions around this person attending or participating in other church meetings and activities, during this process. The Safe Ministry Coordinators will liaise with the person and ensure they are kept informed about the process.

Where a staff member or volunteer has breached a legislative requirement pertaining to the protection and welfare of children, or an obligation stipulated by Blue Card Services, then the authority responsible for issuing the Blue Card will be notified by the Church's Safe Ministry Coordinators.

If the misconduct identified by a disclosure is outside the scope of government legislation and regulations, but is covered by the Code of Conduct or the Church's constitution, then the provisions of this Policy and the Church's constitution, will be applied.

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CODE OF CONDUCT

As part of this commitment, staff and volunteers are required to agree to and abide by this Code of Conduct included in the Safe Ministry Check Training Course. This Code of Conduct seeks to reflect the Biblical call to godliness and faithfulness in ministry (e.g., 1 Timothy 3). By completing and signing the Staff & Volunteer Induction Checklist/Training Record you agree to abide by the Code of Conduct set out below.

Coastal Bible Church - Code of Conduct

I commit to conducting myself in a manner consistent with the Safe Ministry Check Training Course when serving at Coastal Bible Church.

I will treat adults, children and young people with respect and value, without favouritism.

I will behave appropriately, being faithful to my appointed tasks, being an example to others, and being mindful in how I verbally and physically interact with others and how I present myself when serving at Coastal Bible Church.

I will never use physical punishment or abusive language - even as a form of discipline.

I will act transparently, as far as possible, ensuring that another adult is present or within eyesight when I am with a child, young person, or vulnerable adult.

I will not view, possess, produce or distribute pornographic or other restricted material.

I will disclose to the Safe Ministry Team if I have previously been or am currently under investigation for any criminal offences, and will promptly notify them concerning any changes to my criminal record or anything else that would disqualify me from service.

I will not use my role and authority inappropriately, especially in situations where there are power imbalances.

I will not engage in bullying, harassment, harm, abuse or neglect towards anyone.

I will not engage in any unlawful activity with, or in relation to, a child, young person, vulnerable adult, or any other person.

I will not engage in any activity that is likely to physically, sexually or emotionally harm a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

I commit to ensuring that the spaces and activities I'm responsible for are safe and do not put people at risk of significant harm.

I commit to including vulnerable people (and/or their carers/significant other) in discussions about decisions that will significantly affect them.

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I commit to encouraging openness by listening to people's concerns with a willingness to support them and help them.

I commit to **promptly** reporting any concerns or suspicions about harmful behaviours and significant risks to a Safe Ministry Contact without bias or partiality.

I will submit to the Coastal Bible Church screening and onboarding process to ensure I'm a suitable person to work with vulnerable people.

I will submit to disciplinary steps if I am found to violate these commitments or act in an otherwise inappropriate or illegal manner at Coastal Bible Church.

I acknowledge that any breach of this Code of Conduct involving a criminal offence may lead to a report being made to the relevant authorities.

I acknowledge that any breaches relating to the harm or risk of harm to a child, young person, or vulnerable adult will be dealt with under the Coastal Bible Church Safe Ministry Policy.

I acknowledge that any other breach will be considered in the light of providing a safe space for all, and may result in the staff member or volunteer being stood down, either temporarily or otherwise.