

Safe Ministries Policy and Procedures
Vision Church
June 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement

Vision Christian Fellowship Inc (Vision Church), located at 1 Lithgow Street Fyshwick, ACT is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for children and vulnerable people.

It is a goal of all Vision Church ministries to be a safe haven for God's glory.

1.2 Scope

This Safe Ministries Policy and its included Procedures aim to reduce the risk of abuse occurring and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur. This Policy applies to all ministries authorised by or under the control of Vision Church.

1.3 Authority

These are the Policy and Procedures of Vision Church and were reviewed and endorsed by its Board and adopted for use on 27th June 2023.

Vision Church is committed to implementing this Safe Ministries Policy and its included Procedures and to training our leaders in its content and application.

1.4 Definitions

Child: Any person under the age of 18

Vulnerable Adult: someone who is or may be in need of community services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself and unable to protect him/herself against harm or exploitation by another person.

Abuse can consist of one or more of the following:-

Physical Abuse: Any non-accidental physical injury resulting from practices including hitting, punching, kicking, shaking, burning, biting, pulling hair, and alcohol or other drug administration.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual act or threat to perform such upon another person. It occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. It does not necessarily involve genital contact, but is the act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual, but the validity is negated by the power differential.

Emotional Abuse: The chronic attitude or behaviour of one person which is directed at another person or the creation of an emotional environment which erodes development, self esteem and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising or chronic or extreme domestic violence in another person's presence.

Neglect: Characterised by the failure to provide for a person's basic needs, which jeopardises or impairs a person's development.

Helpers: Any non-paid person 16 years and over who is invited by a ministry leader to assist them in ministry, including parent helpers whose children are participating in the ministry activity.

Ministry Leader: Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is recognised and authorised by pastoral staff as the leader of a key ministry area.

Team Members: Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of people placed in their care having been appointed by pastoral staff to a position in a key ministry area of Vision Church.

Key Ministry Area: Any organised activity that is authorised by Vision Church. Includes but is not limited to Youth Group, Vision Children groups and crèche, Scripture in Schools, and Alpha Course.

Pastoral Staff: Pastors employed by Vision Church.

Volunteers: A collective term for all unpaid people in roles as helpers, team members or ministry leaders.

Workers: A collective term for all paid and unpaid people in roles as helpers, team members or ministry leaders.

2. Policy Review

This Safe Ministries Policy and its included Procedures will be reviewed annually at a Vision Church Board meeting.

3. Obligations

3.1 Spiritual

The core beliefs of Vision Church require that all people are treated with love and dignity. All are to be cared for, particularly those who are vulnerable and in need of nurture and protection.

3.2 Legal

Vision Church staff and volunteers are subject to the Federal and State legislations and principles established through common law.

3.3 Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as abuse, but are unacceptable behaviour for staff and volunteers of Vision Church. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual or offensive nature
- Coarse language, especially of a sexual nature
- Suggestive gestures and/or remarks
- Jokes of a sexual nature
- Inappropriate touching
- Inappropriate literature and digital media (eg. M, MA, R or X rated material used with children, and may include PG depending on the age of the child)
- Recording or filming without prior consent
- Acts of violence committed by staff or volunteers in the course of a church activity.

The age of the individual is recognised as one of the determinants in deciding what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ministry leaders will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

4. Selection and Screening

Staff and volunteers involved in any activity with children or vulnerable adults with Vision Church must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to people commencing as volunteers in a key ministry area involving children or vulnerable adults, the following precautions will be taken:

- Volunteer ministry leaders and team members will have attended Vision Church on a regular basis for not less than 6 months.
- All ministry leader and team appointments will be screened by pastoral staff for suitability; considering faith journey, character and skills. This process will include contacting two referees supplied by the candidate.
- Volunteers serving in a Vision Church ministry involving children and/or vulnerable people will annually complete a Safe Ministries Check form.
- An up to date Working with Vulnerable People card (ACT) which complies with legislative requirements of the ACT will be required, sighted and a scanned copy taken prior to the **ministry leader, team member or helper** commencing their proposed role. In the case of Special Religious Education in NSW schools, a Working with Children Clearance Check (WWCC) is necessary. Scanned copies of WWVP cards will be held on a secure database, and the Working with Children's Check number registered with the NSW Office of Children's Guardians where necessary.
- All helpers providing assistance in children's ministry must be fully supervised at all times by an appointed team member or ministry leader.

- Where Vision Church has identified that a potential volunteer or ministry leader has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence they cannot, under any circumstances, be considered for child related ministries or ministry with vulnerable adults.
- If an *alleged* offence/incident, either historic or recent, that is violent or sexual in nature comes to light involving a current serving volunteer or ministry leader, they will be immediately stood down from all child related ministries or ministry with vulnerable adults until the matter has been fully investigated and liability established. If liability is proven the person will not be able to return to ministry in these areas.
- If a **proven** offence/incident, either historic or recent, that is violent or sexual in nature comes to light involving a current serving volunteer or ministry leader, they will be immediately and permanently stood down from all child related ministries or ministry with vulnerable adults.
- These offences do not necessarily preclude the applicant from serving in other ways and the church, after careful consideration, might welcome the applicant's contribution in more appropriate areas.

5. Training

All leaders will be provided with a copy of this Policy and made aware of its content and application.

All ministry leaders and team leaders in Vision Church Children's and Youth ministry programs will undertake Safe Ministry online training, with a refresher every 3 years. (See <https://safeministry.training>)

Volunteers assisting with Christian Education in Schools (CEIS) in Canberra schools need to attend training provided by the CEIS team (see <https://www.ceis.org.au>).

Volunteers teaching Special Religious Education (SRE) in NSW must receive initial and ongoing training in classroom management, as well as in child protection, accessed through external authorised providers. Supporting documentation will be kept on file upon completion.

6. Procedures to create a Safe Environment

In addition to the Procedures listed under the heading Selection and Screening, the following ministry specific procedures will be followed:

Incidents of abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, two team members or a team member and helper should always be present when working with or supervising children.

All Children's ministry spaces have been fitted with a door with glass panels.

6.1 Procedures specific to particular Key Ministry Areas

6.1.1 Vision Children

Parents will be asked to take their children to the toilet before attending Vision Children on a Sunday. Children not independent in toileting will require parental assistance.

Parents are required to sign their child/ren in and out of the Preschool to year two room.

An attendance sheet will be marked by the room leader for all children attending Vision Children.

Parents are to complete an annual child's enrolment form for each of their children who are involved in a Vision Church ministry, and to ensure that relevant details are kept up to date.

6.1.2 Crèche

Parents have responsibility for changing their own child's nappy and will be notified during the sermon if necessary.

Parents are required to sign their child/ren in and out of the creche room.

Parents are to complete an annual child's enrolment form for each of their children who are involved in a Vision Church ministry, and to ensure that relevant details are kept up to date.

6.1.3 Youth Group

Ministry leaders and team members will not visit children in their homes unless a parent is present or another team member accompanies them.

When transporting individual children, leaders should gain direct parental permission. Leaders will take children directly to and from arranged venues and will not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.

All one-on-one pastoral care and/or praying for a child is to be carried out within sight of another team member or within a public space and not behind closed doors.

Youth group leaders are only to have social media connection with youth group attendees when initiated by the child, and parental permission will be sought on the annual Youth enrolment form.

All parent helpers, including at camps, require a WWVP card.

An attendance sheet will be kept for all Vision Church youth group events held on church premises or starting on church premises.

Parents are to complete an annual child's enrolment form for each of their children who are involved in a Vision Church ministry, and to ensure that relevant details are kept up to date. (see www.visionchurch.org.au/vision-youth-registration)

Leaders have the right to ask people to leave who have no valid reason to be present at a child-related activity. Police will be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

7. Conduct

7.1.1 Conduct of Children

Ministry leaders, team members and helpers serving Vision Church are responsible for a group's safety. If a child does not conduct him/herself in an orderly manner that protects and respects other group members, then the child will be removed and referred to their parent or guardian.

8. Alcohol and Other Drugs

The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on church grounds or during an activity is not allowed or condoned by any leader. Any child found to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parent or guardian contacted so the child can be returned home immediately.

A parent or guardian will provide a letter to the ministry leader if a child in their care is required to take prescription medication.

9. Reporting Procedures

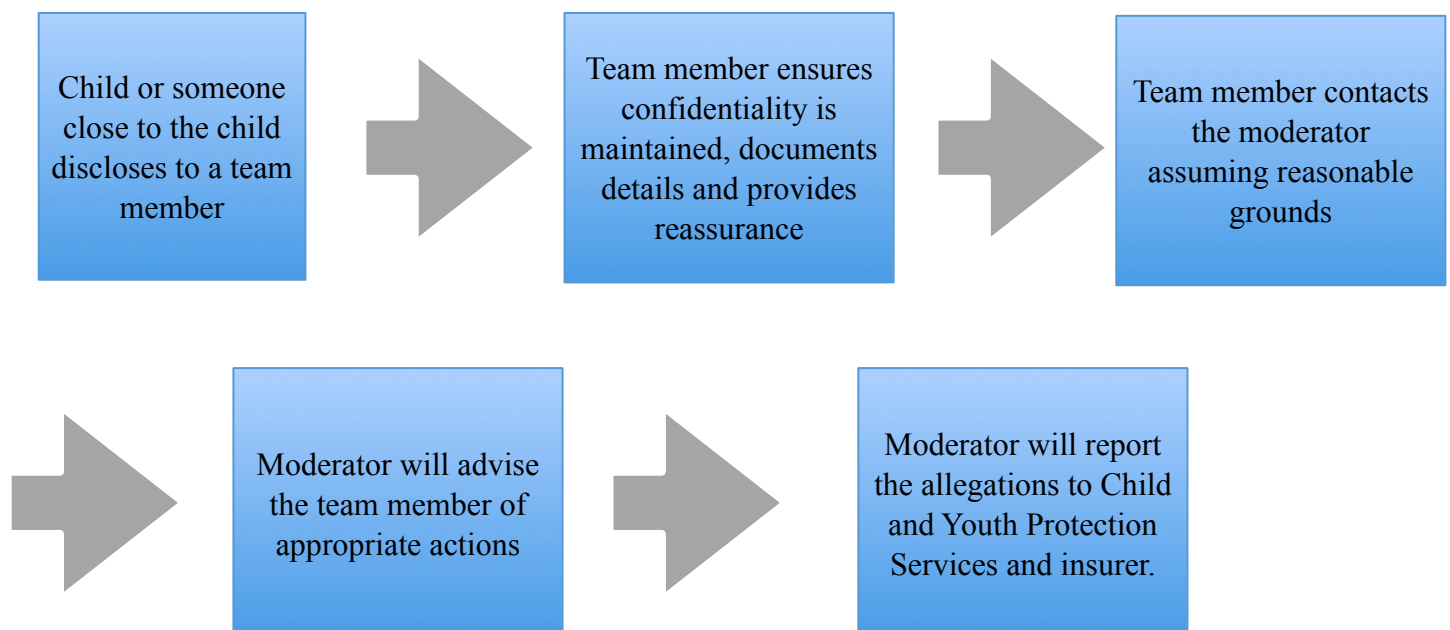
9.1 Alternative Moderators

Alternative moderators will be appointed by Vision Church with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations that arise within a Vision Church event. The name and address and contact telephone number of each of the moderators will be freely available to all ministry leaders and team members. The people appointed as moderators are:

Mr Peter Moyle

Mrs Alison Just

9.2 Reporting and escalation procedures for handling allegations of child abuse within a Vision Church event:



If there are reasonable grounds (see below) to suspect a child has been or is suffering abuse, Care and Protection Services and Vision Church's insurer will be contacted immediately. The Australian Federal Police will be contacted if there is believed to be any immediate life threatening risk.

Reasonable grounds can be assumed when:

1. A child discloses that s/he has been abused, and/or
 2. Someone close to a child (eg. sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of the child.
- Any disclosure by a child or reports by someone close to the child of suspected abuse occurring within the ministries of Vision Church will be documented promptly, including reporting and escalation procedures followed. The documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.
 - Where an allegation is made against a Vision Church leader, team member, helper or pastoral staff, the accused person will be removed from all ministry pending the outcome of all investigations.

9.3 Relevant Phone Numbers:

• Australian Federal Police	• 131 444
• Child and Youth Protection Services (24 hour service) For an incident occurring within the ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1300 556 729 • childprotection@act.gov.au
• Child Protection Help Line (24 Hour service) For an incident occurring within NSW where child is at risk of significant harm	• 132111 (general public line)
• Ansvar/EA Insurance	• 03 98906851

9.4 Reporting Child protection concerns relating to children attending Vision church and connected ministry programs but occurring outside Vision Church events.

9.4.1 Workers (volunteer or paid) will report (as soon as is practicable) when:

- a. a child who attends Vision church/ministry programs discloses that they are being harmed or are at risk of being harmed
- b. another person discloses that a child attending Vision church/ministry programs is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed
- c. the worker has a reasonable concern that a child attending Vision church/ministry programs is at risk of harm

9.4.2 How to respond

- a. When a disclosure occurs or there is reasonable concern for the safety of a child, go directly to one of the pastoral team who will take action and phone the appropriate services (eg. police and/or Child and Youth Protection Services and follow the requirements as mandatory reporters.
- b. Disclosures “Dos and Don’ts” for workers (relevant for first-hand disclosures from a child or second-hand disclosures from either a child or adult about a child.)

Do:

- i. Listen carefully, do not add anything to what the person says (you will need to write this down, exactly)
- ii. Believe the person and what they are telling you.
- iii. Reassure the person that they have done the right thing in speaking to you
- iv. Inform the person that you need to tell people who will try to help
- v. Ensure that the person is not in immediate danger

Don't:

- i. Don't start an investigation into the information disclosed. Avoid leading questions, and keep the conversation brief as this may be seen to have influenced the information, which may jeopardise an investigation.
- ii. Don't promise the person that the abuse will stop
- iii. Don't tell anyone who does not need to know

9.4.3 Reporting and escalation procedures for reporting Child protection concerns relating to children attending Vision church and connected ministry programs but occurring outside Vision Church events.