

Werribee Baptist Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy

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RESPONSIBLE PERSON/POSITION: Pastoral Team & Ministry/Department Leaders	REVIEW DATE: September 2024

INTRODUCTION

Everyone regardless of age, race, and identity is welcome at Werribee Baptist Church (WBC). WBC is committed to promoting and protecting the safety and wellbeing of all who participate in our church community, its programs, ministries, and events. We recognise that all children and vulnerable people have the right to be, and to feel safe; be provided with protection; and to have the opportunity to flourish emotionally, socially, economically, educationally, and spiritually.

Our policy has been developed to uphold this commitment to safety and wellbeing undergirded by Biblical truth which outlines for us the value and worth of every individual made in the image of God with respect and adherence to current National and State legislation.

POLICY STATEMENT

This Werribee Baptist Church Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is written to demonstrate the strong commitment the WBC Council, staff and volunteers have to the safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable people.

Werribee Baptist Church acknowledges that everyone working in, and representative of, our organisation is committed to promoting the welfare of all children and vulnerable people who participate in any of its ministries or activities by protecting their rights and protecting them from harm, including abuse. This policy was developed and reviewed as a collaborative effort of a diverse group representing our community and is made available through constant communication and reinforcement of this commitment at all levels and engagement with our church. It applies to all staff, volunteers, children, and individuals involved in our church community.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is

1. To facilitate the prevention of child abuse from occurring within WBC
2. To demonstrate our organisational commitment to provide and maintain a culture of safety and wellbeing for children and vulnerable people
3. To ensure that all who call WBC their church community are aware of their responsibilities for identifying occasions for child abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing and recognising abuse when it occurs.
4. To ensure a process exists for screening staff and volunteers.

5. To provide a clear process for handling allegations of abuse which includes compliance with mandatory reporting requirements. (See **Safe Church Concerns Reporting Procedure**)
6. To provide guidance and ongoing training for staff and volunteers as to action that should be taken where abuse is suspected within or outside of the organisation.

These policies and procedures are to be read and implemented alongside relevant legislation related to the protection and welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

For the purposes of this policy a child is considered anyone up to the age of 18. All children are considered vulnerable. A vulnerable person is a person who is more susceptible to harm due to factors such as (but not limited to) advanced age, disability, illness, residency status, financial hardship, and experience of abuse.

COMMITMENT TO SAFETY

Werribee Baptist Church has a zero-tolerance for abuse of any kind and the welfare of children in our care is priority. We recognise that all children and families who engage in our community of faith have a right to be included in decisions which impact them, their rights, and their safety, and we will endeavour to engage with any concerns or complaints in a proactive and inclusive manner.

Our safe church culture is embedded in all levels of our organisation. The Church Constitution identifies the Church Council as being responsible for “written governing policies and processes” (6.2.1.6) within a delegated framework executed by the Executive Team led by the Lead Pastor. This models our “top down” culture in relation to child protection. The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct, Confidentiality Policies along with reporting procedures are easily accessible online. Additionally, our commitment to Child Safety is referenced in internal and external communications, job advertisements, and training materials.

We recognise our legal and moral responsibilities to promote best practice, protect and safeguard children from harm, abuse, and neglect. All children, irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, and abilities have the right to protection from all types of harm or abuse; we recognise those children who are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, level of dependency, communication needs or other issues.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK

A current Working with Children Check (“WWCC”) – noting it is for work/volunteer at Werribee Baptist Church – must be held by all employees and volunteers. This includes those who will not have intentional, or potential for, contact with children in undertaking their role(s). Contractors who undertake work at WBC or property must have a WWCC or be escorted or monitored while they undertake their activities.

Renewal: The WWCC card is valid for five years unless surrendered or revoked. Expiry dates will be tracked, and holders notified. Action must be taken as soon as possible by the cardholder to renew the card. A person who no longer holds a valid card and has not taken

action to renew the card within 30 days will not be permitted to undertake any activities that may involve intentional, or the potential for, contact with children

Exemption: As noted above, it is obligatory for employees/volunteers to hold a current WWCC. However, a majority of the members of the Executive Team may resolve to grant an exemption from gaining a WWCC in most extraordinary circumstances. Where a person applies for an exemption, the Executive Team must determine what criteria shall be applied in the situation. However, the following must be considered in deciding:

- Must make an application in writing to the Lead Pastor, noting the reason for seeking an exemption;
- Must not be a “person of concern”
- Must have valid reasons for not seeking a WWCC – non-contact with children, in undertaking activities at, or as part of, the WBC community is not, by itself, sufficient reason for obtaining an exemption;
- Must submit to any term(s) the Executive Team may impose; and
- Must satisfy the Executive Team that they will have **absolutely** no contact (physical or online/digital) with children in undertaking any activities within, or as part of, the WBC community and sign an agreement to this effect together with any terms imposed by the Executive team.

Where the Executive Team, following an application for an exemption and consideration of all the relevant issues, decides to either grant or to refuse an exemption:

- The decision, together with the reasons for seeking the exemption, and the reasons which formed the basis for granting or refusing the exemption must be in writing.
- The name of the applicant must not be de-identified
- A copy of the decision and reasons must be tabled at the next meeting of the Council as they are ultimately accountable for decisions made in relation to the WWCC practices, the tabling of the decision will permit knowledge and oversight of such matters.
- The Council, consistent with its responsibilities, has the power to veto a decision of the Executive Team on an application for exemption; it must:
 - Give careful consideration, especially where a decision has been made to grant an exemption;
 - Examine all the information considered by the Executive Team and may obtain further information considered by a majority of the Council to be essential in making an appropriate decision
 - Be based upon valid grounds, providing reasons for either affirming or vetoing the Executive team’s decision;
- All documentation must be held in a secure and confidential container for a period of 50 years.
- All matters relating to exemptions must remain confidential, except between the applicant, Executive Team, the Church Council, and any other person the Executive Team and/or Council considers should be advised of the decision; and
- Any breach of this confidentiality, not permitted, or required by law by Executive Team members and/or by Council members and any persons advised of the decision shall be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EMPOWERMENT PRACTICE

Werribee Baptist Church values diversity and inclusion, and we do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. For this reason, we commit to:

- Recognise children with disabilities are unique. We will not stereotype or make assumptions about a child's abilities but will work with the child and their carers to determine the best means of inclusion for them to feel safe and able to participate at a level in which is suitable for all.
- Recognise children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are unique. We will take steps to understand language and cultural needs and take diverse family structures and norms into account.
- Recognise some children are unable to live at home for unique reasons. We commit to understanding their unique circumstances and adjust our processes in a way that enables participation without creating obstacles which preclude them from being involved or further marginalised.
- Recognise identity development is a highly personal experience. We will welcome and value all children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, gender diverse and non-binary (LGTBQIA+) and take steps to protect them from abuse and harm. Because we believe God has called us to treat others with love and respect as bearers of His image, we will demonstrate love and acceptance by using the preferred pronouns of each individual when made known to us.
- Recognising the significance of First Nation Peoples (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders), we will endeavour to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of their culture and understand its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children. We will take steps to uphold the right of children to enjoy and feel welcome and connected to their culture and community

WBC staff and volunteers recognise the rights of all children to feel safe and participate in our community. For this reason, we will encourage children:

- To express their views. We will listen to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them as we believe that a community that empowers and listens to them will help them feel safe enough to raise concerns.
- To 'have a say' about things that are important to them. Policies and practices that are shaped by children's views can better prevent harm to children.
- To exercise their rights. Rights are basic entitlements that belong to each person. We will endeavour to uphold and respect these rights, take a proactive role in educating children about their rights, and support them as they do so in a way that does not infringe and/or cause harm to the rights of others.

We are committed to teaching children about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents/guardians, raise with us. Empowerment means building up children and strengthening their confidence in themselves and in the church

community. It involves equipping children with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions and enabling them to increase control of their lives as appropriate.

RECRUITMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Recruitment, including advertising, referee checks and staff and volunteer pre-employment screening, emphasise child safety and wellbeing. Werribee Baptist Church applies these best practice standards when engaging staff and volunteers. We interview and conduct referee checks on all staff and volunteers 18+ years of age. Police checks are required for relevant positions. All staff and volunteers 18+ must complete and sign a Safe Ministry Check form, the Code of Conduct, and Confidentiality Policy before commencing in their role and annually thereafter.

Volunteers are required to complete the **Volunteer On-boarding Process** which will enable them to safely fulfil their position. Ministry Leaders may also be required to sign a ministry-specific Leaders' Code of Conduct and be instructed on how to access and complete Safe Church Concerns Reporting procedure.

Staff and Volunteer induction will seek to familiarise individuals with formal and informal support mechanisms to provide a clear understanding of where to go for support and what type of support is available to them (e.g., team meetings, prayer, pastoral care).

- There will be a minimum period of 3 months of regular attendance at Werribee Baptist Church for all prospective volunteers prior to commencement of ministry.
- Any identified offences of a serious nature revealed through the screening and induction process will be taken to the Pastoral Team for review and discretionary decision as to the applicant's future involvement in Werribee Baptist Church.
- Sexual abuse-related offences in which a person has been identified as a "person of concern" will preclude that person from serving in any area in which contact with children/youth is a possibility. In some cases, an offender may not be permitted to attend the church, or any associated program under any circumstances. The BUV Professional Standards Consultant must be contacted and consulted in this situation.

SUPERVISION AND OVERSIGHT

Children:

The minimum requirement for child supervision is 2 adults (age 18+) present in a ministry area to allow for emergency situations and abuse prevention. Children will be checked into and out of ministry areas by their parent or guardian and must remain under adult supervision until such time.

In the case of senior school-aged youth, they will be signed in and out by trained leaders upon entry to the ministry centre. For off-campus events, adult permission will be obtained in the

form of a ministry release form before a youth may attend. Adult supervision as previously outlined will still apply.

Werribee aligns itself to the recommended ratios which are stipulated by the Baptist Union of Victoria as follows:

The recommended adult/child ratio is:

- 0-2 years old – 1:3
- 2-3 years old – 1:4
- 3-5 years old – 1:8
- 5-12 years old (primary school) – 1:8
- 12-18 years old (senior school) – 1:15

Parents may choose to stay within the ministry area with their child/children during any WBC program/activity/service; during this time, the parent and their child/children will not be included as part of the adult/child ratio. Parents are only to care for their child/children; they must not care for any other child/children.

Taking and/or use of photographs/video/other electronic images of children:

a. Photographs/video/other electronic images

Employees, volunteers, and other members must not take photographs, videos, or other forms of electronic image unless:

It is explicitly permitted for the person undertaking their role; is legally permitted; and consent is given. Consent may be obtained from parents/carers/guardians and, where appropriate, the child; or can be implied from notices or advice given at an event or location; or has otherwise been obtained for specific activities or events and the appropriate consent and release forms have been completed. Images should never be posted on personal social media platforms.

b. Use of Media and technology:

As a general principle, any communication (regardless of form) with a child external to the program or service that they are accessing shall be made through the parent(s) or guardian(s).

Staff and volunteers must comply with ministry or program-specific guidelines which govern contact with children, both in-person and by other means unless a specific exception is provided by as justified by WBC Leadership. Representatives should avoid communication with any child or children under year 7 accessing WBC programs or services by using social media platforms, text messaging, or e-mail.

It is acknowledged that the use of social media can be a significant and important means of communication with children involved in programs in the ministry area.

Consistent with this acknowledgement, WBC Leadership may authorise adult leaders in

the ministry area to use social media for communication with participants year 7 and above. Communication should only be sent to all participants within an identified small group.

Should a child initiate a 1-to-1 communication, the leader should immediately advise his/her supervisor or the General Administrator and ensure the details and nature of the communication (whether once off or ongoing) is documented appropriately.

Staff/Volunteers:

All WBC employees and volunteers who have contact with children within the context of their role shall engage in ongoing supervision with their relevant manager or supervisor. This supervision should include:

- Supporting WBC employees and volunteers within the context of their role and to ensure they have access to all resources required to provide quality support to children accessing services;
- Affirming a commitment to a culture of accountability and transparency;
- Providing ongoing discussion and reflection regarding a child's best interests' and
- Ensuring ongoing compliance with this Policy and the Code of Conduct. Consequences for a breach of failure to comply with the Policy and/or code of Conduct may give rise to the following measures:
 - Meeting with the relevant manager or Executive team member to discuss breach or lack of compliance.
 - An internal investigation occurring facilitated by an independent investigator (not affiliated with WBC).
 - Formal warning being issued.
 - Report being made to external agencies, i.e., Professional Associations and/or Police.
 - Close monitoring and live supervision.
 - Further education being required before commencing in role.
 - Immediate suspension.
 - Immediate termination of membership.
 - Immediate termination.
 - Any other performance management strategy deemed appropriate.

These measures may apply regardless of any criminal investigation or prosecution. Any actual/suspected breaches will be documented and stored on an employee's personnel file.

CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING

All employees of WBC who are likely to have direct or occasional contact with children within the context of their role are expected to have undertaken training in child protection or have a good knowledge of child protection issues. Prior to, or as soon as possible after commencement in their role, the employee shall be provided with a copy of this Policy and child protection training. All WBC employees must undertake ongoing child protection training.

The Executive Team must determine the timing, extent, and frequency of the training for WBC employees and volunteers, respectively.

We require all staff and ministry leaders be familiar with and trained in this **Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct, Reporting and Handling Allegations of Abuse.**

All staff and volunteers must agree to follow the Code of Conduct. All leaders will receive training on the requirements of the Code, before signing it, so that it is understood and put into practice by all leaders and volunteers. This training will seek to provide information which will help staff and volunteers to recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and young people. A Contingency Plan will be developed to aid in effective response to issues of child safety and wellbeing (e.g., how to respond to behavioural issues, threat of harm to self or others, elopement, etc.).

We require all staff and volunteers attend a Safe Church Awareness Workshop (or equivalent) annually. This training is recommended to all people 16+ years, but is only required for adult volunteers (18+).

RISK MANAGEMENT

We recognise the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policy, procedures, and activity planning. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children and vulnerable people.

Staff and volunteers identify and mitigate risks in the online and physical environments where ministry activities occur without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities. The online environment is used in accordance with the Werribee Baptist Church Code of Conduct and Safe Church practice.

For clarity of understanding, we provide the following definitions to aid Staff and Volunteers in communication when threat of abuse or harm exist:

DEFINITIONS

- Abuse:** Abuse and neglect include but is not limited to any behaviour which results in the threat of physical harm, emotional harm, family violence, sexual abuse, grooming, and neglect. (For elaboration see the WBC Leadership Training Handbook.)
- Child:** a person who is under the age of 18 years (e.g.: The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2022, Victoria).
- Disclosure:** a disclosure occurs when someone informs a person in authority/leadership (or a trusted adult within the Faith Community) that they have been subject to abuse or knows of abuse. A disclosure may or may not be an allegation or a notifiable circumstance, but it is the responsibility of the person in authority to investigate and take appropriate action.

- Child Safe Environment:** discharges duty of care by taking steps to keep all those in our care, whether in person or online, safe; This encompasses prevention of spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse (including bullying) or neglect.
- Child Safe Leader:** has been through a recruitment process, understands responsibilities, is supervised and is an accountable team player.
- Child Safe Program:** all risks have been assessed and events thought through and planned.
- Vulnerable Person:** a) a Child or Children; or. b) an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Werribee Baptist Church will protect any personal information that is collected according to the **WBC Confidentiality Policy**.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This Policy reflects legislation and guidance that seeks to protect children, namely:

National Legislation

- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*

State Legislation

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (vic.)

Working With Children Checks

- Worker Screening Act 2020

We are committed to reviewing our Policy and good practice every two years and undertake to seek views, comments and suggestions from children, parents, vulnerable people, carers, staff, and volunteers.

Signed:



Lead Pastor

Document history

Date	Note
October 2018	New policy - Child & Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy
June 2020	This policy & procedure to replace Child & Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy V 01 Policy reviewed and updated
September 2022	Policy reviewed, updated, and renamed "Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy" V02