

# 1.0 - Safe Ministry Policy

## Introduction

### 1. Plain English Summary

Southern Christian Church is committed to keeping people safe in our ministries, and this is led by our Administration Committee and our Safe Ministry contacts.

### 2. Relevant legislation

- *Children and Community Services Act 2004*
- *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004*
- *Family Court Act 1997 – section 9A definition of Family Violence*
- *Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1931 (WA)*

### 3. Definitions

- **Abuse** – all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a person, and includes actions that result in actual or potential harm to a person.
- **Sexual abuse** – means any abuse or assault of sexual nature, sexual molestation, indecent exposure, sexual harassment or intimidation
- **Child** – Anyone under the age of 18.
- **Grooming** – Describes the preparatory stage of child sexual abuse and exploitation, often undertaken to gain the trust and/or compliance of the child or young person and to establish secrecy and silence to avoid disclosure. A child or young person’s parents/carers or other significant adults (including organisations) may also be groomed by someone intending to harm a child. Grooming may occur in person or online.”
- **Ministry staff and leaders** includes anybody on paid staff, and anybody in a defined leadership role, including elders, administrative committee members, pastors, directors, team leaders and small group leaders (note small group leaders are the people who have been given primary responsibility for looking after a group).
- **Partner** means somebody who has committed to grow and be involved in Southern Christian Church, and who has had their application endorsed by a leader.
- **Public premises** are premises where you would reasonably expect any member of the public to visit or walk past at any time, and include cafes, restaurants and libraries during normal business hours.
- **Private premises** are premises where one would not reasonably expect members of the public to visit or walk past, and includes homes, totally enclosed, private office spaces and vehicles.

- **Relevant leaders** means all staff, leaders, pastors, coordinators, volunteers, trainees and anyone working on behalf of Southern Christian Church, whose usual duties involve or are likely to involve caring for, supervising, teaching or otherwise taking responsibility for children or vulnerable people.
- **Safe Ministry Lead** – refers to the member of church staff appointed by the Lead Pastor who will take operational responsibility for implementing the requirements in our Safe Ministry policy framework.
- **Safe Ministry Contact** – refers to at least two designated contacts who are members of the church, appointed by the Lead Pastor, who will be responsible for receiving reports about incidents and other concerns from people within the church community, and responding according to the Management Process for Incidents and other Concerns.
- **Safe Ministry Governance Officers** – refers to at least one designated officer who is a member of the Administration Committee. These officers will assist the Administration Committee in providing high-level governance and oversight in relation to safety and risk within the church, including through reviewing Risk Assessment Plans.
- **Semi-private premises** are premises where you might reasonably expect members of the public to walk past, or other leaders or church members to drop in without warning:
  - At present, this includes the offices at Gateway Community Church, given:
    - another church operates from the same premises; and
    - neighbouring businesses operate during normal business hours.
  - Semi-private premises also includes private homes when other adults are present somewhere on the premises, even if those adults are not within line of sight.
- **Reasonable grounds** – a person has reasonable grounds to believe something when, based on the information available, a reasonable person would form that belief. It is not the same as having proof, but it is more than mere rumour or speculation.
- **Vulnerable person** means anybody who may be at additional risk of harm because of a significant power imbalance:
  - A person may be vulnerable due to age, disability, mental illness, homelessness, sexuality or ethnic or cultural background, where these factors create a power imbalance, and might prevent the person from being able to raise any concerns;
  - For the purpose of Southern Christian Church’s safeguarding policies and procedures, a person under the age of 18 will always be considered to be a ‘vulnerable person’;
  - In other circumstances, if a staff member or ministry leader is unsure, they should assume that the person is considered vulnerable for the purposes of this policy, or should check with a Safe Ministry Contact.

## 4. Background & Governance

This policy outlines the high level, underlying principles that direct our approach to safeguarding vulnerable people involved with Southern Christian Church. It applies to all staff, leaders, pastors, coordinators, volunteers, trainees and anyone working on behalf of Southern Christian Church, whose usual duties involve or are likely to involve contact with a child or vulnerable person. This policy should be read with the other safe ministry policies and procedures which are detailed at the end of this document, and which explain how Southern Christian Church intends to implement these policies in its ministries and through its leadership structures.

To ensure the safety of people is valued across the various leadership structures of the church, and to provide appropriate checks and balances, safe ministry responsibilities will be embedded both within the administration committee and within the ministry staff team. The administration committee is responsible for overseeing the safe ministry framework, including approving and reviewing policies. Staff members with responsible for safe ministry are responsible for coordinating the implementation of that framework.

The Administration Committee of Southern Christian Church takes responsibility for ensuring safe ministry policies are reviewed regularly and that a commitment to safety and wellbeing is embedded in all levels of the organisation's culture.<sup>1</sup> Formal responsibility for review and implementation of this policy sits with the Administration Committee ('the Committee'). The Committee must designate at least one member of the Committee to be a Safe Ministry Officer. Safe Ministry Officers will assist the Committee in providing high level governance and oversight in relation to safe ministry matters, including by reviewing Risk Assessment Plans.

The Committee meets quarterly, and Safe Ministry will be a standing item on the Committee's agenda. All reports about incidents and other concerns will be tabled at the Committee's quarterly meeting, and reviewed by the Committee, with the opportunity to discuss and make recommendations. The Committee may also consider any other safe ministry matters under this item, including issues relating to Risk Assessment Plans and policy amendments.

The Lead Pastor will appoint a member of church ministry staff to be the Safe Ministry Lead, and this person will champion a safeguarding culture across the ministries of the church, as well as having operational responsibility for implementing the requirements in our safe ministry policy framework, including coordinating volunteer training and screening, risk assessments and incident reporting.

The Lead Pastor will also appoint two Safe Ministry Contacts, who will be coordinated by the Safe Ministry Lead, and who are responsible for receiving reports about incidents and other concerns from people within the church community.

**See further: 1.1 Management Process for Incidents and Other Concerns**

## Safe Ministry Commitment

### 1. Commitment to Safeguard Vulnerable People

We are committed to the biblical call to care for the vulnerable by actively preventing harm and abuse, and by seeking to provide safe programs and ministries.<sup>2</sup> We are also responsible and accountable for fulfilling our obligations under State and Federal law to protect children and vulnerable people.

---

<sup>1</sup> As per point 1 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Matthew 18:1-6; Mark 10:13-16

We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable people (including children, families, people with disability and the elderly) are informed and involved in decisions that considerably affect them. We recognise that the diverse needs of vulnerable people should be taken into account and that their concerns be taken seriously.<sup>3</sup> We are committed to embedding this care into all levels of our leadership and culture.

## 2. Commitment to Screening and Training Relevant Leaders

We are committed to ensuring all Relevant Leaders are screened, appropriately supported and trained through the process outlined below.<sup>4</sup> This is covered in more detail in the Safe Ministry Training and Compliance Procedure.

1. All Relevant Leaders must be Partners at Southern Christian Church. They will have their potential roles and responsibilities clearly outlined for them as they start their role;
2. All Relevant Leaders must provide at least two referees who can confirm the proposed leader is suitable to work with vulnerable people and that there is no reason the proposed leader should not be appointed into such a role;
3. All Relevant leaders must complete an approved Safe Ministry Training Course (e.g. <https://safeministrycheck.com.au/>) which outlines appropriate behaviour including how to minimise the chances of harm and abuse, as well as training in how to identify and report cases of abuse;
4. Relevant leaders will have committed to the leader's Code of Conduct and behave as followers of Jesus and be willing to be held accountable for their behaviour; and
5. If a Relevant leader is working with children & youth, they must have their State "Working With Children Check" verified.

No-one with a criminal record of violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, molestation or similar offences is allowed to be involved in children's or youth ministry at Southern Christian Church, or is to be employed at Southern Christian Church.

The Training and Compliance Procedure outlines some additional requirements for other ministry leaders who do not have direct responsibility for caring for children or other vulnerable people. For example, before any person starts formally serving in a team within Southern Christian Church, they are required to:

- Commit to the Code of Conduct, which outlines a range of commitments designed to keep people safe; and
- Provide a self-disclosure in relation to any history of having committed abuse.

---

<sup>3</sup> As per Points 2, 3 & 4 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

<sup>4</sup> As per Point 5, 7 & 8 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

**See further:**

- **1.2 – Code of Conduct**
- **1.4 Safe Ministry Training and Compliance Procedure**

### 3. Commitment to Providing Safe and Accessible Programs

We are committed to ensuring that our programs, ministries and events are safe and appropriate for those attending. Careful consideration will be given to the activities chosen, the venue, safe ratios of supervision, appropriate toileting practices, transportation, work health and safety, parental or guardian permission and confidentiality of records kept.

To help maintain appropriate standards, we will give all relevant leaders access to ongoing training and adequate supervision in their roles and responsibilities.

Where a ministry leader is setting up a new program or event, or making significant changes to a program or event, that ministry leader must complete a Risk Assessment Plan before the event, program or change occurs, and submit to the Safe Ministry Lead for approval. Before the Risk Assessment is finalised, the Safe Ministry Lead must then send the Risk Assessment Plan to the Safe Ministry Governance Officers for the opportunity to make recommendations.

**See further:**

- **1.4 Safe Ministry Training and Compliance Procedure**
- **1.6 - Risk Assessment and Planning Procedure**
- **Southern Kids Policy**
- **Southern Kids - Creche Procedure**
- **Southern Kids – School Aged Program Procedure**

### 4. Commitment to Appropriately Respond to Concerns and Complaints

We are committed to creating a culture where people feel safe to speak out about inappropriate behaviour without fear of being rejected or ridiculed. We are committed to listening and responding appropriately to concerns and complaints about behaviour and safety at Southern Christian Church, and will follow the process set out in the Management Process for Incidents and Other Concerns (1.1). Throughout this process we are committed to protecting the confidentiality, dignity, health and well-being of all individuals involved. Any child-related issues will be managed with a focus on the interest of the child, and when appropriate, and will be reported to the Department of Communities.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> As per Point 6 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

All reports will be managed by the Southern Christian Church Safe Ministry Contacts, and reported to the Committee at its quarterly meeting.

*Safe Ministry Contacts*

Liz Shanhun (also Safe Ministry Lead)	0479 173 815	<a href="mailto:liz@southern.org.au">liz@southern.org.au</a>
Ashley Horton	0417 980 293	<a href="mailto:ash@southern.org.au">ash@southern.org.au</a>
Robyn Hofstra	0416 633 739	<a href="mailto:robyn.hofstra@outlook.com">robyn.hofstra@outlook.com</a>

The Safe Ministry Contacts will work together, coordinated by the Safe Ministry Lead, to follow the Management Process for Incidents and other Concerns.<sup>6</sup> This includes reviewing and responding to any incidents, reporting internally to the Administration Committee, and where applicable, reporting externally (e.g. reporting any reasonable belief of child sexual abuse to the Department of Communities, any criminal activity to Police, and the possibility of reporting allegations of abuse to the State Ombudsman and the insurer of Southern Christian Church). In certain incidents the Safe Ministry Contacts will appoint an Independent Ministry Investigator to investigate allegations of inappropriate behaviour.

**See further: 1.1 Management Process for Incidents and other Concerns**

Approved by Administration Committee: **25 November 2023**

Due for review: **November 2024**

--

This policy should be read with the following Safe Ministry policies and procedures:

- **1.1 – Management Process for Incidents and other Concerns**
- **1.2 – Code of Conduct**
- **1.3 – Recruitment, Investigation and Induction of Staff Procedure**
- **1.4 – Safe Ministry Training and Compliance Procedure**
- **1.5 – Safe Working Practices for Ministry Leaders Procedure**
- **1.6 – Risk Assessment and Planning Procedure**

In relation to kids' ministry, this policy should be read with the following policies and procedures:

- **Southern Kids Policy**
- **Southern Kids – Creche procedure**
- **Southern Kids – Primary School Aged Program procedure**

---

<sup>6</sup> As per Point 10 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations