

A Safe Place for Children

Care, protection and safety of children
in the Uniting Church in Australia

Policy

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to provide safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained.

The Uniting Church commits itself to the care, protection and safety of all children relating with it or its agencies.

We seek to provide a safe environment for children to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community, and to grow in faith.



A Safe Place for Children

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Introduction



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What we believe

The Uniting Church affirms that all people are made in the image of God. We believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance and calls us to do the same to others. The Uniting Church believes that children are important. We are called to demonstrate this belief in our response to grow and share in the mission of Jesus Christ.

As a community of faith, we are committed to provide safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained.



The Uniting Church commits itself to the care, protection and safety of all children relating with it or its agencies. We seek to provide a safe environment for children to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community and to grow in faith.

Why this document was written

For anyone working with children, issues of care, protection and safety have always been complex, but are increasingly so. More than ever before, we are aware of issues of safety, our duty of care, the vulnerability of children and the possibility of abuse. Also, ministry methods that once seemed straightforward may no longer be appropriate.

In addition, standards of care now expected as a matter of law and of community practice are higher than they were in the past, and are rightly being enforced.

Each congregation and church agency needs to take a fresh look at the





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way it cares for children and then continue to monitor this regularly. This document (*A safe place for children*) has been prepared to assist congregations as they review and plan their ministry with children.

A safe place for children is one of a series of publications assisting the Uniting Church's ministry with children. It is intended to be used alongside the children's ministry policy workbook *On the Way Together*, adopted by most Synods in 1998. It should also be used in conjunction with other Uniting Church procedures to ensure that the church is a safe place for all people.

NOTE: While the UCA policy relating to children states that a child is aged 0 to 12 years, this document is suitable for application with regard to children and young people 16 years and under.

Where does the document come from?

A safe place for children was prepared in response to a Uniting Church in Australia Assembly (Standing Committee) request for such a document (July 1998).

The focus of the document is children and their safety whilst involved in any way with the Uniting Church in Australia. The document is not intended to safeguard the Uniting Church from litigation. However, that might well be one of the outcomes of the document's use by congregations and faith communities.

A safe place for children is an official document of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Uniting Education, the agency appointed by the UCA Assembly Standing Committee to undertake the work on *A safe place for children*, appointed a Project Team based in Canberra from the Kippax Uniting Church. The team included parents, lawyers, social workers, Ministers of the Word, policy writers and editors. The Project Team was chaired by Rev. Gordon Ramsay.





Supplementary materials and resources

Synods of the Uniting Church have added materials to *A safe place for children*. These materials are:

- specific to each State or Territory as State and Territory laws vary;
- specific to Synod by-laws, as Synod by-laws also vary; and
- specific to the advice each Synod's Committee and/or staff for Ministry with Children have decided to make available to the congregations of their Synod.

Any questions related to State/Synod supplementary materials and resources should be addressed to your Synod worker responsible for ministry with children, or Synod Secretary.

How to use this document

A safe place for children is written for congregations. It will probably be most useful if it is used in a variety of ways. For example:

- church councils may use it as a series of discussion topics about their role of oversight of ministry with children;
- groups or teams in a congregation who co-ordinate ministry with children may use it for discussion, as a reference tool or as a workbook;
- congregational staff or leaders may use it for their own reflection, for group discussion, as a reference tool or as a workbook;





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- those in or preparing for active ministry with children may use it as a reference tool or a workbook as they plan their ministry;
- small study groups in congregations may use it for study and discussion;
- interested individuals may use it for personal reflection on the issues raised;
- any person or church council may use it together with policies and regulations for dealing with complaints of sexual misconduct against someone in one of the Church's Specified Ministries, a lay staff person or voluntary worker, or a member of the Uniting Church.

Page 5 has a 'step by step' suggestion for how your congregation can use *A safe place for children*.

What's inside?

Each of the chapters is set out in the same way to make the document easier to use.

Each chapter includes:

- information about the particular topic covered by the chapter;
 - comments and observations;
 - questions for reflection;
 - suggestions for ministry; and
 - icons (illustrations at the top of each page) such as to help you find your way around each chapter.
- Two symbols   are used to indicate questions for reflection and suggestions for ministry.



Your congregation's journey with 'A safe place for children'



Use this document frequently and in a variety of ways. In that way, your congregation will be well placed to develop further as one that cares for, protects and is safe for children.

STEP BY STEP

Get started with an overview. Appoint a small group of people (from children's ministry and the Church council) to prepare and plan for exploring and implementing the policy.

Read the Introduction (pages 1 to 5). Decide who will read and explore which chapters in *A safe place for children*.

Groups and committees explore relevant sections and specific State/Territory/Synod resources.

Groups and committees report back to the church council.

The council decides and establishes the congregation's policy and practice.

Groups and committees monitor the establishment and effectiveness of the policy in practice.

The church council, together with groups and committees, evaluate and modify the congregation's policy as necessary.





Step by step

Notes

STEP BY STEP

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Definitions



CHAPTER 2

ADULT

In this policy, an 'adult' is a person aged 18 years and older.

CARE

'Care' is a positive concern for a child which may be expressed through direct and active responsibility for a child's well-being and development.

Children can be cared for by people in a community with which they are familiar and in which their primary relationships are formed, nourished and supported. Care for a child might be allowing for a child's abilities and limitations, or might mean specifically meeting a child's immediate needs.

Care might include activities and relationships which promote education and learning, nurture and guide development, offer counsel and advice, and enrich spirituality.

CHILD

In this policy, a 'child' is a person aged between 0-12 years. A child is a person who is dependent upon others to provide for his/her basic needs in health, safety and development.

NOTE: the above definition reflects the policy of the UCA. This document is suitable for application with regard to children and young people 16 years and under.





Definitions

CHAPTER 2

CHURCH/ CONGREGATION

The Uniting Church in Australia defines a ‘church’ as a place ‘where members meet for the public worship of God, to hear God’s Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, and to share in the wider responsibilities of the church in mission, witness and service to the world, and who are recognised as a congregation by the Presbytery’.

CHURCH COMMUNITY

A ‘church community’ is a Christian community in which we are the body of Christ to each other, and collectively to the world. In the Uniting Church, members of a ‘Christian Community’ discern the life they share in Christ, and are open and supportive of one another, sharing in one another’s joys and struggles. In a Christian Community there should be a high level of trust, and a climate of acceptance among members. The local congregation can be thought of as the primary expression of such a community (adapted from *A Manual for Meetings in the Uniting Church*, pages 196-7).

COMMUNITY

A ‘community’ is a network of people with whom a person interacts. We create a community when we share aims, beliefs and values, interests and activities, rituals and symbols, stories and organisational patterns. In a community we develop a common history. In a community we learn what is significant and acceptable to others; in a community we are recognised and feel a sense of belonging. A community gives us both rights and obligations. In a community we are accountable to one another.

DUTY OF CARE

‘Duty of care’ is a responsibility to ensure safety for those in our care. Duty of care involves anticipating and avoiding foreseeable harm, or minimising harm when it occurs. For example, duty of





care can involve identifying risks, being careful and knowing what to do when someone has been harmed. There can be both a legal and moral duty of care, and a moral duty of care may exist even if there is no legal duty of care. As disciples of Christ, the members of a church community are called to a level of care for children regardless of legal duty.

FAMILY

The 'family' is typically the primary context in which a child grows and develops physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. There is no simple definition of 'family' and families come in many styles and sizes. In terms of ministry and mission practices, it is probably easiest to define a child's 'family' as the people that the child calls family.

GUIDELINE

A 'guideline' offers a suggestion, or gives a general sense of direction, for action or behaviour. A guideline gives advice about what should be done, or how something should be done. When this document refers to a guideline we use the word 'should'.

HELPER

A 'helper' is an adult, or - by arrangement with the Church Council - a teenage/apprentice leader, who has agreed to assist in the conduct of a program, activity or event. A 'helper' does not have primary responsibility for planning or the conduct of such. A 'helper' is subject to the provisions of 'a duty of care'. A 'helper' is also subject to the 'recruitment and clearance' protocols approved by the Church Council, (eg. application forms, referees and police checks).

HARM

A source of 'harm' is something that may hurt or cause trauma to a child, or otherwise have a negative impact on the happiness, security and development of a child. Sources of harm can take





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many forms. They may be physical, emotional, social (in relationships), intellectual or spiritual.

LEADER

A 'leader' is any adult -aged 18 years or older -(including staff) who is responsible for the planning or conduct of a program. All leaders are subject to the provisions of Duty of Care, and the 'recruitment and clearance' protocols of the Church Council, (eg. application forms, referees and police checks). Examples of 'leaders' are the convenor of a church playgroup, the convenor of Christian education for children and members of the church community who volunteer to teach religious education in local schools.



MINISTRY

'Ministry' means teaching and caring on behalf of God and the church community. Ministry involves processes of discipleship and mentoring. Through its ministry to children, the church community supports children's development both as unique individuals and

as participants in a wider community, and their growing understanding and faith as followers of Christ.

PROGRAM

In this document, a 'program' is any event where children are present, whether it is ongoing or one-off, on church property, or organised by the church community in any place. A program includes events on church property organised by groups other than those of the local congregation. This definition includes events where either children or adults are the primary focus, as well as inter-generational events.





PROPERTY

The church 'property' includes both the buildings or other fixed structures, and what is inside them, as well as the natural and built landscape, and the setting or surrounding areas. Property also includes mobile equipment, such as motor bikes, bicycles, cars, cuses, trailers, caravans, play-gym equipment, etc.

PROTECTION

'Protection' is an active and continual process of preventing harm to children. Something harms a child if it has a negative effect on a child's development as a person, either physical, intellectual, emotional, social or spiritual. Protection involves identifying and eliminating risks to children. Protection is possible in a community that cares for children.

REQUIREMENT

A 'requirement' exists to satisfy a legal demand or a regulation. A requirement states a necessary action or behaviour. When this document refers to a requirement we use the word 'must'.

SAFETY

'Safety' means being free from the risk of harm by anticipating and then eliminating or managing potential sources of harm. Safety is more likely in a community that cares for and protects children. For children, safety may be a place with people they can trust.

STAFF

'Staff' refers to any adult employed by the church community. Examples of staff are a church youthworker and a pastoral assistant with responsibility for families.





Definitions

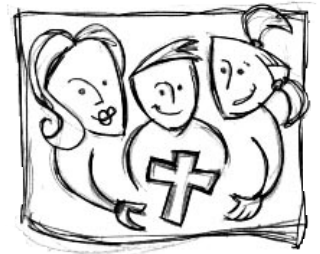
Notes

CHAPTER 2

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Children and the Church



CHAPTER 3

*Whoever welcomes one such child
in my name welcomes me.
(Matthew 18:5)*

The Uniting Church's baptismal service includes a promise by the congregation to maintain its life so that children may 'grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the knowledge and love of God'. This promise is not limited to baptised children, but includes all children relating with the church community. The congregation's response includes a commitment to 'live out our baptism as a loving community in Christ'.

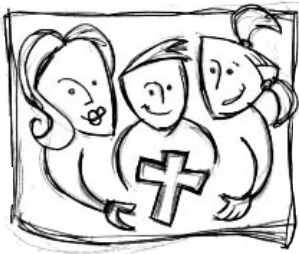
What is a loving community?

The Basis of Union suggests that a loving community is a reconciling community, where both adults' and children's gifts are valued and come together to build the community; and where Christ is experienced. The Baptism Service speaks of a loving community nurturing one other in faith, upholding one another in prayer and encouraging one another in service of the world.



Baptism is one of many reminders in the Christian faith that everyone in the church community is responsible for the ongoing care of children. The whole community has the privilege and responsibility of being in mission and ministry with children. The Bible teaches us that each church community must take responsibility, along with the family, in nurturing children in life and faith.





Children and the Church

CHAPTER 3

The biblical witness

God is especially concerned for children as vulnerable members of society who need to be nurtured and protected. The Bible demonstrates God's ongoing care and concern for children.

In establishing guidelines for the life of the community, the Old Testament charges adults with the responsibility of opening their lives so that children can know and experience God continually in everything they do.

*You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul...
Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 11:18-19)*

In the story of Jesus welcoming children, Jesus turns the disciples' expectations upside down. Although they were concerned that Jesus would be delayed, Jesus preferred to spend time with the children.

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it'. And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

However, there are also biblical passages that seem to suggest that violence against children is acceptable. This is most obviously seen in Proverbs with verses that appear to encourage parents to discipline their children through physical punishment.

Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them (Proverbs 13:24)





Discipline is an important part of a secure framework for a healthy child. However, the use of this and similar passages to justify physical punishment - especially towards children - misrepresents both the passages and the wider biblical message.

In trying to reach a general understanding of God's view of children shown in the Bible, we cannot avoid difficult passages, but we must see them in light of the whole message. The idea that harm should come to children at the hand of their parents or others in the community is widely condemned in the Bible. God's faithfulness to and concern for children is seen again and again. Parents as individuals and the community as a whole have responsibility for the well-being and development of children

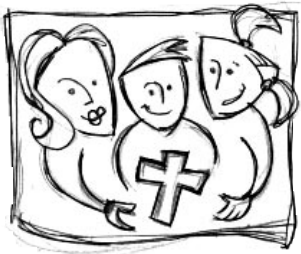
Children in the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church is committed locally, regionally and nationally to listening to, guiding, protecting, empowering and advocating for children within its own church communities and the wider community. We are called to nurture children in their personal and corporate faith, and in connection to a wider Christian faith and tradition.

The children's ministry policy document *On The Way Together*, issued for the Uniting Church in 1998, recognised that in recent years, there have been significant developments in a number of areas, requiring the Church to reconsider its ministry with children. These include such considerations as

- a renewed understanding of the significance of Baptism as the basis for the church's ministry with children;
- a deeper awareness of the congregation's and the whole church's commitment to help children grow in the faith of Christ and mature to faithful discipleship;





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- a recognition of the special needs of children at the end of the 20th century;
- a deeper awareness of how the Church shares the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ; and
- a fresh commitment to help children play their full part in the Church's life, mission, worship and ministry.

Families in communities

The significant, day-to-day work of caring for children will always occur in the context of a child's family. Local church communities play a vital role in nurturing, encouraging and supporting families in this important task. Each family, church community and local community is unique. Each church community must determine the ways in which this role will be lived out.

The guidelines, comments and suggestions throughout the rest of this document seek to encourage church communities to reflect on and decide how they can best provide for the care, protection and safety of the children they are ministering with.

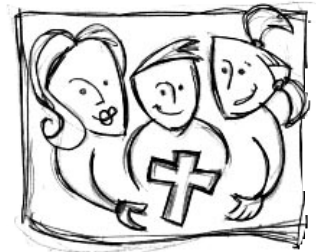
Passages for reflection

Psalm 78

Matthew 21:14-17

Mark 9:42-48





Questions for reflection



1. What do the passages printed above and those referred to in 'Passages for reflection' suggest about

- God's relationship with children?
- the church's relationship with children?
- the children's position in the church community?

2. Which passages - or which verses from the passages - do you see in action in your church community? In what ways?

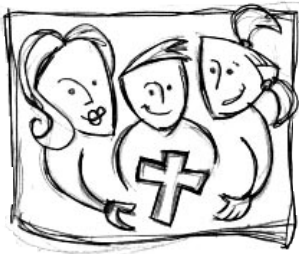
3. What relationship between families and the church community do these passages suggest?

4. Compare your understanding of the 'rod' in Proverbs 13 to the 'rod' in Psalm 23. How does the biblical image of the shepherd assist you in thinking of the role of parents?

5. Look at the Uniting Church's 1998 ministry policy workbook '*On the Way Together*'. How could you use that book to develop your ministry with children? Look, for example, at pages 14, 15 and 18-21.

6. How does your congregation help, support and equip families for the raising of children?





Suggestions for ministry

1. At a church council meeting, spend some time thinking about the ways your congregation is ministering with children. Include formal and informal ways. Some of the ways might include:

- church age-based programs (like Sunday school);
- whole church community events;
- ministry in homes; and
- ministry in the wider community.

You might find it helpful to brainstorm ideas using a whiteboard or butcher's paper.

2. Use recent Bureau of Statistics data or school enrolment information to help work out the approximate numbers of various age groups in your community. Visit local community and government agencies to see which needs of families and children are not adequately catered for. Discuss this in your church council or with your children's ministry planning team.

3. Learn about families and family traditions from different cultures. Start with people in your own congregation or local community. What can you learn about ministry with families and children from these cultures?



Children in our Church Community



CHAPTER 4

*For in Christ Jesus you are all
children of God through faith.
(Galatians 3:26)*

Knowing our children

Caring for children means knowing each child's nature and abilities and knowing about children in general. Within our church community, we need to know and understand the children we are ministering with to make sure we are responding to their developmental needs and the needs of our children as a whole.

It is even difficult to talk of the needs of 'children' because those needs will vary from one age to another, and from one child to another even if they are the same age. We need to be aware of what the particular child or children we are with can and cannot do. We need to be aware that children's abilities and needs change over time - even throughout a year that we may be spending time with them. Children's social skills, awareness of danger, ability to think through situations, and their physical ability and strength all must be recognised so that we can minister with them most meaningfully.

Churches often find it easier to continue past styles of ministry or programs. However, there is no one 'right' program for ministry with children. Caring for children means that we will develop our ministry so that it suits the children in our church community and wider community now. We need to examine regularly everything that we are doing with children; we can't run things just because we have resources or a history in a particular area.

Caring communities make sure that all aspects of their life are accessible (at least in some ways) to all ages. Children need to know they are part of - not apart from - the church.





Children in our Church Community

CHAPTER 4

Responding to our children

Caring for children means that we will consider how each child will best develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. All children need to know they are loved and valued; that they belong to a web of relationships which adds meaning to their life. This includes knowing that they are cared for, are safe and are protected.



Children often have a 'belonging faith'. Their experience of God's love and of faith comes through their relationship with others, and this in turn helps them to become more aware of the presence of God in the world. Caring congregations can nurture this experience by providing a welcoming community of faith which will help to show children where God is present in their lives and the world.

A belonging environment flows from a combination of

- a healthy nurturing church community;
- a healthy family life;
- healthy peer relationships;
- healthy relationships between generations; and
- * healthy expressions of faith, living and service in individuals, groups, congregations, and in and between cultures and generations.

Relationships of care and safety build the life of the community. In a caring community, adults and children will know and care for one another. Children will also know and value each other.



Children in our Church Community



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Issues of care, protection and safety among children themselves also need to be addressed within each community. Two such areas are appropriate play and bullying. Children should be encouraged to agree on the ways in which they will relate with each other. Ask your local schools for resources in this area.

Responding to the needs of families with children

Caring congregations will care for those who are significant in the lives of children. Nurturing children in their faith includes nurturing their parents and families; helping them to grow in their faith individually, as a family and as part of a community of God's people.

Caring congregations will help form and develop relationships within and beyond families which promote trust, cooperation, caring, honesty, compassion, responsibility and a willingness to serve. Caring congregations will provide opportunities for people who are significant in the lives of children to be sustained and cared for in family living.

By developing and strengthening these relationships and networks of support, a congregation can both help prevent crisis situations in the lives of children, and enable families to deal with the stresses of family life in a positive way.

Questions for reflection



Families are more likely to develop a relationship with a church community if they think that it has something to offer them. Churches that are recognised in the local community as providing one or more excellent services for families offer a strong connecting point between church and families.





Children in our Church Community

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1. Brainstorm all the things your congregation has to offer families, and how your church's ministry meets family needs.

2. What examples of promoting 'trust, cooperation, caring, honesty, compassion, responsibility and a willingness to serve' can you find in stories from the Bible? Some Bible passages to start you off are Matthew 9:18-25; John 6:1-15, Ruth 1: 6-18.

3. What examples of promoting 'trust, cooperation, caring, honesty, compassion, responsibility and a willingness to serve' can you find in stories from the life of your congregation?

The church must be a loving community that offers ministry to any family, regardless of the family's shape or pattern. Discuss in what ways ministry in congregations might demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to different expressions of 'family'.



Suggestions for ministry

1. With the written permission and supervision of the Church Council and the children's parents, spend some time developing relationships with one or two children in your congregation. Try to view the world from the child's perspective at everything you attend at your church. Report your observations to the children's ministry leader or supervisor appointed by the Church Council. (Written permission must indicate that such observations are a legitimate training strategy, approved by the Church Council. A responsible third party, appointed by the Church Council must supervise the observation.)

Think of a specific child in your congregation. Seek written permission from the church council, and from the child's parents, and agreement from the child to spend some time with them at church functions. Sit near them during worship. What can they see? Are they included? Is the language of worship understandable? Is the



Children in our Church Community



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music used in worship accessible to them?

Attend Sunday school, youth group or other age-specific activities with them, attempting to relate to the occasion from the perspective of the child. What was your experience? Discuss your experience and observations with the children's ministry leader.

Take note of what the child does during morning tea or other community time in the congregation (if appropriate). Where is the child during this community time? With whom does the child relate?

Speak with the child about how they think of God; about their experience of church; about their experience of other people in your congregation, both children and adults.

2. Consider making specific times in the year and in people's lives to allow them to spend more time with their families. Have a month of 'jubilee' when all meetings are cancelled. Encourage newly married couples or new parents to limit their involvement on Church Council or other committees, to help them strengthen their new relationships, while continuing to participate in the Church's life and worship.

3. Be aware of families in your congregation who are struggling or needing support. Be especially aware of those going through times of crisis, such as separation or divorce, illness or unemployment. Find out if there are ways you can help - transport, shopping, meals, or providing the opportunity for a listening ear.





Children in our Church Community

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4. In caring for children, find a way to mark significant events in the lives of children such as:

- starting at pre-school, school or high school
- for example, give a small gift;
- attendance at camps and other church based events outside the church community
- for example, allow time for the child to tell the church community what has happened;
- birthdays
- for example, give a card;
- personal achievements
- for example, mention sporting and cultural achievements in the congregation's newsletter.



Children in Uniting Church programs



CHAPTER 5

Duty of Care

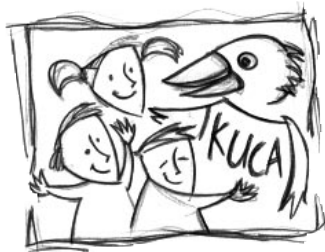
A church community that cares for children will include children in its activities and in the life of the Church. Sometimes this will include programs for them either on its premises, or elsewhere. In addition, children will be present during activities where they are not the primary focus. It is also common for non-church groups to use church property for programs involving children.

In relation to all such programs, the church community has a moral and legal responsibility for the care, protection and safety of such children. In general terms, a legal duty of care will be owed by a church community towards anyone whom - it is reasonably foreseeable - would be affected by the acts and omissions of the church community and who is in a close enough relationship with the church community (for example, by being present on church property, or by participating in a program).

Whether or not the duty of care has been met will depend on the specific circumstances. The purpose of this chapter and the next is to help church communities determine for themselves what is necessary in order to meet their moral and legal responsibility for the care, protection and safety of children. This responsibility is conveniently described in this chapter as a duty to provide:

- appropriate and safe places and spaces;
- proper planning and implementation of programs; and
- suitable personnel.





Children in Uniting Church programs

CHAPTER 5

Program is defined in Chapter 2. That definition should be read before reading this chapter because that term is given a very wide meaning in this chapter and the next.

Because the church's moral and legal responsibility to children in programs run by non-church groups raises separate issues, it is dealt with in a separate section.

Choosing an appropriate program space

Before implementing any program consideration must be given to whether the program can be safely conducted in the proposed location. Some points to consider are:

- is the space big enough for the expected number of people?
- are there physical dangers to children in the space, including danger from equipment associated with the program?
- can people entering or leaving the space be monitored, if necessary?
- is there insurance (liability and property) for the program?
(see below)
- if there were an accident, could medical and other assistance be obtained speedily?
- if the space is outside, what alternative suitable venue is available if weather conditions preclude outdoor activities?

(Chapter 8 deals in more detail with children and church property.)





Personnel resources

Chapter 6 deals in detail with selecting personnel and should be read in conjunction with this section.

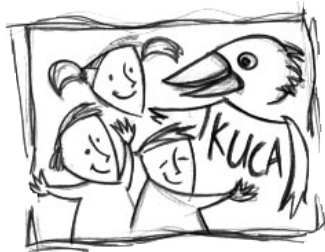
It is important that a realistic assessment be made of how many members of the church community will be suitable and willing to both run and help with the intended programs. The feasibility of a program will depend upon there being sufficient personnel with the aptitude, willingness, time, and physical and emotional ability. The possibility of paid staff to implement programs might also be considered by some congregations.

The number of persons required to implement a program will depend upon the appropriate adult-to-child ratio, unless children are accompanied by parents or guardians (as in worship, for example). Usually, it will be necessary to have at least two adults involved in the program - either conducting the program or observing it. Having two adults involved provides support in the event of an accident - either to the child or to the adult - and reduces the risk of inappropriate behaviour by children or adults.

It is not possible to be prescriptive about the appropriate ratio. This will depend upon several factors, including:

- the experience and training of the adults;
- the age of children;
- special needs of children in the program;
- the type of activity;
- the nature of the space to be used (for example a park or a room); and
- the desirability of adults of both genders being present.





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Information on appropriate adult-to-child ratios may be obtained from education departments or organisations such as Scripture Union or YMCA/YWCA.

Examples of how adult-to-child ratios can vary are:

- a higher adult-to-child ratio will be necessary in an abseiling activity and the adults will require appropriate qualifications, expertise and training; and
- a lower adult-to-child ratio may be appropriate in storytelling to twenty children within a Sunday school program.

The implementation of programs

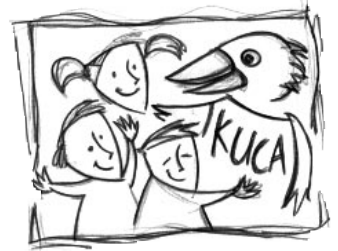
In planning a program, thought needs to be given to the care, protection and safety of children involved. Things for you to consider will vary according to the nature of the program but the following points are likely to be relevant to most programs.

- *Controlling the arrival and departure of children*

When children are in programs without parents or guardians present, there must be procedures for knowing which children are present and for ensuring that children leave the program safely. During programs, details of how to contact parents or guardians must be available. Consider using a 'sign in/sign out' book. Check the local legislative requirements in your Shire, State or Territory with the relevant Government Department. This book could include:



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- emergency contact numbers (at least two) for the duration of the activity;
- the date and time of arrival and departure, with space for initials of parent/carer; and
- details of who is permitted to collect the child.

This information could be incorporated into the registration form for programs (see below) unless the program is ongoing, in which case a separate book should be considered.

- *Behaviour management*

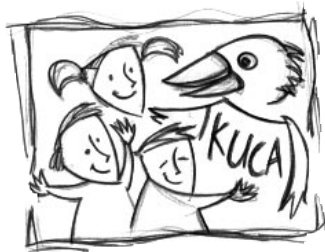
Leaders of programs must consider beforehand how to encourage behaviour that is desirable and how to discourage children behaving in a way that endangers themselves or others (for example punching and kicking, climbing a roof.) Inappropriate behaviour that is not dangerous also needs to be dealt with (for example swearing, disobedience, put downs). This forward planning is known as a behaviour management plan.

Often, children can be involved in working out a suitable behaviour management plan at the beginning of a program. School aged children will be used to this process and are good at recognising the reasons for, and benefits of, rules that encourage safe behaviour (see Suggestions for ministry, below).

For assistance in working out a plan, it may be appropriate to consult those with specialist training such as teachers and childcare workers. Many teachers recommend children accepting the logical consequences of their behaviour; for example, exclusion from the group until appropriate behaviour is shown.

Parents and guardians of children must be made aware of the behaviour management plan, including the consequences of inappropriate behaviour and the possible exclusion of children from programs for inappropriate behaviour. Parents and guardians could





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be informed of the behaviour management plan on the same form which contains contact details and medical care authorisation.

The behaviour management plan is also dependent upon appropriate application by leaders and helpers. For example, inappropriate behaviour by children in programs should never be managed by the use of belittling or sarcastic comments. Such comments are an inappropriate use of power by an adult towards a child.

Physical punishment of children involved in programs is never acceptable. Examples of physical punishment are smacking, shaking, or hitting a child with an object. Adults and helpers should also consider whether their treatment of, and attitude towards, individual children is influenced by the child's gender rather than individual personality and must treat children with fairness and impartiality.

A Christian approach will include expression of the belief that God's acceptance of people is an unconditional act of grace. Finding ways to assert God's love of the child might include:

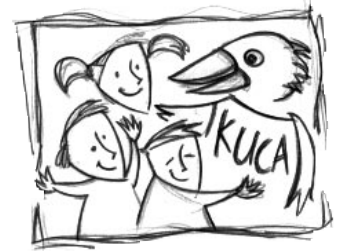
- one-on-one time (leader and child) in a safe setting, making sure that the relationship can be observed by another adult or leader.
- * diversion to another setting, activity or relationship;
- assisting the child to restate the 'rules' and evaluate his or her own behaviour against the appropriate 'rule'
- * making apology for inappropriate behaviours to the group and/or leaders.
- *Protection from the weather*

Children should be suitably protected when outside. For example:

- hats should be worn always;
- sunscreen must be applied if appropriate;



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- clothing should be suitable; and
- shaded areas should be used or time spent outside limited in sunny weather.
- *Health issues*

Some children suffer allergic reactions or require special medication. Such considerations/needs must be identified and responded to. See Chapter 7.

- *Safety of children is everyone's responsibility*

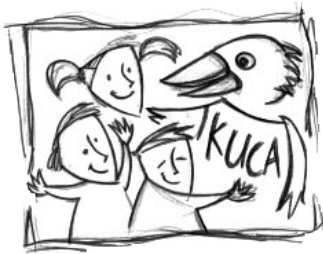
When children and their parents or guardians are present in a program (for example worship), it should not be assumed that the safety of those children is the sole responsibility of those adults. All people in a caring community should be alert and respond to potential sources of harm, for example:

- a toddler approaching lit candles in the worship space;
- children being in spaces where hot drinks or hot food are being prepared or consumed;
- children wandering away from supervised spaces; and
- children playing with material and equipment without supervision.

It should not be assumed that the church community is aware of this responsibility. Instead, give some thought to how the church community could be informed. Some suggestions are:

- a sermon/talk during worship reminding the church community of its responsibility as a group for the care, protection and safety of children in the group;
- notices displayed throughout the church building, particularly in dangerous areas such as morning tea space;





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- a reminder by a leader of a program at the commencement of the program; and
- encouraging small groups to work through this document.

When a registration form is required for use in programs

A registration form for a program which must be completed and signed by a parent or guardian of the child must include the following:

- name, address, phone number of child and parent or guardian;
- emergency contact phone numbers (at least two) for the duration of the program;
- space for signature acknowledging having read the behaviour management plan;
- permission to seek medical help if necessary;
- permission to use private vehicles for transport, if applicable;
- details of who is permitted to collect the child;
- details of any person not permitted to contact the child during the program; and
- details of any Court order relevant to the previous 2 points.

To find out about indemnity and forms you can use, contact your Synod children's ministry staff or your Synod Insurance Officer.





Outside organisations using church property

It is common for non-church groups to use church property for the conduct of programs involving children. Morally - and sometimes legally - the church has a responsibility to consider aspects of the care, protection and safety of such children to maintain integrity with the non-church community. Again, it is impossible to be prescriptive about the extent of the legal duty of care that is owed, because that will depend upon the particular circumstances. However a duty of care to provide safe premises will arise in every situation where people are using church property.

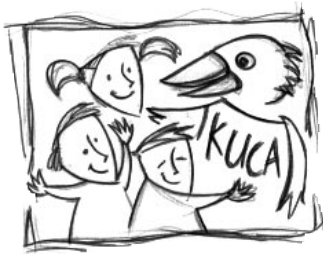
Each church community must consider what is an appropriate level of supervision of non-church groups using its property. The information above (choosing an appropriate program space) applies equally to programs run by non-church groups. Such groups should be asked to provide details of their own policy for the care, protection and safety of children, and of all relevant insurance held. The church community may provide a copy of its own policy to such organisations to assist in the development and implementation of a policy. Often non-church groups can offer advice about ways of enhancing the safety and well-being of children.

Insurance

At least annually, the church community should review the insurance in place to cover:

- staff and leaders of programs;
- participants in programs;
- property, including places and spaces in which programs are run that are not church property;
- use of motor vehicles and other transport; and





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- contractors or other service providers, including such agents own insurance arrangements.

More information on insurance cover can be obtained from the Insurance Officer for each Synod.



Questions for reflection

You are a leader on an activity that takes 7-11 year olds to a beach for an afternoon of games and a swim. What are the potential sources of harm and the general safety practices you need to consider? (*Scripture Union, Safety and Care, 'Handout 5'*)

Take an established activity or event from your program and evaluate it in the light of the discussion in this chapter. What must you do, what should you do and what would you be wise to do if you are committed to the care, protection and safety of children? (adapted from *Scripture Union, Safety and Care, 'Handout 5'*)

How do leaders and children in programs know what behaviour is expected of the children, and what are the consequences of inappropriate behaviour?



Suggestions for ministry

Determine how your congregation can work out guidelines for the ways that children relate with each other. Invite a local primary school principal or teacher and some children to sit with the church council or children's ministry planning team so that you can learn how this is done in your local schools.

Then, using the guidelines or information you have gained, sit with the children from your congregation and help them to brainstorm positive guidelines, behaviours or attitudes that will help everyone feel cared for and safe. For example:



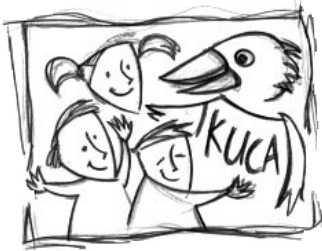
Children in Uniting Church programs



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- 'In our church, we are kind to each other'
- 'In our church, we say sorry'
- 'In our church, grown ups are careful when carrying hot drinks'
- 'In our church, we walk when we are inside'
- 'In our church, we talk about our problems, instead of spreading rumours or hitting'





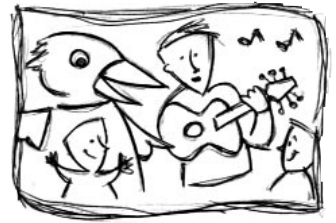
Children in Uniting Church programs

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Notes

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Uniting Church people in ministry with children



CHAPTER 6

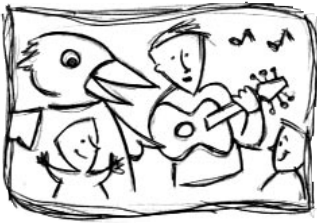
The care, protection and safety of children are the paramount considerations when selecting staff and leaders for programs involving children. This means that the task of a group or person selecting staff or leaders is to find the best person for the position, not simply settling for anyone willing or available. The same care should go into selecting personnel working with children whether they are paid or not. This may mean not accepting someone who offers to be a leader, if they are not suitable, even though they are well-meaning and willing. This also means that once an appointment is made, the staff member or leader must be provided with training and support and must be subject to some supervision.

Selection of staff and leaders to work with children requires decisions to be made about:

- who will be responsible for selecting staff and leaders;
- the selection process;
- the requirements of the position;
- the qualities required of the person filling that position;
- screening of applicants;
- supervision of staff and leaders; and
- support for staff and leaders.

This chapter will discuss these issues in relation to staff and leaders, but often there are other adults (including teenagers) who help in the running of programs involving children. The application of the principles discussed in this chapter to these people will be addressed in a separate section following.





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Church communities must take seriously their commitment to the care, protection and safety of children and must ensure that those whom they commission to work with children, whether on a voluntary or paid basis, do not pose a danger to those children. The procedures recommended in this chapter may seem unnecessarily demanding and time consuming to those used to the church culture of voluntary, altruistic work, but the procedures reflect current expectations about the safety of children and in fact it can be hoped that, once the recommended procedures are in place, these will in fact save time.

It is necessary to understand how the words ‘staff’ and ‘leader’ are used in this chapter. See the definitions in Chapter 2.

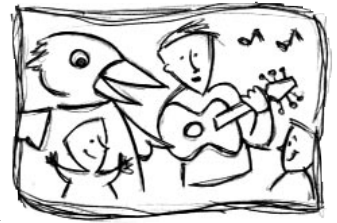
Personnel issues that are not dealt with in this chapter

The ordained leader (minister or deacon) of a congregation is included within the definition of ‘staff’ but the appointment of ministers and/or deacons is not dealt with in this chapter because that process is already subject to church regulation. See the Uniting Church’s Constitution and Regulations; and consult your Synod about relevant Synod by-laws. The behaviour of those involved in specified ministries is also covered in documents such as the ‘*Code of Ethics for Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Deaconesses, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors (1997)*’; see also ‘*A Safe Place, Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Misconduct (1998)*’ available from the UCA Assembly, “Gospel and Gender” agency.

The appointment and regulation of childcare workers appointed by the church community to run childcare centres raises specialised issues which are the subject of legal regulation, and are not dealt



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with in this chapter. Some Synods have already established formal procedures and contracts for paid employees. Contact your Synod Secretary for details.

Responsibility for selection of staff and leaders

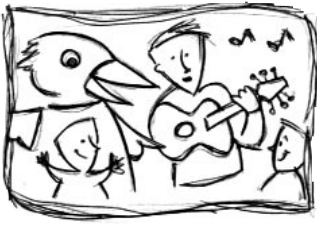
The responsibility for appointments will vary depending upon the context of the appointment. Sometimes the selection will be made by the church council, by the minister or by an existing leader or staff member. Wherever possible, selection should not be the responsibility of one person. Instead, it is recommended that a group be chosen to select staff and leaders, and that the group includes both genders as well as someone with experience in interviewing and appointing staff. The composition of this group could change according to the particular appointment to be made.

The church council must decide who has authority to make appointments. Any appointment of staff must be approved by Presbytery.

The selection process

The selection process must be decided upon in advance either by the selection group or by the church council. The formality of the selection process depends upon the nature of the position being filled. For example, in selecting a childrens worker for a church community, a written application with supporting references, provision for checking police records and a formal interview would all be appropriate. By comparison, in selecting a Sunday school teacher, a signed declaration that the person has no relevant criminal record and understands the church's policy on care, protection and safety of children, plus an informal discussion and the provision of names of referees might be sufficient.





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The selection process, once decided upon, must be applied to every applicant for the same position in the same way, regardless of experience or reputation.

Setting a job description

When staff and leaders are being selected, it is important to have clear guidelines as to the role any person appointed will perform, and how that role fits into the mission of the church community or other appointing body. A clear and comprehensive description of the job to be done is essential. Points to consider when writing such a description are:

- what tasks will they be required to perform?
- what hours will they be asked to work and what proportion of time should be spent on each task?
- to whom will they be responsible?
- what form and level of reporting and supervision will be required?
- what training and support will be provided? and
- what other guidelines are necessary for this position?
- the period for which the job description is current

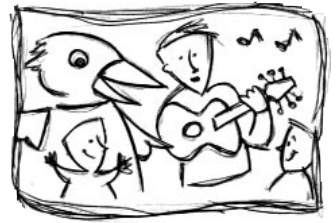
All applicants for staff and leadership positions should be provided with the job description.

Determining the qualities desired

Some people will not be suitable for leadership roles with children no matter how willing they are to undertake such positions. For example, persons with a history of violence or sexual offences must not be considered. Also, great care must be taken in accepting per-



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sons with emotional or mental illness. (This section has been adapted from Scripture Union, *Safety and Care*, p. 18.)

A selection group must prepare a written document setting out the qualities sought for the job. This will help clarify exactly what is expected of the staff member or leader and also informs potential applicants. Points to consider in writing such a document include:

- what sort of person are you looking for in general terms?
- are age, gender, health and physical strength important?
- what personality characteristics will the person have?
- how will the person relate to children?
- should the person have appropriate training or will training be provided?
- what sort of experience of working with children will the person have? and
- how will the person relate to, and work with, other adults?

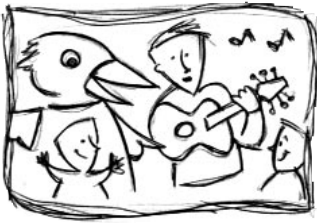


Whenever a selection process is occurring, take care to comply with laws prohibiting discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. Advice on such issues can be sought from the appropriate authorities who can be identified by telephoning government information in your State or Territory.

Screening of applicants

Unfortunately, we cannot assume that all those in a church community want the best for children. A church community that makes children welcome may also attract people who want to abuse children. Even those with good intentions may have the capacity and tendency to damage the emotional, spiritual and





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physical health of children. The job of the selection group is to screen out such people during the selection process. How then does the selection group ensure that unsuitable people who may harm children are not given staff or leadership positions?

All applicants for staff and leadership positions involving children should sign a declaration that they have no relevant criminal record. Depending upon the responsibility of the position, the degree of supervision and the opportunity to gain the trust and confidence of children, a police check might also be necessary. Names of at least two referees should be obtained for any position, and references sought. All information obtained about applicants from police checks must be kept confidential by the selection group. Also, opinions expressed by referees should be kept confidential in most circumstances.

Depending upon the responsibility of the position, the degree of supervision and the opportunity to gain the trust and confidence of children, written references may be required and should be followed up in conversation - face-to-face or at least by telephone call. Referees should be asked to address the following points:

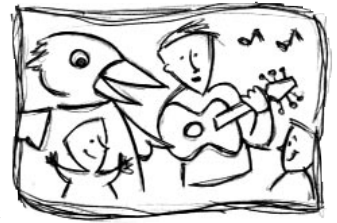
- the referee's identity and whether they are willing to name someone to vouch for their credibility;
- how long they have known the applicant and in what capacity;
- how they rate the applicant's ability to care for children; and
- whether or not they would recommend the applicant for the position.

These precautions must be taken regardless of the applicant's reputation and length of time in the church community.

See Scripture Union form, pp. 36-37 in *Safety and Care* as an



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example of an application form that could be used to obtain the above information.

Supervision of staff and leaders

The church community has a responsibility to supervise people in ministry with children. The church council should ensure that supervision is provided. This may be done by regular reporting to the council, or by some council members meeting regularly with staff and leaders in ministry with children. In addition, the recommendations about appropriate adult-to-child ratios, discussed in Chapter 5, will ensure that informal supervision occurs.

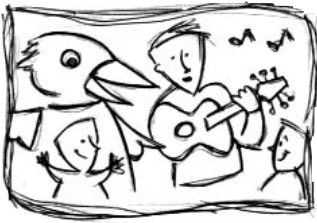
Training staff and leaders

Staff and leaders usually require training to perform their duties, to keep up to date and to improve their abilities. Training may be required before, at the commencement of, or during, an appointment. For example, some teaching materials require specific training before the materials are used, and a first aid certificate cannot be obtained without attendance at a course.

Staff and leaders should be encouraged to participate in training by allocation of funds and by inclusion of a time allowance for training.

The nature and amount of training will vary for different positions. Sometimes the appropriate training will be done in the local setting. It may be no more than working alongside a more experienced leader or having quality resource material on which to base programs. Sometimes the training will require resources not available locally and may involve joining with people from other churches or organisations. Valuable training opportunities exist at regional, state and national levels.





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For some activities within programs, proper training and qualifications are essential. Examples of these are abseiling, driving of vehicles and conducting some courses.

Supporting staff and leaders

People in ministry with children will be most effective if they are well supported emotionally, spiritually and practically, so that they are free from unnecessary stress. All such people are entitled to such support. A person or group may provide that support by being:

- a listening ear;
- a prayer partner;
- a mentor; or
- an advocate.

In addition, the church community should provide appropriate practical support, which may include:

- a meal; or
- administrative assistance.

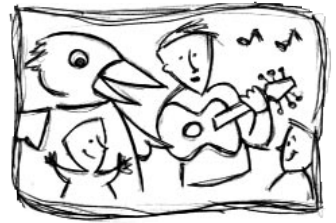
Making the job description available to the church community enables the church community to have realistic expectations of staff and leaders and to provide appropriate support.

People in support roles

People in ministry with children include those other than staff and leaders who assist in the running of programs and activities. Some will be potential leaders. Others may prefer to remain in a support role. Examples of such support roles are rostered helpers at a



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church playgroup, parents accompanying a junior youth group outing, and teenage/apprentice leaders of Sunday school programs.

NOTE: That it is never appropriate for teenage/apprentice leaders to be in charge of activities or events involving children in the absence of an adult or adults. All persons under the age of 18 years assigned to functions as teenage/apprentice leaders must be supervised at all time.

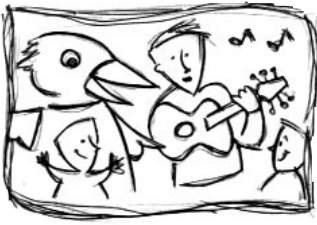
Many of the principles outlined above relate equally well to people in support roles, although often less complicated selection processes will be appropriate. If deciding that less formal selection processes are appropriate, the procedures for screening applicants should still be followed.

Questions for reflection



1. Write a job description for a staff or leadership position involving children's ministry in your church. Devise a selection process including appropriate screening.
2. How can your church community offer support to people in ministry with children in the next three months?
3. The leaders of a program in your church for the last three years have said this will be their last year. What steps should be taken in respect of leadership of the program for next year? Who should take these steps?





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Suggestions for ministry

Affirm staff, leaders and people in support roles by:

- commissioning them at the commencement of new programs;
- commissioning them at the commencement of each year; and
- including regular prayer points in the church community's news-sheet.



Children,

Friendships and Health



CHAPTER 7

*The righteous walk in integrity -
happy are the children who follow them!*
Proverbs 20:7.

Children value relationships with adults they like and trust. An adult who is trusted by a child provides safety, guidance and a listening ear.

Guidance is important for children's development. When adults are aware of the differing abilities of children as they develop, they can have expectations of children that are appropriate to the children's age. Adults can teach children valuable life skills. This can require a degree of patience and creativity.

At the same time, each child is unique and has individual reactions to interactions with adults. Children's reactions are based on their past experiences and current needs; and should be affirmed by caring adults.



In some instances, adult interaction/s with children may be perceived by the child to be unwanted, intimidating or harassing, not unlike those found in some adult-to-adult relationships. However, children are not always able to articulate when they find a situation with an adult to be intimidating or harassing. Increasingly, though, due to Protective Behaviours Programs in schools, children are better able to articulate their likes and dislikes when it comes to interactions with others.

More concerning, however, is an adult's conscious decision to intimidate or harass a child, the effects of which disempower and





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CHAPTER 7

impair the child's willingness to come to and participate in the church community where Christ is experienced (see emotional abuse).

Unfortunately some adults, for whatever reason, abuse children. Child abuse is not usually just one physical attack or just one instance of failure to meet a child's basic needs. Usually child abuse is a pattern of behaviour that takes place over time.

A church community must be aware of:

- behaviours that may be perceived by the child as intimidating or harassing;
- deliberate behaviours by adults that intimidate or harass a child; and
- all forms and indicators of child abuse.

Forms of child abuse

Commonly recognised forms of child abuse include the following.

Physical abuse refers to non-accidental injury to a child. Examples include: excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings. Indicators include: unexplained bruises, burns, bites, broken bones, or scars; overly withdrawn or aggressive behaviours; inappropriate clothes for weather conditions to cover the body; complaints of soreness; discomfort with physical contact and/or emotional problems.

Emotional abuse refers to an ongoing attitude or behaviour directed at a child, or the creation of an emotional environment which is seriously detrimental to, or impairs the child's psychological and/or physical development. Examples include: constant criticising, belittling, insulting, rejection; providing no love,

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support or guidance. Indicators include: passive and aggressive behavioural extremes; habit disorders (sucking, rocking).

Child sexual abuse refers to any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult or an older or bigger person for that person's sexual gratification. Examples include: sexual touching, exposure to pornographic material, child prostitution, intercourse.

Indicators include: physical signs of injuries, poor self esteem; lack of confidence; peer problems; being unusually disturbed by physical contact; excessive seductiveness, age inappropriate sexualised play; inappropriate expressions of friendship between a child and an adult.

Neglect refers to the withholding or failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life which jeopardises or impairs the child's psychological, intellectual or physical development. Examples include: failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, attention to hygiene or supervision. Indicators include: consistently hungry, malnourished, tired, inappropriately dressed for weather conditions, insufficiently supervised.

Mandatory reporting

Mandatory reporting of child abuse requires that certain professional groups in the community must report child physical and sexual abuse if they suspect it has occurred. State and Territory legislation varies on the requirements of mandatory reporting but in essence the legislation provides an effective and responsive child protection system.

A caring church community may have members that are 'mandated to report child abuse' due to their occupation, for example doctors, nurses and dentists. However, members of a caring church community without a legal duty of care have moral responsibilities





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to notify child protection agencies of their concerns if they suspect a child is being abused.

The recognition of child abuse can be difficult. In some States and Territories you can phone the Child Protection Service and talk about your concerns with a person trained in working with abused children without actually lodging a formal concern. Advice from this Service may be sought to clarify a decision to report, or allay fears of child abuse.



It is the church's responsibility to have access to information and procedural documents that clarify child abuse processes for reporting abuse. Contact your State or Territory Family or Community Services for information.

Relationships between children

Children value relationships with other children that provide friendship and support. Children have a developing awareness of the world and their place in it and this is learned through - among other things - interacting with other children.

Children's safety may be at risk through accidental injury or bullying behaviours. Accidental injury may occur as part of play - often as a result of rough or inappropriate play by children with differing ages and levels of ability.

Unfortunately, some children, for whatever reason, bully and cause distress to other children. This may include physically attacking, discriminating against, teasing or isolating a child.

A caring church community will identify strategies to prevent any behaviour that is distressing to other children.





‘Protective Behaviours’

Most schools usually incorporate education and awareness programs to help children to cope more effectively with life. The Protective Behaviours Programs are one such initiative.

In these programs, children learn to understand their feelings, rights and responsibilities. They develop strategies for solving problems and making decisions. They learn to say ‘no’ and ‘stop’ to behaviours that make them feel uncomfortable. They are made aware of forms of abuse, domestic violence, alcohol and drugs. They identify safe places and identify networks of people they can talk to.

Protective Behaviours Programs have equipped children in school with a better understanding of their personal reactions to interactions with others. A caring church community is aware that children under school age have not had the opportunity to participate in a Protective Behaviours Program, and should develop practices that ensure the safety of younger children in the church and on the church grounds.

A church community needs to be aware of the Protective Behaviours Programs in the schools of its wider community. A church may be identified by the child as a safe network of people they can talk to about things that are worrying them.

Where a child talks about an incident of abuse, a child is said to have made a ‘disclosure’. A caring church community will respond by supporting the child as needed.

Disclosures and support

Protective Behaviours Programs increase the likelihood of children





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revealing experiences of abuse and reduce the incidence of abuse recurring.

Generally, when a child reveals an experience of abuse, professionals recommend a supportive response - believe the child, do not quiz the child, and validate the child's decision to tell. Tell the child you will do whatever you can to make the abuse stop and that this means reporting it to someone who can help; the two of you cannot do this on your own. Record immediately what the child has told you or anything you might have observed. Make sure you put the date, time and your signature on what you have recorded.

The church can provide support to victims and offenders but is not equipped to investigate allegations of abuse.

For more information on the Protective Behaviours Programs and your nearest member group contact:

Protective Behaviours National Forum

49 Flinders Street

ADELAIDE SA 5000

Ph: (08) 8223 5428

Fax: (08) 8223 6425

Spiritual Care

Caring for children's spirituality means taking care to ensure that language, images, symbols, rituals and relations with other people foster a positive and active spirituality. Language such as, 'the blood of the Lamb', or 'the fires of hell', or 'damnation' are difficult for a child to understand and repress positive spirituality. Such language should be avoided. Symbols and rituals, such as 'altar calls', and 'fasting' are also capable of repressing a positive spirituality and being abusive. Teaching and learning methods, such as 'memory verses' might also lead to difficulties, as the context of



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the bible passage and its teaching are easily misconstrued by a child in such circumstances. Activity which prevents or excludes children's participation might also repress a positive spirituality in a child.

Children and health

Caring for children means helping them to remain healthy and reducing the risk of harm. This means knowing about relevant areas of health and safety. Often it means knowing specific things about the health of individual children.

Children's understanding of health, and what may harm them, develops with time and experience. Children might be less able than adults to communicate this understanding to others. A caring church community listens to children's comments about their own health and takes these comments seriously. Children often know something about their own health (for example an allergy or disability) that might not be known to others.



Important areas of health include hygiene, medical conditions and disabilities, and temporary circumstances affecting children's health.

Hygiene

Children need help with aspects of their personal hygiene and adults should model appropriate behaviour. Good hygiene is especially important around food, toileting, or when someone is sick. Poor hygiene may harm not just the child, but people with whom the child comes into contact.





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Medical conditions and disabilities

A child might have a medical condition or disability which may reduce the child's overall well-being, or make the child more vulnerable to harm.

A condition or disability might be present and recognised at birth, or may develop and the symptoms appear only during childhood. It may or may not be permanent. It might be physical, intellectual, social or emotional. A child's disability might not be immediately obvious to others, and a child may have more than one disability.

Caring for a child often means knowing about the child's individual health status and abilities, and knowing that these can change.

A medical condition or disability might affect the child always, or only occasionally or in certain circumstances. Conditions and disabilities vary in their impact on a child's health, and children are not affected by the 'same' condition or disability in the same way.

Some conditions and disabilities affect only the individual child. Others, such as contagious diseases or mental illness, need to be managed if they are not to affect the health of people in contact with the child. Child contagious diseases include: common cold, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, whooping cough, meningitis and encephalitis.

The child might or might not be able to do anything to minimise the effects of a condition or disability, and often the best action is to avoid, or be sensitive to, circumstances which test the child's health or which places the child's ability under pressure. For example, a child with an allergy to certain food, medicine, plant or insect sting, might need only to avoid the source of the allergy.

It may be important for other people to know about a child's health status, especially if they are directly responsible for the



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child's care or involved in an activity with the child, for example as a leader on a church program or in giving food to the child. Knowledge about a child's health helps people to protect the child and to respond appropriately if the child is at risk of harm (see 'confidentiality and privacy' below).

Temporary circumstances

Expectations of children need to be flexible because a child's ability to care for his/her own health or to act safely may be affected by a temporary circumstance, for example due to an injury, illness, tiredness, or even being worried, hurried or upset. A child might perform less well than usual at some activity, or may have a poorer understanding of situations and possible risks.

Accidents, emergencies and first aid

Caring for a child means being prepared for accidents and emergency situations. In an accident or emergency, a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm. At these times, health and safety become the immediate concern and it may be necessary to give a child first aid. Being prepared for an accident or emergency is especially important when the church conducts activities specifically for children, for example programs which might be distant from the church grounds and the children's families.

There are a number of ways a caring church community can be prepared for an accident or emergency involving a child.

The church should have clear procedures to follow. These procedures should at least make clear who is to do what and when, and what resources they will need. The procedures should also include information on the nearest medical services, how and when they should be contacted, and how available they are, for example travelling time.





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In the event of an accident or emergency, medical advice should be sought regardless of the apparent degree of injury, and relevant family members should be notified. A caring community has a duty of care to those who participate in church activities and programs. Procedures should be written down and be easily accessible when needed. People with particular responsibility for children's care, for example program leaders, should be familiar with the procedures. Procedures may also be developed for specific activities or when there are children who are known to have special needs.

In the event of an accident or emergency, devised procedures should include plans on who will:

- attend the injured child/ren;
- supervise the uninjured children;
- administer medical first aid (trained person);
- notify appropriate authorities (ambulance, fire, police);
- notify immediate family members;
- notify the church ; and
- review planned activity arrangements.

People directly responsible for children's health and safety - such as program leaders - should have first aid experience. For particular activities, this training and experience must be appropriate for the activity, for the children involved and given the availability of other medical services. A church community should be aware of and make best use of its members' first aid training experience.

When a child is involved in a church program, the church should have current family contact details and relevant information





about each child's medical history and current health status. This information must be accessible only to people who need it. Permission forms should be used in case a child needs urgent medical attention.

The church should have an appropriately supplied first aid kit which complies with Australian standards. Specific activities and programs may require specialised first aid equipment to deal with particular kinds of accidents and emergencies. Changes and additions might be necessary to the kit depending on the activity, the number of people involved and the time needed to travel to the nearest medical facilities among other things. Contact your nearest St John's Ambulance agency or Australian Red Cross Society for information on what to include in a first aid kit.

Confidentiality and privacy

Information about a child's health status - for example a medical condition or details of an accident - is personal and should be treated with respect to the child's privacy. Confidentiality is part of our care for a child and means that information about a child is only shared with people who need it. Always think about the nature of the information, who needs it, and why and when they need it. Sharing information about a child's health should only be done in consultation with the child's family members.

Confidentiality of the congregation's records relating to leaders recruitment, training and police check status must also be taken seriously. The congregation's Church Council must provide secure and confidential storage.

Questions for reflection

1. Can you recall a time when you were a child and you felt





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intimidated or harassed by an adult? How easy was this memory to recall? Were you able to discuss your feelings with the adult? If so, did discussing it help you with the situation? If not, do you think discussing it with the adult or another adult would have helped the situation?

2. What feelings would you have if a child disclosed to you that he or she had been abused or is currently being abused? How might these feelings affect your response to the child? What can you do to avoid letting your own feelings get in the way of helping the child?

3. Would you treat someone who had physically abused a child differently from someone who had sexually abused a child? Why or why not?



Suggestions for ministry

1. Arrange an interview with the local school principal to hear about the Protective Behaviours Program. Arrange with the school to offer a Protective Behaviours training event for church leaders and interested congregational members.

2. Invite a representative from your local Child Protection Service to speak to your congregation. Find out the process of reporting, investigating and prosecuting cases of child abuse in your State or Territory. Find out from this agency how you and your congregation can support children and their families as they go through this process.

3. Arrange a First Aid Certificate Training course for church leaders and interested congregational members.



Children and Uniting Church Property



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A significant aspect of our care for children means ensuring that the places where the church community gathers are safe so that children can participate in the life of the community.

If the church is to be welcoming to children, its property needs to be a place in which a child feels safe, and where possible sources of harm in the physical surroundings are eliminated or positively managed. It is important, therefore, for a caring church community to be aware of the potential risks to children's safety that exist in and around the property of the church.

The church 'property' includes both the buildings or other fixed structures, and what is inside them, as well as the natural and built landscape, and the setting or surrounding areas. Property also includes mobile equipment. Safety in our buildings and grounds is an issue that affects everyone in the church community, not only children.

Making property safe for children means looking and thinking about the church property from a child's point of view. Stop and think about what children are like, and what they like to do:

- children are active and learn through play;
- children are smaller and not as strong as adults;
- children's understanding and physical abilities are constantly changing;
- children have less experience of the world than adults;





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- children like to test and experiment with new things; and
- children are still learning about their environment and its potential risks.

In reality, this means that children run, they climb, they jump, they are inquisitive and like to touch things and explore new places. Pursuing their own interests may lead them to do things that are possibly harmful, and even to disobey adults. Some risks are unique to them; and there are some risks where children are more vulnerable, or from which they may suffer greater consequences than adults.

Eliminating and managing sources of harm to children

Some sources of harm might be eliminated; others might be always present but can be managed if people are aware of them. In making the property safer for children, a caring church community needs to think about the buildings and fixed structures, what's inside the building and how the property is used by different people.

Fixed structures such as buildings, fences and play equipment may be a risk to which children are potentially vulnerable. The following are examples of some of the common features of church property that might pose a danger to the safety of children:

- doors might be slammed on a child or jam small fingers;
- windows might be run into or fallen out of;
- walls might be run into or fallen off;
- electricity (wires/cords, power points, ovens and hot plates, generators) and water (bodies of water, taps, kettles) might attract the attention of a curious child;
- play equipment might be fallen off, and moving parts might





collide with or trap a child;

- floor or ground surfaces (for example slippery tiles, uneven pavers, or loose gravel) might harm a running child;
- fences, gates and other barriers can be used to promote safety, but should be appropriate to the risks they are trying to prevent and should not be a harm in themselves;
- floors, ceilings and spaces under buildings might trap an inquisitive child, or pose other sources of harm (e.g. spiders);
- stairs, both inside and outside the building, might be fallen down by a child moving too quickly or not using a hand rail or with hand rails too high for a child to reach;
- under pew pipe heating.

Sometimes something inside the building might be a risk to children. For example furniture might be a risk because of its shape, size, weight, placement, or by the way it assembles or works (eg collapsible tables). Electrical appliances and tools may pose a risk both when in use and when idle.

Some items kept on the church property can pose a risk to children. These might include items that are flammable (matches, accelerants), or poisonous (cleaning agents, medicines, insecticides, fertilisers, petrol, paint). These need to be locked away, or stored away from children. The church should develop guidelines for the storage and use of these items.

You can make your property safer by thinking about how it is used, for example: What activities take place in the various 'spaces' (rooms and other areas)? Who does what, when, where and why; and what are the implications for children's safety? There might be spaces primarily for children's use (creche and other play areas), spaces primarily for adult use (meetings or morning tea), and other areas where children may have no or limited access (kitchen, storage room). Activities need to be held in appropriate spaces.





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Children's play equipment must be appropriate to the age of the children using it. It must be sited carefully to avoid 'blind spots', and to provide adequate clear surrounding space to allow it to operate without interference (for example, from other equipment or part of a building) and so children can move around it easily, and in or near shade. Ideally, play equipment and any spaces dedicated to children's play should be within view of adults and easily accessible in the event of an emergency.

Equipment must be used on appropriate 'soft' surfaces such as special bark, rubber or sand. Equipment should be regularly checked to ensure that it is clean and in safe working condition, firmly anchored, and that there is nothing that could interfere with its use (for example, a toy or an overhanging branch). It must be assembled and used in accordance with instructions, any legal requirements, and appropriate adult supervision depending on the nature of the equipment and the ages of the children using it.



The church property includes not only the buildings, but also natural or landscaped features and these might also put children's safety at risk. Such features include the type and placement of trees and other plants, the size and location of rocks, steeply sloping ground, areas of poor rainwater

drainage or excessive sun. For example, trees and plants may be poisonous or very twiggy (a danger to eyes or skin). A child can fall out of a tree, if it has handy low branches making it ideal for climbing, or run into a tree, if it is situated in or near an area children use for running type play. Rocks may be small enough for a child to throw, big enough for a child to fall from, close enough together to trap a child, or heavy enough to crush a child.



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The setting of the church property - the area immediately surrounding the property - might also be a source of harm to children. Children may go beyond the bounds of the church property in their travel to and from church, for a planned activity, or if they wander away from the church without an adult knowing. Risks to children's safety include traffic (roads, driveways), aspects of the natural or designed landscape such as bodies of water, dense bush or animals (dogs, snakes, insects), or people who are not members of the church community. Sources of harm may change relatively quickly (a new road, a fallen tree) or might develop gradually over time (increases in traffic, eroded soil). Other risks may simply be unknown.

The setting of the church property might be something which cannot be changed or even controlled, but it should be remembered when we think about creating a safe environment for children. For example, the setting may have implications for the design or modification of the church property (e.g. siting, fences) or for the appropriate level of supervision given to children.

Pay special attention to the potential risks to children when changes, both permanent and temporary, have occurred to the church property. There may have been an extension to a building, new furniture set up, temporary fixtures bought in and or perhaps special play equipment may have been hired. A new risk to the children in our church community may have been created by these changes and the risks should be identified and eliminated or managed.

- Develop guidelines on how property areas should be used and make these available to church activity leaders and members of the public using the church property.
- Identify someone as the contact for occasions when action is needed. Decide on a process for getting things done and write the process down to ensure that things are done and/or fixed.





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- Contact appropriate authorities for maintenance, for example a builder, an education body, an architect, an engineer or an insurer.
- Do regular inspections of building structures and grounds for infestations of spiders, etc.
- Do property reviews and budget for maintenance costs each year.
- Encourage children to identify and report anything unsafe.

Developing and using a property checklist

A checklist will help you to keep the church property safe for children. NOTE: Church insurers will usually be able to supply a property checklist for use by a congregation's Church Council to ensure that church property is safe for all people. A checklist can help you to remember and monitor potential sources of harm and identify action to be done to make the church safer. To make your checklist, the members of the church property committee could meet with parents and children's ministry leaders. It will be best to use the whole checklist at regular times throughout the year. For some property areas, such as the kitchen or play areas, it may be safer to use a specific checklist more frequently.

Your congregation will need to make up its own checklists to best suit the features and setting of its property. A checklist will need to be detailed and reflect the particulars of a congregation's fixed and mobile property. The checklist might include the following items:

Worship space

- locks functioning
- furniture secured
- safety plugs used in power points
- electrical equipment inaccessible to children or under adult supervision





Kitchen

- poisons locked away
- plastic bags locked away
- appliances inaccessible to children
- cutlery inaccessible to children
- glass items inaccessible to children
- hot/boiling water inaccessible to children
- no dangling cords
- no items which allow climbing
- floor is dry
- safety plugs used in power points
- towels are clean and dry.

Grounds

- fences in good condition
- gates and locks working
- equipment locked away
- dangerous plants removed or made safe
- play equipment appropriate and safe to use

Bathrooms and toilets

- poisons locked away
- hot/boiling water inaccessible to children
- floor is dry
- safety plugs used in power points
- soap available
- towels clean and dry
- drains are inaccessible to children





Questions for reflection

1. What are the potential sources of harm to children of your church property? Which ones can be eliminated? Which sources of harm should be managed? How might some be managed?
2. Can you think of an incident at your church when a child was hurt, or at risk of harm, in which some aspect of the church property was a contributing factor? What happened? Who was involved? What was done, or could be done, to try to stop such an incident happening again?



Suggestions for ministry

1. Watch carefully what children do in the various 'spaces' (rooms, grounds) of the church property. Who does what, where, when, and how often? How do children's activities compare to adults' activities in the same spaces? Are adults' and children's activities compatible, and what can you do if they are not? Try to think how children's activities might lead to potential sources of harm, and what can be changed to reduce harm.
2. Talk with children and ask them what they think are the 'dangers' around the church property.
3. Visit other churches and/or talk with people from other churches to see how they have made their church property safer for children.



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