



GOULBURN MURRAY LUTHERAN PARISH
ST PAUL'S, SHEPPARTON – TRINITY, ECHUCA
Child Safe Policy – December 2016



Theological Foundation

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14 (ESV)

As a community of faith and healing the Lutheran Church is shaped by the Word of God. God brings the church into being as a safe place in which believers can be nurtured in the new life of Christ and grow into maturity. Therefore any form of abuse is a fundamental theological issue which must be addressed and corrected. This is central to our being as church. Nowhere is this more so than in the case of children, who are a precious trust and care from God. Children especially are under divine protection (Isaiah 11:6–9). God protects the vulnerable and God's people are to do the same (Isaiah 1:17). When children came to Jesus and his disciples objected, he turned the usual order of things upside down by saying that the Kingdom of God belongs to 'such as these' (Matt 19:14, Luke 18:16). As we would receive Jesus, so we are to receive a child (Matt 18:5, Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48). Throughout his ministry Jesus honoured children, saying that if one wants to become truly great one must become like a little child (Matt 18:1–5, Mark 9:33–37, Luke 9:46–47). Therefore the church and all believers have a special responsibility to care for all children and see that no harm comes to them. How we treat children is a test of the genuineness of our faith. God calls us to make every effort to protect children and treat them with the love, care, and respect that is rightfully theirs.

Commitment to Child Safety

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments. See Code of Conduct and LCA Standards of Ethical Behaviour.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Our children

Our policies and programming decisions are made with our children's needs in mind. Respect for the children we serve is paramount. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Our staff and volunteers

This policy guides our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. We welcome input from our staff, volunteers, and congregation regarding the code of conduct.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Lutheran Church of Australia Professional Standards Department, the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the [Working with Children Check](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information.

We carry out reference checks and police record checks to ensure that we are recruiting the right people. The collective reference of the Church Council may take the place of personal referees for members in good standing of St. Paul's Lutheran Church. Police record checks are used only for the purposes of recruitment and are discarded after the recruitment process is complete.

If during the recruitment process a person's records indicate a criminal history then the person will be given the opportunity to provide further information and context.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.¹

¹ A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence>.

- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.²
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.³

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks.

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will allow opportunity for our congregation to contribute when necessary. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability. *Next date for review is December 2018.*

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff and volunteers are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

² Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence) <www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence>.

³ Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first) <www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/guide-to-making-a-report-to-child-protection-or-child-first>.