



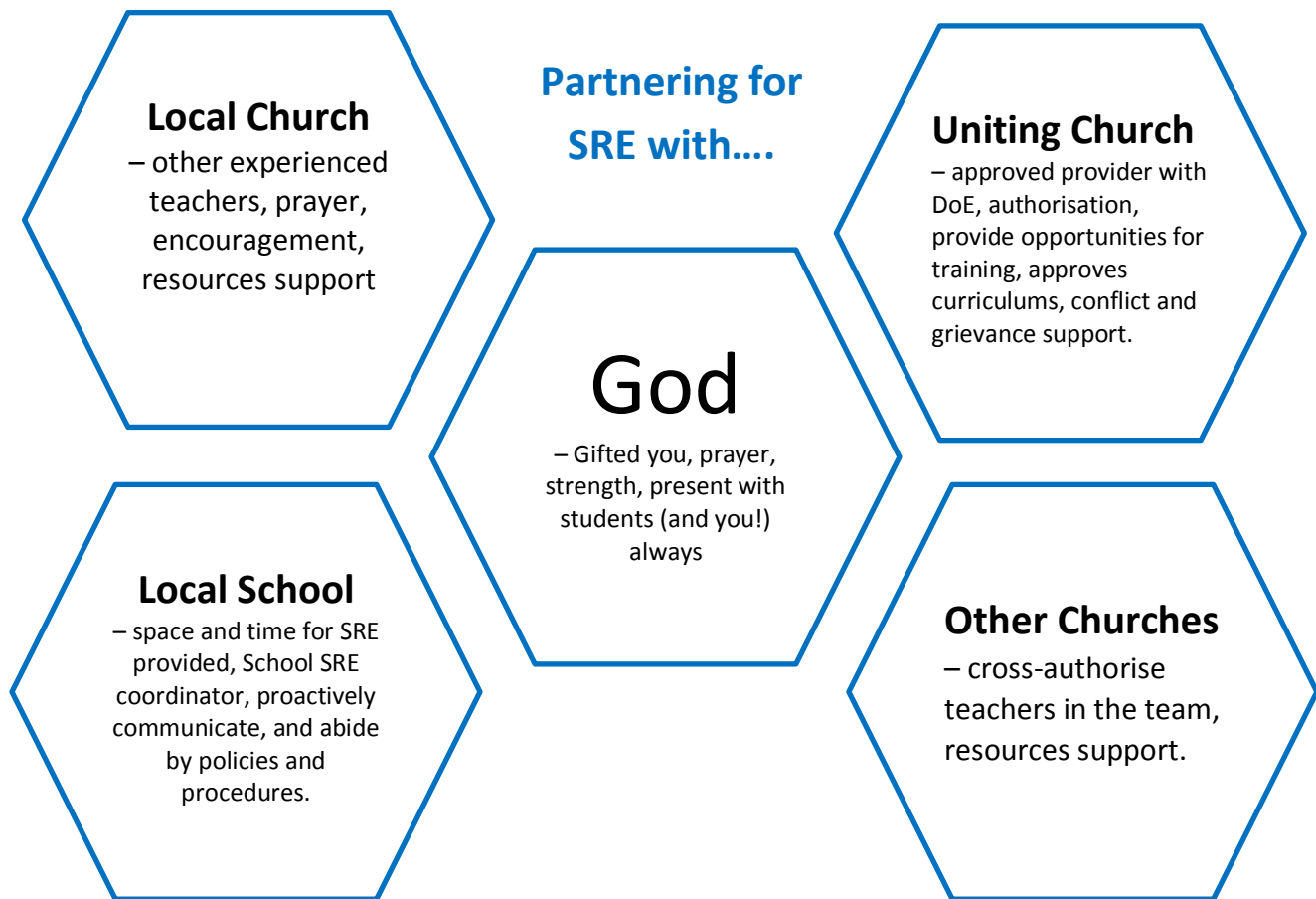
**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Partnering for Special Religious Education

An Essential Introduction for SRE teacher and helpers



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Partnering for Special Religious Education

An Essential Introduction for SRE teacher and helpers

We are privileged to have the opportunity to partner with NSW Government schools to provide Special Religious Education (SRE) to teach children in the faith. SRE compliments student learning about world religions in General Religious Education (GRE) which is included in the NSW Board of Studies Curriculum, as part of the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) Key Learning Area.

Those who feel called to be SRE teachers and helpers share their gifts and skills in partnership with God, their local church, their denomination, the school, and other local church (in a combined arrangement) to offer SRE for students. It is such an amazing opportunity to be a caring presence helping students growing in understanding of the building blocks of faith and how life and faith intertwine. Each of these partnerships has both responsibilities and supports for making SRE the best it can be for our students.

Preparing to be an SRE Representative

Like all other volunteering or work with children, we have a few things to do to prepare for this role. The first stage is called **authorisation** and happens BEFORE a new SRE representative begins in the role. Part of the authorisation process includes having completed a SCTA Safe Church Awareness Workshop, and working towards your SRE Teacher Basic Training Certificate. You can provide evidence that you have prior learning which fits the competencies (skills and knowledge) of the basic training certificate to apply for credit for some modules.

Once you are authorised, you can begin working with an SRE class. Ideally, you should work with another SRE teacher until you are confident to conduct the class yourself. If you have further modules to complete in your SRE Teacher Basic Training, you can do these at the next suitable time during your first year. On the next page you'll find an overview of the authorisation steps.



SRE Teacher Authorisation Steps

1) Obtain Working With Children Check (WWCC) Clearance number.

Applications online: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au

2) Attend an SCTA Endorsed Safe Church Workshop (or refresher, if 3 years since you last attended).

Training calendars online: www.childrensministry.org.au/safety-and-protection/2016-2/

3) Skills & Knowledge for SRE - Participate in SRE training (there are face-to-face workshops and online options) and/or provide evidence of prior learning relevant to SRE teaching (such as tertiary qualifications, short courses such as lay preacher subjects, youth or children's ministry seminars, etc). You will need to have completed at least 2 modules of the Basic Training OR appropriate Recognition of Prior learning BEFORE you can be authorised.

4) Complete and sign a Uniting Church SRE Engagement Form (version 2017), including having a conversation with your minister or other authorising agent for your Church Council (they need to support your authorisation).

5) Send a copy of your completed SRE Engagement form to Uniting Mission & Education. When your completed form is received you can be issued an SRE Authorisation card. You will need to carry your current SRE authorisation card and wear a Uniting Church name badge when at school for SRE to show you have authorisation from an approved provider of SRE.

What else can I do before I start?

You've got your authorisation sorted! Now what?

Now is a great time prepare for the classes themselves! The material collected here is designed to help you to feel as prepared as possible – digesting some of this information, and offering advice on how to make the most of this opportunity.

1. Find out the starting dates, term dates, class allocation and other school calendar events which may affect your program.
2. Obtain your Approved SRE curriculum material as early as possible. Read ahead so that you have the big picture of where your lessons are going.
3. Start collecting visual aids, pictures, objects etc. in advance.
4. Start praying now for yourself, your class and your school.
5. Get to know some children the same age as your class. Learn as much as you can from them about their interests, concerns, likes and dislikes.
6. Get to know your school and your school SRE co-ordinator (usually a member of staff) and other SRE teachers. As the year progresses you will learn the names of the school principal, office staff and class teacher.

What's expected of me as an SRE teacher?

Along with the expectations of those we partner with, we need to examine our own expectations to make sure that they are realistic! As a foundation, the expectations for an SRE teacher are:

- ✓ **Commitment** to the task that God has given you.
- ✓ **A loving attitude** towards all the children that you teach, and an understanding and acceptance of their family background, no matter how different it may be to yours.
- ✓ **Preparation** of each lesson, following the approved curriculum.
- ✓ **Punctuality** at school for your lessons to ensure the handover between classes is smooth.
- ✓ **Attendance** at relevant accreditation and enrichment training and in-service courses. The best teachers are those who are always ready to learn.
- ✓ **A prayerful approach** towards the lessons to be presented and for the children in your class.

Volunteering for SRE in a NSW Public School

Beyond the foundational expectation above, as a volunteer within the school setting, you have obligations to act within the policies and procedures of that school. There are some policies which apply to all NSW Government Schools and some might be specific to the local school, both of which you need to be familiar, particularly with how they apply to your role as an SRE representative.

The fundamental policies and procedures an SRE representative should be familiar with are the *Religious Education policy* and *Religious Education implementation procedures*. Additional relevant documents include: code of conduct, workplace health and safety, controversial issues policy, values statement, allergy and anaphylaxis management, anti-discrimination and harassment policy, and the wellbeing framework. How schools come together to provide positive educational experiences relies on clear procedures and expectation for all involved.

As you begin to prepare and in your first weeks, you'll need to learn about any local school specific policies/procedures. These are important for classroom management and safety in the school setting. You might be able to learn these from an experienced SRE teacher at that school or from the school's SRE coordinator. Things such as:

- Movement of children in class groups, eg. From an assembly area and entry into classroom.
- Ways children at your school address the teachers.
- Leaving the room e.g. If a child needs to go to the toilet it is often suggested that a second student accompanies another.
- Emergency evacuations and lockdown procedures.
- School discipline policy and school award/reward scheme. Find out if you can also use this.
- Individual needs in your class eg. Any student's with high-risk health concerns (such as asthma or anaphylaxis risk); Seating arrangements for students with special needs. Do you have a school aide assigned to help?
- Use and care of classroom equipment. Access to equipment you might need for your lesson e.g. overhead projector, CD players, video and TV, maps and pictures, and/or use of school library resources.

How should I prepare my lessons?

Although lesson outlines are already prepared, it does require time to think through how you would present this lesson to these students. In many curricula, there will be more activities offered than you will have time to use in one lesson! This gives you the opportunity to adapt each lesson to suit your particular students, the available space/resources and time.

- Start preparation well ahead! Give yourself plenty of time to prepare craft, visual aids etc.,
- Pray for yourself and for your students.
- Read through the lesson plan and student material.
- Discover the lesson aims— what is the key message of the lesson?
- Make any necessary changes e.g. Will the introduction grab the children’s attention? Are the activities appropriate to the age/stage of the children’s development? Does the conclusion draw the theme of the lesson together?
- Think about different ways children learn – each child in your class could have different preferences. Auditory—learning by listening. Visual—learning by seeing. Tactile—learning by doing. What activities might help these different styles connect with the lesson?
- Complete the children’s activity yourself.
- After the lesson ask yourself:
 - What worked well?
 - What could be improved?
 - Was the lesson aim achieved?

Language in the SRE Classroom

Students come to your SRE classroom with their own understanding of religious terms and concepts which may be different from your own. Language is a very powerful tool and needs to be used carefully.

Therefore when teaching SRE remember:

- Belief type statements are those which require an element of faith to be accepted as true e.g. “There is life after death”. These should be owned or grounded.
- Grounding what you say clearly shows where or who a statement comes from. e.g. “Many Christians believe...”, “The Uniting Church believes...”, “The Bible says...”
- Owning what you say clearly shows students when a statement is from your own experience e.g. “I believe ...”, “I feel...”, “I think...”. etc. Beware if you find yourself starting too many sentences with “I” – you need to stick to the curriculum.
- Fact type statements are those which can be scientifically, historically or empirically proven e.g. “Many people worship as part of their religious observance.” These do not require owning or grounding.
- Use language that allows students the freedom to consider belief statements and accept them if they wish.
- Our language and terminology will not assume that students share our beliefs in an identical way or to the same extent.
- Do not allow focus on violence, hell, or evil spirits.
- Do not put down other faiths or a child’s family beliefs or values.
- Explain or simplify religious terms or ‘jargon’ where appropriate. e.g. ‘grace’.

Spiritual Sensitivity

One caution worth reinforcing is ensuring we are thinking about the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of the students we teach in SRE.

Spiritual abuse is behaviour which uses the threat of power from God or a higher power to coerce or pressure someone into a particular behaviour. Sometimes the term 'Proselytize' is used with negative connotation to describe a similar action where conversion to a particular faith is pushed, regardless of the cost (often to self-esteem, self-worth, and emotional wellbeing) to the individual. This behaviour is unacceptable. The welfare of students is our highest priority.

SRE is an educational activity, to teach students the building blocks of faith in age-appropriate way. Particularly children in Primary school are still developing abstract and reasoning processes and as such our sensitivity to how they might respond is important - not just for their relationships and interaction in SRE, but their relationship and connection to God. This is important and sensitive work - we are spiritual teachers and leaders in SRE classrooms.

Stages of Development

While not an exact science, theories about stages of development can help give us generalised advice on what might be helpful for children at different ages, generally based on cognitive (brain and thinking) and emotional development. In each of these stages of growth and learning the implications for us as SRE teachers are enormous. Our lessons must appropriately reflect these stages, so that children will learn more effectively and enjoy the process too.

Lower to Middle Primary Years

In the early years at school, children may tell us this week that they want to follow Jesus; last week they wanted to fly to the moon and next week they want to be a firefighter! They are unlikely to have developed a moral sense - Bad is what gets punished, what goes unpunished must be OK. They surprise us with their answers to our questions, but they may be trotting them out parrot-fashion rather than understanding. Religious words can easily become confused.

Some characteristics:

- Like to play → therefore ... include fun elements.
- Energetic → therefore ... allow opportunities for movement.
- Dependent on adults → therefore ... avoid abstract language.
- Take words literally → therefore ... avoid abstract language.
- Short attention span → therefore ... plan your lessons around short, varied activities.
- Enjoy repetition → therefore ... re-use songs and activities they have enjoyed.
- Need security → therefore ... be consistent in your care for students.
- Limited vocabulary → therefore ... use language they can understand.
- Inquisitive → therefore ... encourage questions, give short answers.
- Imaginative → therefore ... encourage creative expression.



Stages of Development - Middle to Upper Primary

Children in their later primary years still struggle to understand abstract concepts like ‘truth’; they do, however, believe people whom they trust. We must work hard at turning abstract concepts into concrete teaching. They are normally curious about the world and thirsty for information. They have a remarkably strong sense of justice and loyalty. They leave us breathless with their energy.

Some characteristics:

Influenced by those they admire

→ therefore ... use real-life and biblical role models.

Belonging to a group is important

→ therefore ... look for opportunities for team activities.

Peer pressure is a big influence

→ therefore ... create opportunities for positive attitudes to be expressed.

Influenced by popular culture

→ therefore ... include positive examples from that culture.

Often says “It’s not fair!”

→ therefore ... be fair and consistent in all your dealings with children

Sometimes hostile to authority

→ therefore ... balance authority with friendliness.

Competitive

→ therefore ... provide occasional opportunities for healthy competition.

Sometimes moody

→ therefore ... acknowledge and respect situations which may be outside your control

Sensitive to criticism

→ therefore ... choose your words carefully.

Stages of Development - Lower Secondary

Once children enter their teen years they are wrestling with their identity, and are sometimes insecurely balanced between childhood and adulthood. Moods are often inevitable and there can be a sense of conflict between doing what is “right “ and tossing authority to the wind! Physical growth spurts are normal and conformity to group norms of behaviour is valued more highly than individualism.

Some characteristics:

Searching for a sense of identity

→ therefore— accept and affirm while maintaining established standards. Focus on Jesus public life and relationships with people.

At time for testing fixed rules, authority and social order

→ therefore – Ask for possible alternatives in dilemma situations and explore their implications

Anxiety about one's acceptability

→ therefore.-Introduce self awareness exercises and help them to perceive and affirm the good in themselves and others.

Growth spurt

→ therefore—Be willing to listen. Speak to them as young adults. Aim at communicating respect for them as they are.

Doubt, questioning and critical judgement developing

→ therefore— reassure them as they move from a reliance on others to a more reflective & owned faith.

Ability to think abstractly developing

→ therefore— provide enjoyable and stimulating learning tasks which balance intellectual and practical interests.

Stages of Development - Upper Secondary

In the final years of school the support of peer groups is strong and a more even pattern of relationships develops. There is also increased awareness of and concern for global issues. They swing between attraction and intimacy with one or a few others and wanting to be alone. A range of emotions are all easily stirred up.

Some characteristics:

Have greatly developed intellectual skills and experiences

→ therefore— affirm gifts and interests in all areas intellectual and sporting, encourage alertness to public affairs. Acknowledge that they may have greater knowledge in some areas than many adults.

May see the human condition as one of two extremes, wholly irredeemable or perfection

→ therefore— express balanced and compassionate responses to disasters whether from natural causes or human error and acknowledge the human suffering involved. Discuss practical ways to help.

Beginning to explore commitment

→ therefore—provide opportunities for in-depth exploration of the meaning and demands of the various kinds of commitment open to them. Recognise them as adults.

Vulnerable to varied emotions

→ therefore— be sensitive to likely emotional responses, enlist the deep positive drive and energy expressed, affirm their willingness to become involved in the world, seek ways of helping them to appreciate the value of understanding and caring service.

Developing an owned faith

→ therefore— encourage their thinking, provide support & share in the journey.

Simple Creative Teaching Ideas

SRE should never be boring! Here are some ideas to add variety and interest to your lessons.

1. **'Get to know you' Activities.** A short game or activity can help establish relationships with the students. Make a point of learning the names of your children through games and fun activities.
2. **Physical Settings.** Use posters, pictures, banners, or set up a small worship table, with a cloth, cross, bible, etc. as a visual focus. At times you may be able to move outdoors etc. to enhance the learning experience and environment.
3. **Stories.** Use a range of stories, bible or children's. Dramatic stories and plays are often included in curricula. You can use stories that can be role played, mimed, or told with props. Children might even enjoy creating their own play from the story of the week, to perform back to the class.
4. **Music.** Use tape/CD, video, or play an instrument.
Display the words so that they can be easily read.
Explain the words and apply them to your lesson objectives
Encourage involvement with singing, dancing, movement, body percussion or percussion instruments.
5. **Visual Aids.** The use of videos, overhead projectors, slides or pictures, puppets, personal memorabilia, items of clothing, etc. add to the interest that you can create in your lessons.
6. **Use of the Bible.** Let the children see you use your bible.
Allow hands on opportunities for children to use bibles as well.
7. **Prayer.** Keep it short, using inclusive language.
Invite students to participate.
Use a variety of styles e.g. spontaneous prayer, responsive prayer, formal prayer, prayer chains, prayer books, prayer circles, etc.
8. **Games and Activities.** Children love games! Use games that advance the flow of the lesson, are appropriate to the age group, are inclusive, and need not be bound by the classroom setting.
9. **Linking Lessons to life.** Look for relevant events in the lives of the children that relate to the lesson content e.g. school excursions, class art work on the walls, etc.
10. **Talk with other teachers.** Find out what worked, and let them help you! In many areas, encouragement and training are offered to SRE teachers. Take advantage of these special days. You learn so much from others.



Classroom Management

Many behaviour problems will be avoided if your lessons captivate the students. Therefore good preparation and presentation will form the basis of a good behaviour management strategy. However, instances may still arise where the following hints will be helpful.

1. Find out the recognised signals for gaining children's attention, or develop your own e.g. one raised hand, hands on heads, clapping rhythm.
2. Reinforce the classroom rules or alternatively set your own with the help of the class. Enforce these rules consistently.
3. When asking questions of the class, expect raised hands before allowing an answer. Discourage children from calling out by ignoring those who do.
4. Ask teachers if there are any students with special needs in the class e.g. hearing impaired, limited reading ability, behavioural issues. Cater for these students in your planning. An extra classroom helper may be an asset to you.
5. For minor disturbances, keep the lesson flowing by:
 - ✓ Praising positive behaviour
 - ✓ Standing near the child
 - ✓ Establishing momentary eye contact
 - ✓ Using a simple gesture
 - ✓ Removing distractions
6. For major disruptions be sure the child understands why the behaviour is wrong. Questions such as "What should you be doing?" may help.
7. Share your feelings about the misbehaviour not the misbehaving child themselves. Don't jeopardise your relationship with the child by being negative about them as a person.
8. Outline the choices and the consequences of the misbehaviour, so as to place the responsibility for the student's actions on their shoulders, not yours. Encourage them to make a good choice.
9. Be specific when you are reprimanding a child for poor behaviour. Link their actions to the class rules. Ask the child what rule they have forgotten, and to tell you what they are doing wrong. Describing poor behaviour as 'being naughty' is not specific enough!
10. Always look behind the presenting problem to consider the real reason for the negative behaviour e.g. Rejection from friends, not belonging; Home situations; Emotional instability caused by grief, loss, etc; Lesson not engaging enough?
11. It is NEVER okay to physically discipline a student, or use threats of physical discipline.



Essential Child Safety and Protection

Child safety and protection is of paramount importance in all we do. There are legislation and school policies to adhere to, but when we are partnering with schools for SRE we must also ensure what we are teaching with sensitivity and upholding the values of the school. There are specific policies with regard to anti-bullying and harassment, sensitive issues, and child protection for the benefit of all in the school community.

The core values of NSW Public Education are:

Integrity	Excellence	Respect	Responsibility	Cooperation
Participation	Care	Fairness	Democracy	

Reporting a Child at Risk of Harm

When we work with children, we have a responsibility to look out for the wellbeing of these children who may not be able to stand up for themselves. SRE teachers are obligated under the NSW Working With Children Check legislation and the NSW Department of Education Child Protection policy to report any concern we have about the welfare of a child we encounter in our school to the Principal in the first instance, as they are responsible for the duty of care in that school setting. We also recommend you complete an anecdotal record with your safe church contact person, so they are aware that this concern has been raised in the course of your church ministry, and can connect you with pastoral support, if needed.

Sensitive and Controversial Issues

First and foremost our concern is with the wellbeing of each child. Thus this must take higher priority than any theological or doctrinal tenants of any religious faith. As an SRE teacher, regardless of your personal beliefs or position around sensitive issues such as political views, same-sex relationships, suicide, and gender roles, you must not impose your own beliefs or position, but focus on the approved curriculum. Assumptions cannot be made about the family and community of any of our students, thus these sensitive issues are generally not directly addressed in Primary stage curriculums, and should be approached in a discussion/conversation based way in High School curriculums, respecting the right of students and parents to hold a different viewpoint, and not be discriminated against for holding a different viewpoint.

Other basic child safety advice

*Make it an absolute rule never to be left alone with a child. It is best always to have as many children with you as possible. Never keep a single child back after class if there are no other staff members or children present.

*If a student wants to talk to you alone, perhaps they have a problem they want to raise, ensure that a discussion of this kind takes place in a conspicuous situation, i.e. out of hearing but in sight of as many people as possible.

*Sometimes a simple touch to comfort a distressed child can be appropriate (but always in full view of others). It is not wise initiate physical contact, but be obvious that any contact is about the needs of the child. It is never appropriate to touch a child in anger.

*If a child responds to you with affection and physical touch, it is best to acknowledge them but then gently encourage them to go and play/interact with the other children in the playground or classroom.

Approved Curriculum for SRE

One of the important things in our partnership for SRE is to be transparent about what we teach and how we teach. That is why there are ongoing training expectations for all SRE teachers, and also why we only work with Approved Curriculum materials.

The SRE website will direct you to the web pages for the different curriculum providers available to you. Some come from Denominations, others from Christian Education bodies. All must be age-appropriate and tried and tested, to ensure they are appropriate for use in the school setting.

For time to time additional curricula are approved by SRE providers. So you can check back from time to time to see other options available.

Establishing yourself in the first weeks of SRE

Your priority in the first few weeks of the year must be in establishing yourself as the teacher and in consistently applying the classroom rules. These things are more important than getting the lesson finished! Here are a few more helpful hints that will get you away to a good start.

- Ensure you find and sign the attendance book for all visiting SRE teachers/helpers.
- Discover and observe the school rules—discipline policies, children going to the toilet in lesson time. The use of equipment such as pencils, blackboard, CD players, electronic whiteboards need to be negotiated with the classroom teacher. As a general rule it is better to be self-sufficient!
- Get to know the names of the students as quickly as you can.
- Remember never leave your class unattended—if you need assistance send 2 children to get the teacher. At the end of the lesson wait for the teacher to return to the class before you leave.
- Establish class rules with the students and be quietly consistent in applying them.
- Leave the classroom tidy and always finish your lesson on time, ready to hand over to the classroom teacher.
- If an emergency arises and you are unable to attend your class try to find another SRE teacher who could take your lesson. If unsuccessful, make sure you contact the school so that they can make other arrangements for your class.



Some 'What if...?' Questions Answered

Those 'What if...?' questions inevitably come up and it helps if you know what to do before the situation comes up, especially when it is a sensitive issue. If there is something on your mind not listed here, please make contact and ask. No question is too silly, so you'd be silly not to ask!

What if I have a concern that a child in my class is at risk of significant harm?

Use the NSW child protection helpline (ph: 132 111) or online mandatory reporters guide (MRG) to check if the information you have warrants a report to community services NSW. If so, you will need to report it to the Principal at the school, as they are responsible for overseeing the duty of care in that context. It is also recommended that you complete an anecdotal record with your Safe Church Contact Person, so they are aware that a concern has come up in the course of your church ministry involvement, and can help connect you to pastoral support.

What if a school keeps changing the time/day of our SRE classes, making it difficult to coordinate SRE teachers from the churches perspective?

There are set implementation procedures for SRE – including the negotiation of class scheduling. Speak to your School SRE Coordinator first. Hopefully it is possible to resolve the issue locally. If you continue to have difficulties, speak to Synod SRE coordinator, Emma Parr, to discuss the concern, as there are occasionally issues with the implementation of SRE that require additional assistance.

What if I have a question about the content of a lesson in the approved curriculum we use?

Speak to your church SRE coordinator (if you have one) or you can contact the Synod SRE coordinator, Emma Parr, to discuss the concern. You can also contact curriculum providers direct to offer feedback. Most curriculums are revised based on feedback from SRE teachers like you during the year, so don't be afraid to raise your feedback.

What if I notice something unsafe at school (eg. Floor tiles in hallway lifting causing trip hazard)?

We all have a responsibility to say something – You could raise it with your classroom teacher, School SRE Coordinator or office/facilities staff if you know them.

What if there is an accident while I'm at school (eg. Someone trips over and badly hurt themselves)?

If it was in the course of your class or you directly witnessed it (whether it is a student, another staff member or yourself injured), you will need to report it to the Principal. The Principal can tell you whether you need to complete an incident report or witness report. This ensures that any insurance implications can be met and anybody who is injured is appropriately followed up from the schools point of view.

What if I have another question not covered above?

Contact the Synod SRE coordinator

Emma Parr – Religious Education & Safe Church
Uniting Mission & Education, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta NSW 2151
Phone: 02 8838 8977 Email: sre@nswact.uca.org.au

You may also find what you need on our website: www.childrensministry.org.au/sre



For more information (including downloading this booklet) visit:

www.childrensministry.org.au/sre

Helpful Links

www.childrensministry.org.au

Homepage for resources, ideas and articles from children's and family ministry in Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT, including SRE and Safe Church sections.

www.childrensministry.org.au/sre/nsw-doe-links

Direct links to NSW Department of Education policy and procedures applicable to SRE in Schools.

www.ume.nswact.uca.org.au

Homepage of Uniting Mission and Education, the ministry resourcing page of the Synod of NSW and ACT, including the resourcing team, theological library, lay ministry, mission initiatives, multicultural and cross cultural ministry, rural ministry, mission resourcing, next gen ministry, schools, education and training opportunities.

www.iccoreis.asn.au

Homepage of the Inter-Church Commission on Religious Education In Schools (ICCOREIS), a peak body for resourcing SRE in NSW. The member churches of ICCOREIS are responsible for the majority of SRE classes in NSW.

www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au

The Office of Children's Guardian NSW is responsible for the NSW Working with Children Check (WWCC). On this site you can access working with children advice, apply for your WWCC clearance, register your church/organisation as an employer, and verify WWCC clearance numbers.