

# United Church of God – Australia Child Protection Policy

## **Policy Statement**

The Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for Children. Church employees, Leaders, Helpers and Volunteers are to be advocates for children's personal growth, as well as their safety, and work to clearly defined safeguards, policies and procedures for their individual development and protection.

The Church will not tolerate, and will seek to eradicate, any behaviour that constitutes sexual, physical, spiritual, or emotional abuse, or any form of bullying and harassment of children. The Church is committed to providing a safe environment for children in its offices, congregations, camps and for any Recognised Activity that operates under its name.

All employees, Leaders, Helpers and Volunteers within the Church are expected to uphold and abide by this Policy and the associated *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* at all times.

Alleged abuse within the church community is to be reported in accordance with this *Child Protection Policy* or applicable law if it takes precedence.

## **Background**

The United Church of God – Australia (UCG-A or “the Church”) is aware of its duty of care and responsibility for the welfare and well-being of children within the Church and recognises the need to protect children from abuse by Leaders and members of the Church as well as the wider community.

UCG-A recognises that children in our care may have special needs such as intellectual or physical disability or culturally diverse backgrounds. Our care for children must be sensitive to the individual needs of the child. The abuse of children in any form will not be tolerated by UCG-A in any Recognised Activity in which the organisation is engaged.

The Policy aims to reduce the risk of abuse occurring by creating a culture of child protection throughout the organisation. The Policy also aims to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur within the Church community.

The United Church of God has a rich history of ministry to children and young people. This takes place in a variety of settings - Sabbath School, children's clubs, youth groups, in worship, weekly services, and in camps, church socials and activities, or where child care is offered as part of some special occasion. This work is carried out by the ministry of the church as well as by faithful adult volunteers who give their time and expertise, and without whom this ministry would not be possible.

Ministry to children and young people has never been taken lightly. In this age we are compelled to recognise that in our society there are people and situations which represent a threat to children. Church Management, Pastoral staff and all adult members must create a safe environment for children, young people and families in our congregations. There is a general recognition that this responsibility is greater than ever before.

We as a Church must be vigilant in providing an environment where children and young people will be supervised by competent and caring individuals who may be trusted to work with them without occasioning fear, neglect, or misdemeanour.

### **Role of the National Council (Board of Directors)**

It is the responsibility of the National Council to ensure:

- UCGA has a clear policy relating to the protection of children. That policy must reflect Biblical, legislative and (where appropriate) social expectations in relation to the protection of children,
- The provision of management processes, procedures and guidelines that articulate UCGA and legislative expectations in relation to the protection of children,
- The review of the Policy and any related documentation at least once per three years,
- The allocation of sufficient resources to fully implement the Policy and its subservient processes,
- Training to those with responsibilities in working with or caring for children in the Policy and related documentation, and
- Training to the congregation as a whole on the subject of child protection as part of the yearly safety review carried out in each local congregation.

### **Related Documents**

The *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* provides the management processes, procedures and standards of behaviour expected of Leaders, Helpers and Volunteers involved in activities with children. That document is the vehicle by which this policy is implemented.

We also acknowledge that some Recognised Activities in the Church might have external affiliation with other organisations. These organisations will possibly have policies governing the issues of Safety and Child protection. This Policy is not intended to replace or conflict with the other policies, but instead to operate in conjunction with them.

### **Definitions**

Abuse	any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse and neglect.
Adult	any person aged 18 years or older.
Child	any person under 18 years of age
Church	the United Church of God – Australia (UCG-A) with its registered office.
Helper	any adult person who is invited by a Leader to assist them in a Recognised Activity. A Helper is a volunteer who is considered an employee of the Church under the relevant child protection legislation..

Leader	any adult who is responsible for the control and safety of Children placed in their care while holding a formal position in a Recognised Activity of the Church. Includes Pastors, Elders, group leaders, counsellors, teachers and activity leaders
National Council	the Board of Directors of the Church
Recognised Activity	any organised activity that is authorised or promoted by the Church.
Recognised Activity Leader	any person authorised by the Church to lead a Recognised Activity.
Volunteer	any person who is employed by another person and does not carry out any work for the other person for a financial reward. Helpers as defined in this policy may be Volunteers.

### **Scope and Application**

This Policy applies to:

- All Recognised Activities of the Church
- All Leaders, Helpers and Volunteers within the Church or engaged by the Church
- Recruitment and selection of potential Leaders, Helpers, Volunteers & employees

### **Policy Implementation and Compliance**

All pastors and Leaders of Recognised Activities will be issued with a copy of this Policy and the accompanying *Child Protection Guidelines & Procedures* document, and as a requirement of their position must agree to implement and abide by the policies and standards contained therein.

The pastor of each local congregation is responsible for the application of this Policy in his areas of responsibility, for educating Leaders and Helpers under his jurisdiction and in monitoring compliance. The coordinator of each major national Recognised Activity, for example Summer and Leadership camps or Festival activities, shall be the person responsible for the application of this policy for the duration of the activity, for educating relevant Leaders and Helpers, and for monitoring compliance.

It is the policy of the United Church of God – Australia to comply with the relevant legislation of each State in which it operates.

### **Breaches**

Should there be reasonable grounds to suspect child abuse, or there is disclosure of alleged abuse by a child or young person, the matter will be taken seriously. Reasonable grounds can be assumed when:

- An alleged victim discloses that he or she has been abused, and/or
- Someone close to the alleged victim (e.g. sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of the alleged victim, and/or
- There is the suspicion of abuse due to physical, emotional or psychological evidence.

Where an allegation of child abuse is made against a Church employee, leader, helper, volunteer or member, the alleged perpetrator will be removed from all activities that would bring them into contact with children pending the outcome of all investigations. Allegations will be treated as valid until or unless proven otherwise. No attempt should be made to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim.

It is necessary to report an allegation of abuse to the relevant state-based child protection agency and/or the police. If in Victoria, the allegation must also be reported to the Commission for Children and Young Persons (see details in *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures: Appendix One*). Any internal investigation into the alleged abuse will be respectfully and carefully pursued according to this policy and the associated *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures*. In a timely manner, the relevant Church local authority along with the Director of Operations and the Chairman of the National Council will also be notified in confidence.

Specific guidelines and procedures are required to be followed to examine and report all such suspicions or allegations. Details of that process are included in the *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* document.

### **Policy Review**

This policy and the associated *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures* document will be reviewed in the following circumstances:

- not less than once every three years by the National Council
- as a result of the findings of an internal or external audit of the Policy and associated documentation
- as a result of an incident of child abuse being reported to the relevant authorities.

When considering changes, the National Council may seek the advice of legal practitioners, elders and qualified members with expertise in child protection matters who might provide appropriate insight and comment. Any changes approved will be communicated to the membership of the Church via the Church website and/or by an announcement in each congregation.

### **Exceptions and Interpretations of this Policy**

In emergency situations Recognised Activity Leaders and others subject to this policy are allowed to take the most prudent or commonsense course of action necessary to supervise and protect children during that emergency.

Other exceptions to the policy, as well as clarifications or interpretations of the same, which are in conformance with the policy's spirit and intent but which are not already provided for or addressed herein, may be set forth in UCG-A National Council directives, standards or other requirements it may distribute pursuant to the policy, or may be granted on a case-by-case basis by the National Council. Such interpretations, clarifications or exceptions are to be made or granted in writing.

Child Protection Policy V 1.2

Reason for review: Update due to legislative changes arising from the Royal Commission into the Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse.

Reviewed: November 2017

Ratified: August 2018