SAFE SPACES & MINISTRY POLICY

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Background & Governance

This policy outlines the underlying principles that direct our approach to safeguarding vulnerable people involved with Eastside Community Church (ECC). It applies to all staff, leaders, pastors, coordinators, volunteers, trainees and anyone working on behalf of ECC.

The elders of ECC take responsibility for ensuring these principles are reviewed regularly and embedded in the organisation culture at all levels.[1]

Its continual implementation is required to ensure:

- a culture of safety is maintained in the Church;
- that the Church is compliant with legislation relating to reporting harm and protecting Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults; and
- that the Church meets its insurance requirements in the area of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

As a Christian Church, we are committed to teaching and upholding the historic, orthodox Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. This commitment shapes our care and teaching and provides an objective basis for the value of each human being as an image bearer of God.

Flowing out of this, we believe that a commitment to safe ministry spaces is grounded in the truth that all people are created in the image of God. In particular, the Church is committed to the Biblical call to care for the vulnerable and acknowledges God's special concern for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed.[2] We view safe ministry as a mandate from God to ensure safety and protection, especially for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults in our community.

With this in mind, Eastside has adopted the following policy to:

- Provide a safeguarding framework to inform, guide and support the stakeholders who work with and participate in our ministries and activities; and
- Fulfil our legal and insurance obligations in relation to:
    - staff and volunteers engaged in working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults; and
    - reporting matters, including child sexual abuse, sexual misconduct and reportable conduct involving a child, to government authorities.

This Safeguarding Policy outlines the Church's commitment to comply with the 10 Child Safe Standards and the Universal Principle of Queensland's *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*:

[1] This policy is in accordance with the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157; As per Point 1 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations
[2] Isaiah 1:17; Proverbs 31:8; John 15:12; Mark 10:14

Mandatory Requirement 1 - Leadership and Culture – Child safety and wellbeing are embedded in leadership, governance, and culture.

Mandatory Requirement 2 - Voice of Children – Children are informed of their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously.

Mandatory Requirement 3 - Family and Community – Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Mandatory Requirement 4 - Equity and Diversity – Equity is upheld, and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice.

Mandatory Requirement 5 - People – Those working with Children are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Mandatory Requirement 6 - Complaints Management – Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child-focused.

Mandatory Requirement 7 - Knowledge and Skills – Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep Children safe through ongoing education and training.

Mandatory Requirement 8 - Physical and Online Environments – Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for Children to be harmed.

Mandatory Requirement 9 - Continuous Improvement – Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

Mandatory Requirement 10 - Policies and Procedures – Policies and procedures document how the Church is safe for Children.

The **Universal Principle** requires the Church, in implementing and complying with the Child Safe Standards, to endeavour to provide an environment that promotes and upholds the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. The Church is committed to creating spaces where all Children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and other Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Children are culturally safe, welcomed, safe, valued, included, and respected.

This Strategy applies to:

- all Church Governance Group members, staff, and volunteers; and
- all people who are involved in or attend the Church and its programs, including visitors, parents, and contractors.

Definitions

Abuse – Any form of abuse, exploitation, coercion or ill-treatment. This might include but is not limited to physical abuse, verbal or emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual abuse, mental or psychological abuse, or neglect.

Blue Card – The card issued by Queensland Government's Blue Card Services after an application is received, verifying suitability for working with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults. A positive notice always

accompanies a Blue Card approval. Where the term 'Blue Card' is used in this policy, it also refers to the positive notice issued by Blue Card Services.

Child/Children - An individual under the age of 18 years old.

Child Safe Organisation – Any organisation required under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* to follow the Child Safe Standards and the Universal Principle to keep children safe and well.

Equity – Equity means treating people with fairness and compassion. It means removing barriers where possible so that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance can belong and contribute. Equity creates an environment where thoughtful approaches and supports are provided so that Children feel safe, valued, respected, included, and empowered to participate in activities, programs and ministries.

Harm – Takes its meaning from the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*. Harm, to a child, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how harm is caused. Harm can be caused by:

(a) physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or

(b) sexual abuse or exploitation.

Harm can be caused by:

(a) a single act, omission or circumstance; or

(b) a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.

Reportable Conduct – Takes its meaning from the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*. Reportable Conduct includes:

(a) a child sexual offence;

(b) sexual misconduct committed in relation to, or in the presence of a child;

(c) ill-treatment of a child (which is conduct towards a child that is unreasonably and seriously inappropriate, improper, inhumane or cruel);

(d) significant neglect of a child (note, neglect means a failure to meet the basic needs of a child that is deliberate or reckless);

(e) physical violence committed in relation to, or in the presence of a child; or

(f) behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.

Safeguarding - Appropriate measures put in place to protect Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults from harm.

Stakeholders - Refers to all people (other than staff or volunteers) who have contact with a ministry involving Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults. These may include parents, carers, the participants themselves, visitors, and contractors to the ministry.

Vulnerable Adult - An individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason and includes those who suffer disadvantage such as social and financial hardship.

Young person / people - Refers to a person / people who is / are 16 or 17 years old.

Role Definitions

Please refer to the Position Description of each role for more information.

Junior Volunteer – under 18 years of age - Refers to volunteers under the age of 18 who have contact with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults under the supervision of an adult Team Member/Ministry Leader. Whilst they do not have the leadership responsibilities of an adult, it is important that there is appropriate screening, training and management.

Governance Group Members - Leaders appointed by the Church according to its constitution as responsible and accountable to the church members for the governance of the Church. Can include elders, deacons, council members, board members or pastoral staff.

Ministry Leader - Refers to the person (staff or volunteer) leading a ministry, program or activity which involves children, young people or vulnerable adults.

ECC Safe Ministry Supervisors - The Safe Ministry Supervisors will follow a Safe Ministry Issue Management Process.[3] This includes reporting any criminal activity to Police, and the possibility of reporting allegations of abuse to the State Ombudsman and the insurer of ECC. In certain incidents (as outlined in the Issue Management Process) the Safe Ministry Supervisors will appoint an Independent Ministry Investigator to investigate allegations of inappropriate behaviour.

ECC Safe Ministry Supervisors are:
Andrew Robbins – Pastor

M: 0416 968 175 E: andrew@eastside.org.au

Caleb Loeken – Pastoral Intern

M: 0413 855 406 E: caleb@eastside.org.au

Debbie Ventnor – Office Administrator

M: 0403 772 955 E debbie@eastside.org.au

Penny Jell – Children's Ministry Coordinator

M: 0409 995 325 E: penny@eastside.org.au

[3] As per Point 10 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

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Team Member - Refers to both paid staff and volunteers who have contact with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

Mandatory requirement 1: Statement of Commitment

Eastside Community Church values every person as someone created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and believe that adults and children alike should be treated and cared for in a way that reflects the value God has created each person with. For this reason, we are committed to providing a safe environment for every person attending one of our ministries. We believe that child safety is not simply a legal requirement but a reflection of the Gospel.

Eastside Community Church is committed to being a safe ministry space for all and will provide a supportive environment by:

- Ensuring staff and volunteers are appropriately screened and trained and behave in a manner that resembles and represents Christ's attitude and approach.
- Providing safe environments and ministries that promote spiritual, social, and physical safety and personal growth and development.
- Promoting a culture of safety throughout the Church, constantly communicating, and reinforcing our commitment across all aspects of ministries and activities.

We have zero tolerance for any form of abuse or harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults and are committed to actively seeking to prevent this abuse and harm. This includes maintaining and cultivating an open and aware culture, treating all concerns and allegations raised seriously, not minimising the impact of abuse and harm on the victim, and promptly responding to all concerns and allegations.

Eastside Community Church is dedicated to providing safe spaces for everyone and are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities under the eight Child Safe Standards of a child and youth risk management strategy as set out by the Queensland Government Blue Card Services.

Mandatory requirement 2. Code of Conduct

We recognise that everyone is important to God, and therefore to us. All care is taken by the church to provide a safe environment for all involved in our ministries. As well as a Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers, the

[4] As per Point 10 of the National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Church has expectations for children, youth, and parents, carers and visitors whilst attending or interacting in our ministries.

These Codes of Conduct define expectations relating to standards of behaviour for all people involved with the Church and its ministries. It provides clear guidelines about what is expected, the consequences of not meeting these expectations and information on how to report inappropriate behaviour.

These Codes of Conduct will be:

- part of the selection and training process for working or volunteering at the Church;
- visible to any guests or visitors participating in ministries or activities involving children, young people or vulnerable adults; and

reviewed by the Church Governance Group and the Safe Spaces Team on an annual basis.

Mandatory requirement 3: Recruitment, Selection, Training and Management

Recruitment and Selection of Staff and Volunteers

The Church recognises the importance of recruiting staff and volunteers who have the right gifts, skills, and abilities to fulfil their roles. Whilst this is important for all roles in the Church, we especially acknowledge this importance with roles working with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

To ensure this, the Church will screen and train all staff, leaders and volunteers involved in any ministry, program, or activity of the Church. All staff and volunteers are to be recruited, selected, and inducted in accordance with the *Procedure for Recruitment and Training of Staff and Volunteers*.

Training of Staff and Volunteers

The Church acknowledges the importance of providing initial and ongoing training and support to staff and volunteers.

All staff and volunteers who serve in ministries with children, young people or vulnerable adults must undertake mandatory safe ministry training as part of their induction (and every three years thereafter) as well as annual refresher training. This includes training on definitions of abuse, reporting obligations, risk management, duty of care, positional power, transparency and accountability, and protecting vulnerable people.

The ECC Safe Ministry Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that a training plan is set in place and there is adequate record keeping of training applied. For details on training requirements, refer to the *Procedure for Recruitment and Training of Staff and Volunteers*.

Management of Standards of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers

The Church expects all staff and volunteers to uphold the relevant Code of Conduct(s), which provide clear guidelines on expected behaviour when working with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults and the consequences of not meeting these expectations.

The Church also expects staff and volunteers to provide safe environments and follow the Guidelines for Creating Safe Environments. Any breaches of these standards will be dealt with under *Complaint Handling*.

Mandatory requirement 4: Responding to Child Protection Concerns

Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults can only be protected from harm if child protection concerns are reported and dealt with quickly and effectively. Therefore, Eastside will ensure appropriate and timely reporting of all disclosures or suspicions of harm and any complaints relating to child protection concerns, especially sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct involving a child, in accordance with the Eastside Safe Ministry Incident Management Process.

The Church will ensure that Child Protection concerns will be reported to its ECC Safe Ministry Coordinators as well as to the relevant authorities as soon as possible and in accordance with legislative requirements.

Mandatory requirement 5: Complaint Handling

Eastside will respond to complaints about breaches of the Code of Conduct quickly and in accordance with the Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers. These apply to both minor breaches and serious breaches, including child sexual abuse or sexual misconduct involving a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

Any complaints against Queensland Baptist Accredited Pastoral Leaders are to be reported and investigated in accordance with the Queensland Baptists Ethical Issues Response Group Guidelines.

Mandatory requirement 6: Creating Safe Environments

The Church will ensure that physical, spiritual, emotional, and online environments promote safety and well-being and minimise the opportunity for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults to be harmed.

Safe Physical Environments

- The Church will comply with Workplace Health and Safety requirements as well as consider the impact of the physical environment on the potential for risk, especially to Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults.
- If the Church property has any residential facility on or adjacent to the church property that is under direct management and control of the Church (including private rental) then the Church will ensure that all regular adult occupants of that property hold a current Blue Card for the duration of their residence.
- The Church will take reasonable steps to ensure that any ministries it supports, including overseas ministries, have appropriate child protection policies in place. *(If you are a charity, this is a requirement under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission [ACNC] external conduct standards.)*

Safe Spiritual and Emotional Environments

- In all our ministries, we remain committed to teaching and upholding the historic, orthodox Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. This commitment shapes both our care for individuals and teaching. We will act with compassion and respect toward all people (even those who disagree with orthodox Christian teaching).
- As part of this conviction, we believe every person is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignity, care and respect. This underlying value applies to all people, not just those who agree with orthodox Christian beliefs. We recognise that from time to time, those that we care for will disagree with aspects of the orthodox Christian faith. We will not change the teachings of scripture, yet we will always seek to treat these people with compassion, thoughtfulness and respect.
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- Within this context, Eastside is committed to fostering ministries where all children, young people, and vulnerable adults are provided a safe, supportive environment where they are valued. and valued.
- We recognise that spiritual and emotional safety includes being treated with kindness, being listened to, and having appropriate avenues to raise concerns. There will be clear avenues so that any child, young person, or vulnerable adult can seek support if they feel unsafe.

Safe Online Environments

- The Church will promote safe online behaviour in any electronic communication.
- In accordance with current privacy laws, the Church will seek permission to use media (photos, media, etc.) of children in marketing and promotion and will ensure these remain the property of the Church and are used only within the law.

Risk Management

a. Managing Persons of Concern

A Person of Concern is someone who:

- Has pleaded guilty to, been convicted of, or has admitted to a sexual criminal offence;
- Has been found to have sexually offended, arising through due diligence checks related to recruitment;
- Is currently charged with a sexual offence;
- Has been the subject of an allegation of a sexual offence and this was not appropriately investigated;
- Has been found to have received an adverse risk assessment arising from sexual misconduct;

- Is deemed to be a risk to the safety of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults because of an adverse risk assessment relating to sexual misconduct;
- Exhibits constant wandering across other people's sexual boundaries.

A Christian congregation can be one of the few places where Persons of Concern, as the recipients of God's forgiveness, can mix with a Christian community. However, that forgiveness does not mean immunity from natural consequences and sensible steps to protect the vulnerable..

Because the Church is committed to providing a safe space for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults, should a Person of Concern be identified within the Church, the ECC Safe Ministry Coordinators and Elders, in consultation with the QB Professional Standards Officer will assess and manage any person identified as a Persons of Concern in accordance with An Australian Baptist Response to Persons of Concern.

No-one with a criminal record of child abuse, molestation or similar offences is allowed to be involved in ministries with children present.

For more details, please see: An Australian Baptist Response to Persons of Concern.

b. Risk Assessments and Management Plans

The Church will ensure that Ministry Leaders assess the risks and complete a Risk Management Plan in relation to any Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adult programs or activities undertaken at, for or with the Church.

- For regular activities, the assessment will be conducted at least annually and whenever there are significant changes in the program activities, attendance, or location.
- For High-Risk Activities or Special Events, the Ministry Leader will complete a risk assessment.

All Risk Management Plans in relation to any Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults are to be approved by the Safe Spaces Team beforehand and communicated with relevant staff and volunteers to ensure appropriate safe standards are met.

The Safe Church Coordinator and Ministry Leaders will ensure that appropriate and reasonable precautions are adopted to address risks identified as part of a risk assessment. When considering what measures are appropriate, Ministry Leaders will consider the likelihood of an incident occurring, the seriousness of the consequences and the difficulty of avoiding the risk.

c. Incident Management – Responding and Reporting

The Church is committed to providing a safe environment for all. Part of this process is ensuring that:

- incidents, whether potential or actual, are responded to in an appropriate way; and
- reporting and analysing occurs to ensure the incident does not happen again.

All incidents (including accidents and disclosures), whether suspected, perceived, potential or actual, will be managed through the Eastside Safe Ministry Incident Management Process and recorded on an Incident Response Form.

Third Parties and Affiliated Entities

The Church will require any third party (tenant or external party using Church property) that provides services to Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults to provide a copy of their child and youth risk management strategy at least annually.

The church will ensure that any affiliated entities (any entity or program that is, or is represented as, a ministry of the Church) comply with current child safety standards, including making annual reports to the Elders regarding their child and youth risk management strategy.

The Church will ensure that physical, spiritual, emotional, and online environments promote safety and wellbeing and minimise the opportunity for Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults to be harmed.

Mandatory requirement 7: Compliance with Queensland's Blue Card Laws

Recordkeeping

The Church complies with recordkeeping requirements of the Blue Card system and with the Safe Spaces Recordkeeping Guidelines that are informed by the Guiding Principles of the Queensland Baptists Data Retention and Destruction Policy (Clauses 2.4 and 4.5).

The Church will retain records in alignment with the Safe Spaces Recordkeeping Guidelines.

- Where records contain, or may contain, sensitive information, they will be kept in a manner that protects confidentiality and will only be accessed by a limited number of authorised persons.
- Where records are kept in hard copy, they will be held in a secure location with proper consideration of access, and physical conditions.
- Where records are kept electronically, they will be monitored to ensure security and ongoing accessibility.

*For more details, please see: Recordkeeping Guidelines and the church Privacy Policy**

**Please note: If your church has an annual turnover exceeding $3 million, you will fall into the category of complying with the Australian Privacy Principles.*

Review and Accountability

a) Internal Review

The Church will review this policy regularly , as part of its normal policy review process.

b) External Review

The Church will seek advice from and communicate with the specialised team available through QB Church Services in regard to:

Any Child Protection Concerns – contact safesapaces@qb.org.au

Any Safeguarding policy advice and support – contact safespaces@qb.org.au

Any complaints in regards to Pastors, Staff, Volunteers or Stakeholders – contact pso@qb.org.au

Any knowledge of a Person of Concern within the Church – contact pso@qb.org.au

Mandatory requirement 8: Communication and Support

Communication

The Church recognises this policy is most effective when it is communicated to all stakeholders.

The ECC Safe Ministry Supervisors will:

- Ensure that all stakeholders are aware of responsibilities and understand what is accepted behaviour for interacting with Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults;
- Enable individuals to feel comfortable addressing issues of concern; and
- Highlight the importance of the Church's commitment to protecting the safety and wellbeing of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults in our environment.

The Church believes Child protection and a culture of safety is everyone's responsibility, and is committed to considering and implementing new ways of communicating this.

Support

The Church recognises that stakeholders may require support when dealing with issues such as behaviour management, conflict, bullying, child protection concerns or breaches of this policy. As such, the ECC Safe Ministry Supervisors and the Elders will ensure support is available.

The types of support that may be made available include:

- Partnering with external support and counselling services;
- Seeking guidance and advice from the Church's workplace health and safety officer/s;
- Providing additional training;
- Implementing mentoring or discipleship; or
- Mediation or other conflict resolution techniques.

Appendix 1: Guideline for Communications Related to Safe Spaces & Ministries

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Communication outcome

Although specific people have particular responsibilities when it comes to creating a safe environment, safe spaces and ministries are the responsibility of every person who calls Eastside home or is involved in ministries at the church.

In other words, the goal is a healthy culture that everyone supports and upholds. Because of this, it is important that our commitments are well communicated so that every person knows, understands and supports the culture that we want to build and maintain.

In this respect there are three broad outcomes we want to achieve through our communication:

1. That those with specific responsibilities under the policy and relevant guidelines know, understand and are equipped to fulfill them.
2. That every person who calls Eastside home knows the culture that we are seeking to build and maintain with respect to safe spaces and ministries.

Communication Strategies

Strategies for communication with staff, ministry leaders and volunteers:

Communicating our commitments to safe spaces and ministries should be communicated in the following ways to staff, ministry leaders and volunteers:

- Inducting all staff and volunteers that interact with children and vulnerable people annually and as required
- New staff induction that includes a requirement to review the Safe Spaces & Ministry Policy. If working with children or vulnerable people, they must also undergo training.
- Regularly include updates and refreshers relevant to our commitments to safe spaces and ministries in communications (team emails etc), team meetings and training days
- Provide opportunities for feedback and support to all staff, ministry leaders and volunteers

Strategies for communication with the church and parents/caregivers generally:

- Annual email to all parents/caregivers requiring update to relevant registration information
- Semi-regular Updates in email communications to parents/caregivers for relevant ministries (kids, youth and kids club)
- Signs in ministry spaces that clearly indicate commitments and key contacts

Appendix 2: Guideline for Responding to a Child Protection Concern

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What is a Child Protection Concern

A child protection concern may include concerns regarding:

- A Child at risk of significant harm.
- A Child abuse offence, including but not limited to -
    - Sexual abuse.
    - Physical abuse.
    - Verbal or emotional abuse.
    - Mental or psychological abuse.
    - Neglect.
    - Spiritual abuse.
- Inappropriate personal or intimate communication and/or boundaries which may constitute grooming.
- Exposure of a Child to domestic or family violence.
- Or any other reason of concern.

A child protection concern may be received from:

- A Child who has been directly involved.
- An adult who has been directly involved (including personal disclosures of wrongdoing).
- Another person with information about a child or adult.
- Another church or organisation with information about a child or adult.
- Staff, volunteers or other stakeholders who have concerns based on their observations and interactions with one or more children or adults.

A note about QLD's Mandatory Reporting Laws:

Sexual offences: If an adult gains information that causes them to believe on reasonable grounds that a child sexual offence has been committed against a child by another adult, they must report it to the police or Depart of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services. This applies for a child under the age of 16 years or a person with a mental impairment. (S229BC of the Qld Criminal Code 1899)

Mandatory Reporting Professions: Under the Child Protection Act 1999, certain professions are required to make a report if they receive a disclosure or suspicion of harm. These include, but are not limited to, Doctors, registered nurses, teachers, police officers, child safety employees, early childhood educators and foster carers. If a staff member or volunteer is a mandatory reporter under this definition, they will need to fulfill their obligations under the Act when handling any disclosure.

What to do when receiving a complaint

Listen well:

- Move to a suitable environment, free from distraction. Remember, a private conversation still needs to be in a space visible to others. Let your Ministry Leader know where you are.
- Be CALM and PATIENT – allow time for the person making the complaint (eg: Child or Young Person) to be heard.
- Let the person use their own words – avoid asking leading questions.
- Avoid 'quizzing' the person about details of the abuse.
- Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Listening supportively is more important than what you say.

Gently reassure:

- Reassure the complainant that it is OK that they have told you what's been happening.
- Check if there are any concerns about the child's safety, especially immediate safety.
- Reassure the person, particularly if they are a Child, Young Person or Vulnerable Adult that they are not at fault, and not the cause of any distress that may be felt by anyone.

Show respect:

- Respect that the person may only reveal some details.
- Acknowledge the person bravery and strength in sharing the information.
- Avoid making promises you can't keep – manage the person's expectations.
- Explain to the person that in order for the Child, Young Person or Vulnerable Adult to be safe, you will need to report this to someone else.

Immediately report:

- Immediately report the Disclosure to the Ministry Leader or a member of the Safe Spaces Team. If appropriate, keep the person informed of the reporting process.
- As soon as it is practical, complete an Incident Report Form, recording all details about the suspicion or disclosure of abuse.
- The Safe Spaces Team will be responsible for ensuring the appropriate form of action, that the Church fulfills its legal obligations and that all concerns are managed appropriately.
- A copy of the Incident Report Form is to be kept securely by the Church, and a copy sent to the QB Safe Spaces Coordinator and relevant authorities as required.

Assessing A disclosure or suspicion of harm

When a child protection concern is raised, the ***Safe Spaces team must assess*** what action needs to be taken. The following questions provide a guide for the key actions that may be required.

Please refer to the flow chart below.

Is the disclosure about a child in immediate danger?

If YES:

- Contact the Police immediately on 000 and report the information.
- Follow instructions given by the Police.
- Address any immediate safety needs of others present.
- Organise support for the person who has disclosed the complaint or information.
- Contact QB Church Services for additional support for your Church.

If NO, Does the report include a disclosure or suspicion of harm?

If YES,

- Contact the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services and report the disclosure or suspicion. Such Child Protection concerns are responded to by the Department by either:
    - Recording a Child Concern Report when the concern received does not reach the threshold for a notification.

- Recording a notification if the concerns suggest the child has been harmed or is at risk of harm and does not have a parent able to protect the child from harm.
- Moving a child to a safe place if required.

- It is important to note that this is the decision of the Child Safety Officers. Your role is to report and provide support as needed.

If the disclosure or suspicion of harm is historical and has been already dealt with by the appropriate authorities, the report to the Department can note that this is a historical event previously reported. Even if the harm has already been dealt with, it is important to report as there might be extra details that you can provide which may not have been disclosed previously.

Is the report about a Staff or Volunteer of the Organisation? If YES,

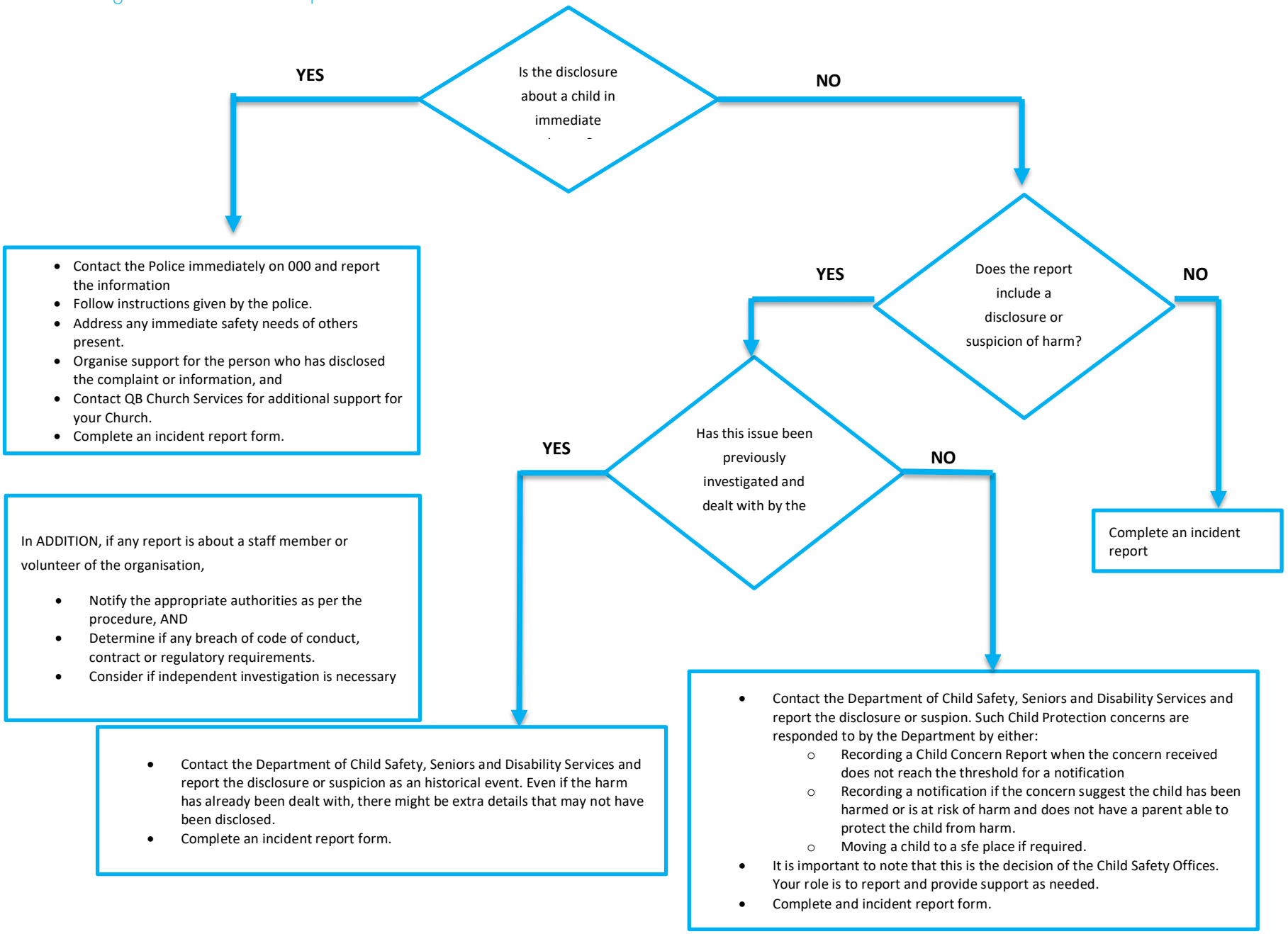
- Notify the appropriate authorities as per the procedure above.
- Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the staff or volunteer has breached any of the following: code of conduct, contract or any other regulatory requirements.
- It may be appropriate to investigate the disclosure or suspicion further. Depending on the nature of the incident and the person involved, it may be necessary to appoint an independent investigator. The investigator would make a recommendation to the Eldership for further action.

Reporting:

- In all instances, an *Incident Report Form* must be completed, submitted to the QB Safe Spaces Team for action and filing.

Record Keeping: For record keeping requirements, please refer to the requirements detailed in section 7 – Procedure for Record Keeping.

Assessing A disclosure or suspicion of harm Flow chart



Appendix 3: Guideline for Creating Safe Environments

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Creating Safe physical environments

Core Guidelines:

- The safety of the physical environment is considered ahead of time in the planning for any ministry activity. This includes undertaking risk assessments and subsequent planning to minimise the potential for any form of harm.

- The designated area and any equipment being used should be safe and appropriate for the planned ministry activity. This should include consideration of the age appropriateness of the activity along with the following:
  - the proximity to roads, traffic and parking
  - availability of appropriate toileting facilities
  - appropriate room for the planned activities
  - safety and appropriate maintenance of the facility and any equipment being used
  - appropriate fire safety including the presence of a fire extinguisher and or blanket

- For all children, a sign in and sign out process is always used. In addition to this, information for each participant is to be collected at least annually. This should include:
  - Names, addresses and phone numbers of children or guardians
  - Emergency contact
  - Any medical information relevant to the appropriate care of the child

- A well-stocked and suitably supplied first-aid kit should be handy at all times. And there should always be at least one leader who has done first-aid training.

- Leaders should work together in, at a minimum, pairs. They should never engage in secretive behaviour or be alone with a child in a space that is not visible and open to others. If a quieter environment is needed, make sure it is always visible and accessible to others.

- Leaders should never discipline a child physically or touch a child in a manner which is inappropriate in the context of their age, gender, cultural context or personal circumstances.

- Leaders will only ever visit the home of a child with the permission of parents. Youth aged children over the age of 15 may meet up with a leader of the same sex for the deliberate purpose of discipleship provided that it is with permission and in a public place. This should always be documented.

Leader to child ratio guidelines:

- The following ratios should be adopted:
  - 1:8 for children 6 years and over
  - 1:4 for children 2 to 3 years
  - 1:6 for children 4 to 5 years

Note: these figures assume that parents are not present. If all parents are present, two leaders are required at a minimum. If some parents are present, the children who have parents present are removed from the ratio.

- Permission to reduce the supervision ratio can be granted by the Safe Ministry Supervisor. This should be done after a thorough consideration of any risks and prior to ministry activity (i.e. not spontaneously).
- When considering the appropriate ratio, it is important to make sure that there is an adequate balance of both male and female leaders in order to provide the adequate care for the ministry program.

Toileting guidelines:

- Prior to any ministry activity, toilets should be checked to ensure that they are clear, clean and safe.
- The following age-appropriate principles should be put in place:

Children under 5 years of age

- Parents/caregivers should have children toileted or had nappies changer prior to check in
- Parents/caregivers should be texted/called if toileting or nappy change is required
- In rare circumstances where a parent/guardian is not available, toileting or nappy change should be carried out by an experienced paired female leaders.

Primary age children

- Participants should be taken to the toilets in pairs (same sex) by an adult leader (same sex)
- If assistance is required during toileting, another leader should be present (same sex)

Over primary aged

- There is a general expectation that those over primary age are independent and able to toilet
- Leaders should appropriately monitor toilet facilities to ensure there is no inappropriate behaviour
- If a leader needs to enter a toileting facility to check on a participant, they should always do this in parts of the same sex

Transport guidelines:

- Youth aged children may be transported by youth leaders where:
    - Written permission has been granted by parents/guardians.
    - Two leaders are present in the vehicle.
    - Transportation is part of a planned youth group program or approved discipleship.
- Transport should not be provided in any other situation, except in the case of emergency. Even in these situations, parents/guardians should be notified ASAP, and two leaders should be present.

Medications:

- Each year as part of the annual information collection, parents/guardians will be asked to provide information about any required medications.
- Medication will only be administered to children where express permission has been granted by the parent/guardians. This will usually only occur in context of a youth camp or an emergency situation (e.g. allergic reaction – EpiPen).
- Where there are multiple medications being dispensed, this should be administered by a first aid officer or a suitably qualified health care professional (i.e. nurse or doctor).

Higher Risk Events

- It is important to be alert to the extra planning that is required to mitigate an activity from being high risk. The term high risk has a meaning determined by Baptist Insurance. High risk activities carry an increased frequency and severity. But these can be mitigated with appropriate controls.
- Higher risk activities that require extra planning include, but are not limited to swimming events, camping, offsite outdoor activities, and significant community outreach events.
- These events are often different and unique and require a thorough risk assessment of individual risks as well as the appropriateness of mitigation measures. This must be reviewed by the Safe Ministry Supervisor prior to the ministry event.
- Where a higher risk event is still deemed 'high risk' after appropriate mitigation controls, this requires approval by Baptist Insurance Services.

Creating safe spiritual and emotional environments

Core Guidelines:

- Destructive and manipulative fear, obligation, shame and guilt have no place in our ministry spaces. Because of this, we always strive towards a culture of spiritual and emotional safety as we seek to ensure that no person feels dominated, coerced or controlled.

- Leader should always be above reproach in the way that we use our words and exercise authority, both in terms of the content and the tone of language used. Words should never be used to shame, belittle, or threaten any person. This includes being sensitive to the words and images used to avoid causing offence. Leaders should ask themselves, "if the way I am speaking was known to the whole church, would it be considered appropriate?"

- Leaders should be careful not to use language that would isolate or diminish the dignity of any person. Neither should they show favouritism to some that in turn isolates others. Leaders will never encourage children not to discuss this with their parents or caregivers, unless of course, it is the disclosure of abuse.

Faith discussions:

- In all our ministries, we remain committed to teaching and upholding the historic, orthodox Christian faith as revealed in Scripture. This commitment shapes both our care for individuals and teaching. We will act with compassion and respect toward all people (even those who disagree with orthodox Christian teaching).

- As part of this conviction, we believe every person is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of dignity, care and respect. This underlying value applies to all people, not just those who agree with orthodox Christian beliefs.

- We recognise that from time to time, those that we care for will disagree with aspects of the orthodox Christian faith. We will not change the teachings of scripture, yet we will always seek to treat these people with compassion, thoughtfulness and respect—even when they disagree.

- Although we are committed to teaching scripture clearly, individuals should never be forced, coerced or manipulated into believing something. The teaching of the church is always submitted to scripture itself, and no individual can claim to speak for God without finally being submitted to scripture itself.

Safety for the vulnerable guidelines:

- It is important that a positive, empathetic and adaptable attitude is adopted to creating safe environments for the vulnerable in society. This includes but is not limited to those with special needs, the culturally and linguistically diverse (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander), the frail and aged and those that impacted by family and domestic violence.

- Where these people are participating in ministries, their particular needs should be understood and wherever possible catered for. This should be done by creating an empathetic and open environment where the desire to lovingly include others is well established. It can also be done via direct conversations, as well as maintaining open lines of communication with them as well as their parents and care givers.

- Among all of these groups, it is particularly important that leaders are alert to the potential signs of abuse.

- Where there are domestic and family violence-related matters, leaders need to be aware of and diligent in relation to custody matters. Where leaders become aware of complicated custody arrangements, advice from the Safe Ministry Supervisor should be sought.