

Faith Church (Sunshine Coast) Ltd
ACN 665 810 551



FAITH CHURCH

Working With Children Incident Management Process

1. Purpose

The purpose of this process is to assist Faith Church (Sunshine Coast) Limited (FCSCCL) to meet the organisation's obligations for reporting behaviours of concern toward children and youth in church communities by ensuring an appropriate incident response is followed. The document outlines responsibilities, principles and processes to follow.

It forms an important part of the organisation's commitment to creating a culture of safety and protection of children and youth, and together with the Working With Children Policy and the Leader Commitment (Code of Conduct), forms part of the Working With Children Procedure.

This process should be followed by Church Council Contacts when they receive a report of an incident relating to the safety or mistreatment of a child or youth within FCSCCL programs.

Responding to incident reports on a case by case basis allows Church Council Contacts the ability to ensure their course of action is suitable for the incident, without having to work through fixed steps which may be unnecessary in each case, and allows for the development of particular steps more suitable for the persons and reports raised.

This document should be made easily accessible to volunteers, children, youth under the age of 18 and their families.

2. Principles

When incidents are reported, the response will be guided by the following principles:

1. All incidents will be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.
2. The response will protect the confidentiality, dignity, health and well-being of all individuals involved (including any individual suspected of behaving inappropriately).
3. Special consideration will be given to protecting the interest of children or youth (if they are in any way involved), and we recognise that this may require expert involvement to assist the incident response.
4. We will promote a culture where all leaders, volunteers and participants are encouraged to raise concerns and report incidents as they happen. We will make this process accessible to everyone and ensure we meet our reporting obligations (to Church Council Contacts, regulators, law agencies and FCSCCL's insurance provider), on every occasion.

At each point in the process, the Church Council Contacts will be required to:

- a. Agree on a reasonable course of action based on the information at hand and apply the principles on a case by case basis; and

- b. Ensure the incident and outcomes are thoroughly documented and saved as a record of decisions and any actions taken which includes clearly outlining roles, responsibilities and follow up.

A summary of incidents and responses should be regularly reviewed by the Church Council to implement risk management strategies which focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and youth.

3. Process Overview

1. Record Details of the Incident

The Incident Process should be initiated when a Church Council Contact(s) receives a report of an incident.

When an incident is reported, it is important to record as much detail as possible. The details of those reporting abuse should be kept private and confidential, only made accessible to Church Council Contacts and to individuals and organisations who are legally required to be advised.

Significant elements to record include:

- a. Church Council Contact name (who received the report);
- b. Date received;
- c. Name of person who raised the incident;
- d. Date incident occurred;
- e. Initial details of incident (record as much detail as can be recalled. If possible, ask the reporter to email their report);
- f. Record further details of the incident;

It may be necessary to ask further questions of the person reporting the incident. (However, if the reporter is also the alleged victim, it may be appropriate to seek external advice prior to asking further questions), which may include:

- i. Exactly when did the incident occur? Time of day etc;
- ii. Was any other person present at the time of the incident?
- iii. What happened prior to and after the incident?
- iv. Where was the reporter when the incident occurred? Were there things the reporter could not see when the incident was occurring?

- v. Has the reporter observed a similar occurrence prior to or since the incident?
- vi. Has anything else occurred in relation to the incident since the incident?

2. Work through the steps related to category of report

Share the report details with the other Church Council Contacts, then together work through each category, only skipping if all Church Council Contacts unanimously agree it can be skipped.

Categories: Is the incident about:

1. A child or youth?; Follow process in Annexure A; and/or
2. A Church Council Contact?; Follow process in Annexure B; and/or
3. A church leader or volunteer? Follow process in Annexure C; and/or
4. A church participant? Follow process in Annexure D; and/or
5. A church program? Follow process in Annexure E; and/or
6. An incident outside the church? Follow process in Annexure F.

Annexure A

1. A child or youth

Note:

- This step should only be used when there is a report about a particular (named/identifiable) child.
- If the report is not about a particular child, but rather about a program involving children or a leader of children, this step can be skipped.

The Process

- a. Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a particular child or youth was/is at significant risk of being harmed.

Note: In the State of Queensland the abuse and neglect types that must be reported are: (i) physical abuse; and (ii) sexual abuse. Reporting is mandatory when there is a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse.

Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It is possible that the details of a report could be nonsensical; or the claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worth of further investigation.

- b. Determine what, if any, external agencies or organisations might need to be contacted. The steps which may be included where applicable are:
 - i. Making an official report to the Department of Family Services. This might be actioned by assisting the reporter contact or by another person;
 - ii. Contacting the Police to inquire if they need to be informed;
 - iii. Making a Police report;
 - iv. Contacting the organisation's insurance provider;
 - v. Contacting the State Ombudsman to inquire if formal notification is required;
 - vi. Contacting any pastoral care person to provide support to the child or youth; and
 - vii. Include the name of the person responsible for taking those steps.
- c. Record and make plans regarding any further steps, processes or guidelines any of the agencies recommend taking. Include the name of the person responsible for taking each of these steps.

Annexure B

2. A Church Council Contact

If the incident involves a Church Council Contact, either current or previous, or if the incident involves any person immediately related to a Church Council Contact, either current or previous, the incident must be referred to Donovan Winkler Lawyers, Ashgrove Qld, Ph: 7 3188 5124, who will appoint an appropriately qualified person to conduct an external investigation of the incident.

If the incident involves a current Church Council Contact or a person immediately related to a current Church Council Contact, they must be automatically suspended from any further work or other duties within the organisation (if the incident relates to sexual abuse) until the outcome of the external investigation is complete.

Record the outcome of the investigation and any action taken by recommendation from the investigation. Include the name of the person responsible for implementing the recommendation/s.

Annexure C

3. Church Leader or Volunteer

A Leader could be a ministry leader, a youth leader, a children's church leader or a volunteer within the organisation.

Note:

- If the incident relates to the behaviour of a leader, then the organisation may bear the responsibility for the leader's actions;
- If multiple leaders are implicated in the report, the Church Council Contacts should implement this process for each leader individually; and
- If no specific leader is identified, it may be appropriate to treat the issue as a Church Program incident which relates to the general behaviour of leaders within the program.

The Process

- a Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a leader has behaved inappropriately. Record any notes or reasons for the determination. It is possible that claims made about leaders could be accurate but not describe inappropriate behaviour; or claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further investigation.
- b Determine if outside agencies should be contacted about the suspected behaviour of the leader. It may be suitable to contact the Police if the suspected behaviour could be considered illegal. Other possible agencies to contact are the organisation's insurance provider, denominational support teams or organisation partners. Record who will contact which agency and any details or recommendations resulting from that contact. This may be done with or through the person who originally made the report.
- c Determine what steps should be taken to investigate the suspected behaviour. The appropriate method of investigation will depend on the circumstances and the severity of the suspected behaviour and on the suspected leader's role in the organisation:
 - i. If the suspected incident occurred outside the responsibility of the organisation; and the suspected leader was not acting (or could not be reasonable thought to be acting) as a representative of the organisation, it may not be appropriate for the organisation to conduct an investigation;
 - ii. If the suspected behaviour is severe misconduct, it may be appropriate to arrange an independent investigator providing a level of transparency and separation from the organisation. The independent investigator should provide a report and recommendations to the Church Council Contacts for their review and action;

- iii. If the suspected behaviour is not severe misconduct, it may be appropriate to appoint a person within the organisation to investigate the suspected behaviour;
 - iv. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to temporarily remove the suspected leader from various responsibilities during the investigation;
 - v. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team in order to provide pastoral care;
 - vi. Record the steps are to be taken, including who will action those steps;
 - vii. Record any resulting decisions and recommendations provided by an investigator if applicable.
- d Determine if the suspected leader should be suspended from some or all their responsibilities

There may be reasons to consider suspending a suspected leader from their duties or responsibilities, and to what extent:

- i. If the leader is suspected of sexual abuse, the leader must be immediately suspended from their duties and responsibilities with the organisation;
 - ii. It may be appropriate to remove the leader from responsibilities where they would be brought into any or substantial contact with the suspected victim;
 - iii. It may be appropriate not to remove the leader but reduce their responsibilities for a time to ensure they are aware of the appropriate behaviour of a leader in their role;
 - iv. It may not be necessary to take any action related to the suspected leader.
- e Record the decision and what, if any, steps are to be taken, and who is responsible for taking those steps. They may include:
- i. Communicating with the suspected leader;
 - ii. Communicating with the suspected leader's supervisor;
 - iii. Communicating with the suspected victim.

Annexure D

4. Church Participant

A participant is a person who attends a program or event run by the organisation.

Note:

- Only follow this step if there is a report raised about the behaviour or conduct of a particular person which occurred in the context of a program run by the organisation. If the concern is regarding a person's behaviour outside the context of an organisational program, please go to Annexure F, An Incident Outside the Church;
- If multiple participants have been implicated, the Church Council Contacts should follow the process for each participant individually;
- If no specific participant is able to be identified, it may be more appropriate to treat the issue as a Church Program incident – Annexure E.

The Process

1. Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the participant has behaved inappropriately.

Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that claims made about a participant could be accurate, but not describe inappropriate behaviour; or the claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further investigation.

2. Determine if the suspected behaviour is of such a nature that any State, Federal or other organisation might need to be notified.

It may be suitable to contact the Police if the suspected behaviour could be considered illegal. Other possible agencies could be the organisation's insurance provider, denominational support teams, or organisation partners.

Record who will contact which agency and any details or recommendations resulting from that contact. This may be done with or through the person who originally made the report.

3. Determine what steps should be taken to investigate the report.

It may be appropriate to investigate the suspicion further. Depending on the nature of the incident or the relationships between the parties it may be appropriate to appoint an independent investigator. The independent investigator should provide a report and recommendations to the Church Council Contacts for their review and action.

Otherwise (if appropriate) decide who, within the organisation, will investigate and record their report.

4. Determine what, if any, steps should be taken regarding the suspected incident and participant

Depending on the suspected or potential severity of the incident, there may be arrange of options to consider taking in response to the concern:

- I. It may be appropriate to appoint someone to speak with the suspected participant about standards of behaviour expected for organisation participants;
 - II. It may be appropriate to set out some particular standards of behaviour for this participant to ensure future behaviours are appropriate;
 - III. It may be appropriate to request the participant does not attend various programs for a time, or until various criteria are met;
 - IV. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.
5. Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.

Record any resulting decisions or recommendations provided by an investigator (if applicable).

Annexure E

5. Church Program

A program is an event, group or session which is run by the organisation volunteers. It includes spaces, environments and culture. It may also include any online environments used for the program by leaders or participants.

If a report is received about leadership in general, or the general behaviour of participants, it might be suitable to use the following steps to respond:

1. Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a program is unsafe.

Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that claims made about a program could be accurate, but not describe inappropriate culture or an unsafe environment; or the concerns could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further investigation.

2. Determine what steps will be taken to investigate the incident.

Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.

Record any resulting decisions and recommendations.

3. Determine what, if any, steps should be taken regarding the program incident.

Depending on the severity of the concerns about the program and the result and recommendations of any investigation, there may be a variety of steps to consider taking.

- a. It may be appropriate to gather some or all of the program leaders to re-establish appropriate culture standards and acceptable behaviours;
- b. It may be appropriate to gather some or all of the program participants to increase awareness of organisational policies and appropriate behaviours.
- c. It may be appropriate to conduct a program risk assessment;
- d. It may be appropriate to recommend updated systems or processes to be used within the program by the leaders;
- e. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.

4. Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.

Annexure F

6. An Incident Outside the Church

If the incident occurred outside the context of a church program and the person of concern was not acting as a representative of the church, the incident is most likely outside the direct responsibility of the organisation.

However, as responsible members of the community, there may be appropriate steps to take in response to external incidents.

1. Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the concern is valid.

Record any notes or reasons for the determination. It's possible that the concerns raised could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.

2. Determine what, if any, steps should be taken about the incident.

Depending on the severity of the severity of the incident, it may be appropriate to follow one or several of the following steps:

- i. Contact CrimeStoppers, the Police or other emergency services;
 - ii. Contact Family and Community Services;
 - iii. If there is a report about a person who is in a position of influence in another organisation, it may be appropriate to help the reporter raise their concern through the appropriate channels in that organisation;
 - iv. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.
3. Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.