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OUR SAFE CHURCH STRATEGY

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Purpose

The purpose of our 'Safe Church Strategy' is to enable our church's leaders and workers to develop a safe church culture so that all people, involved in or are attending our church's ministries and services, are safe from harm and able to grow in their relationship with God and others.

Preamble

This policy is predicated on the belief that all people, including children, are created in God's image, loved and valued by their Creator, and should be treated with equal regard. This document outlines our approach to the protection of people, particularly, children and vulnerable persons, so that we comply with relevant legislation, engage in best practices, and cultivate a safe church for spiritual growth and wellbeing.

Our Safe Church Strategy

- commits us to providing a safe environment for all people especially children and vulnerable persons;
- authorises a Code of Conduct for all persons engaged by the church, whether pastors, employees or volunteers, who will be in contact with children and vulnerable persons;
- provides a process for screening and selecting persons who will attend or participate in ministries with children or vulnerable persons;
- provides a process for responding to disclosures of harm or misconduct and for reporting to appropriate authorities; and
- sets out the training and supervision requirements for all who are engaged by the church, whether pastors, employees or volunteers, who are in contact with children and vulnerable persons or attend or participate in ministries with children or vulnerable persons.

Policy Commitment and Guiding Principles

It is our policy to respect everyone as unique individuals created by God, and to give special attention to the care, protection and wellbeing of children and vulnerable persons. We will behave towards them in a manner that resembles and represents Christ's attitude and approach, providing an environment and ministry that promotes their spiritual, social and physical safety and personal growth and development.

To this end we will promote a "safe church" culture throughout our church, constantly communicating and reinforcing our commitment at all levels of our church's life and ministry.

Regarding the church's commitment to providing a safe environment for all, *especially children and vulnerable persons*, the church acknowledges that Australian Baptists have agreed to adopt **the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations** and that these principles represent 'best practice'.

Therefore, the church will have regard to and implement the following principles as integral to our strategy for cultivating a safe church environment and safe activities.

1. Embedding a "safe church" perspective, safety, including child safety, in our church's culture, leadership and governance.
2. Respecting children and vulnerable persons by giving them opportunities to participate and have a say in the decisions affecting them.

3. Keeping families and communities informed and involved in the development of the church as a safe environment.
4. Upholding equity and considering diverse needs.
5. Ensuring that people working with children and vulnerable persons are suitable and are properly supported.
6. Keeping the processes for responding to complaints of sexual abuse focussed upon the needs and best interests of children and vulnerable persons.
7. Equipping staff and volunteers with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and vulnerable persons safe through continual education and training.
8. Managing physical and online environments to minimise the opportunity for abuse occurring.
9. Continuously reviewing and improving the implementation of these principles for creating and maintain a safe church environment.
10. Maintaining up to date policies and procedures that document how the church is a safe place for children and vulnerable persons.

Related documents and resources

Documents and resources that relate to or are affected by this Strategy include:

- (a) Code of Conduct / Code of Practice (*Schedule 1*);
- (b) Church Constitution;
- (c) Privacy Policy;
- (d) Church Volunteer Policy;
- (e) Social Media Policy;
- (f) *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* (Qld) and the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011* (Qld) (“The Act”).
- (g) Queensland Family and Child Commission website www.qfcc.qld.gov.au.
- (h) Baptist Insurance Services website (Risk Management) www.baptistinsurance.com.au.

Definitions

The dictionary in Schedule 2 defines particular words in This Strategy.

Scope

This Safe Church Strategy applies to the persons listed below, referred to in this Safe Church Strategy as pastors, employees and volunteers.

- Any church leader who is making decisions affecting children or vulnerable persons.
- Any person engaged by the church to provide a service to the church, whether paid or voluntarily, and who while providing their service will be in contact with children or vulnerable persons.
- Any students or trainees undertaking an internship or field placement at the church and who as part of that internship or field placement will be in contact with children or vulnerable persons.

Screening and Selection

Persons Requiring a Blue Card

All the church's pastors, employees and volunteers must hold valid and current Blue Cards to attend or participate in any church activities that will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable persons.

Persons with an Exemption Card

All pastors, employees and volunteers who are a police officer or registered teacher must hold a valid and current Exempt Card from the Blue Card Services of the Queensland Government to attend or participate in in any church activities that will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable persons.

Maintaining a record of the holders of Blue Cards and Exemption Cards

The Church Leadership are responsible for ensuring the timely and accurate recording of information relating to the issuing of Blue Cards and Exemption Cards - Schedule 5.

The Blue Card must be sighted to verify its authenticity before recording its information.

Changes in circumstances affecting a Blue Card

If there is a change in their circumstances for a pastor, employee or volunteer that might or will affect their Blue Card status, then that person must:

- notify immediately the church's Safe Church Coordinator; and
- notify the Queensland Government's Blue Card Services.

The Safe Church Coordinator, in consultation with the Church Leadership, can require the person to desist from attending or participating in in any activities that will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable persons.

Agreement to comply with policies and codes

All pastors, employees and volunteers must be provided with a copy of this Safe Church Strategy, including the Code of Conduct.

Application Process

All pastors, employees and volunteers must undergo the following application process to be engaged in any program or ministry with children or vulnerable persons.

1. Present a valid and current Blue Card or Exemption Card.
2. Submit a written application as per Schedule 3.
3. Provide the contact details of at least two referees.
4. Attend an interview if deemed necessary by Church Leadership - Schedule 4.
5. Sign an agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct - Schedule 1.

Church leadership's obligations re the application process

Where a person makes an application to work with children and/or vulnerable persons, the Church Leadership must ensure the following criteria are met before accepting the application and allowing the applicant to be involved in any church activities that will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable persons.

1. Churches the applicant has attended (or has been involved or connected with) in the past five (5) years are contacted to ascertain whether there have been any alleged or actual incidents of harm involving the applicant (Schedule 4).
2. If the church leaders determine that more detailed information is required from the application, interview the applicant using the questions in Schedule 6 as a guide to ascertain the suitability of the applicant.
3. In the case of a volunteer, the person has attended the church regularly for a minimum of six (6) months unless exceptional circumstances apply.
4. If the applicant has not obtained their Blue Card through the Church, the Church leaders must also arrange completion of a “Link an Applicant/Cardholder to this Organisation” form and submit to Blue Card Services; (available from www.bluecard.qld.gov.au)
5. Where certain roles require registration by the Baptist Union of Queensland (Queensland Baptists), the applicant must also successfully pass the application process under those Registration Guidelines.
6. Where a job or role description has stipulated additional educational, skill or other requirements, the applicant is also required to satisfy these criteria before commencement.

Support and Training

The Safe Church Coordinator is responsible for establishing an arrangement for the appropriate supervision, support and training of pastors, employees and volunteers in contact with children and vulnerable persons.

The coordinator must report to the Church Leadership and the annual church members’ meeting about the supervision, support and training of pastors, employees and volunteers.

Where a person is appointed either as a pastor, employee or as a volunteer who will have contact with children or vulnerable persons, the Safe Church Coordinator will ensure that the person’s Blue Card or Exemption Card details are recorded in a register similar to the template provided by Schedule 5.

The Safe Church Coordinator will in consultation with the pastor, employee or volunteer establish a training plan, setting out the type of training that will be provided, the regularity of the training and the expectations that the Church has for the pastor’s, employee’s or volunteer’s attendance and participation.

Pastors, employees and volunteers must receive training and development on an annual basis, but no pastor, employee or volunteer can have an interval greater than three years between training sessions in their training plan.

Requirements for Contact with Children and Vulnerable Persons

All staff and volunteers must:

- comply with the Code of Conduct - Schedule 1 - while in contact with children or vulnerable persons;
- comply with the requirements of risk management plans that are required and in place for high risk activities or special events - see www.baptistinsurance.com.au for risk management resources;

- promote the participation and empowerment of children and vulnerable persons, recognising that attention needs to be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other vulnerable groups;
- listen carefully and consider respectfully the input from children and vulnerable persons concerning decisions affecting them and what makes them feel safe or unsafe;
- ensure children's personal information is treated appropriately and in line with the church's privacy policy for the collection, storage and use of information; and
- participate in safe church training provided by the Church and for which the leadership requests their participation.

Responding to and Reporting Harm or Misconduct

The following guidelines are for responding to and reporting disclosures or evidence of harm or misconduct (a breach of the Code of Conduct).

1. When a person discloses harm or misconduct, whether it took place recently or a long time ago, we will respond with respect, compassion and appropriate action.
2. In all cases where harm is disclosed, the best interests of the child or vulnerable person will be paramount, and the Church response will be clear and transparent to those affected.
3. The Church's Safe Church Coordinator will assess and minimise any risks to a child, to children and to vulnerable persons, especially ensuring the safety and support of the child or adult who disclosed harm or misconduct. The coordinator will also respect the right of the child or adult disclosing harm or misconduct to confidentiality and will consult them before reporting their identity and information to others. The coordinator will also consider restrictions imposed by Privacy legislation for passing on information to others.
4. The Safe Church Coordinator will connect the child or person disclosing harm or misconduct with Church staff and/or professionals identified by the Church as competent to provide care and support during and after the process.
5. The Church's Safe Church Coordinator will complete a report to document the disclosure or evidence and the coordinator's and/or church leaders' response (Schedule 7). Care must be taken to record information and evidence in the words of the child or person to assist with the accurate presentation of the information or evidence, especially if the matter is referred to a government department or to the police to be investigated. The church's Safe Church Coordinator will ensure that these reports are properly stored either physically and/or electronically and accessible to the church leaders.
6. Where we have reason to suspect that a child is experiencing harm or is at risk of experiencing harm or being neglected, or receive a disclosure of harm or misconduct, we will contact Child Safety Services and seek information and advice about how to proceed.

During normal business hours – we will contact the Regional Intake Service.

After hours and on weekends – we will contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on **1800 177 135** or (07) 3235 9999.

7. If the alleged misconduct or harm was perpetrated by a Registered Minister of Queensland Baptists, then the Safe Church Coordinator or church leaders will also inform either the QB Safe Church Officer or the Director of Pastoral Services for Queensland Baptists.
8. The person identified by the disclosure as harming and/or guilty of misconduct will be required to step aside from any activities that will bring them into contact with children or vulnerable persons while the matter is being investigated either by the church's Safe Church Coordinator, the church leaders, the police or a government department/agency, and until a determination about the matter has been made.
9. The church leaders in consultation with the Safe Church Coordinator would determine the parameters that will be put in place regarding the attendance and participation of the person identified by the disclosure, in other church meetings and activities during this process. This person will also relate to a person identified by the church leaders to liaise with the person and ensure they are kept informed about the process.
10. Where a staff member or volunteer has breached a legislative requirement pertaining to the protection and welfare of children, or an obligation stipulated by the Blue Card Services, then the authority responsible for issuing the Blue Card will be notified.
11. If the misconduct identified by a disclosure is outside the scope of government legislation and regulations but is covered by the Code of Conduct or the Church's constitution, then the provisions of this strategy and the church's constitution will be applied.

Schedule 1 - CODE OF CONDUCT / CODE OF PRACTICE

1. **Pastors, employees and volunteers must respect persons and property and acknowledge that they will:**
 - a) be responsive and courteous to others and avoid improper use of their position;
 - b) avoid discriminatory and /or harassing treatment of others and seek to respond in an appropriate manner to the diverse needs of children in their care;
 - c) not swear or use inappropriate or crude language in the presence of, or towards others;
 - d) always show integrity and act in a manner consistent with the Church's values;
 - e) respect privacy and protect the confidential information of others (excepting in cases requiring disclosure of illegal activity);
 - f) be committed to ensuring the wellbeing of all children and vulnerable persons in a safe and caring environment.
2. **The church is committed to maintaining a drug and alcohol free environment for all child-related activities and the pastors, employees and volunteers acknowledge that:**
 - a) The consumption, sale of or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs (other than properly prescribed and administered drugs) while attending or participating in any child-related activities or programs involving vulnerable persons will result in being disallowed from attending or participating in such activities or programs and possibly a report to the police.
3. **In relation to behaviour, pastors, employees and volunteers acknowledge that they will:**
 - a) comply with the church's guidelines for the use of electronic communication and social media when interacting with children;
 - b) not be alone with children where they cannot be seen by other Church workers;
 - c) not take a child to their home or visit a child in their home unless the visit is part of an organised activity for the group or in the company or consent of the child's parents/guardian.
 - d) not make any sexual or crude innuendos such as suggestive looks, comments, jokes, sounds, display visuals, words, acts or gestures towards any child, vulnerable person or Church worker;
 - e) not touch, hug, or kiss any person in a way that is inappropriate to the situation, or uncomfortable or confusing to the receiver;
 - f) not drive a child unaccompanied without gaining permission from child's parents/guardian and the church leader in a direct position of responsibility;
 - g) not commit any sexual offence, sexual misconduct against, with, or in the presence of a child or vulnerable person (including a child pornography offence) or any assault, ill treatment of or neglect of a child (or any person) or any behaviours that causes psychological or other harm to a child;
 - h) report any behaviour suspected to be "sexual grooming", any concerns in relation to any observed "indicators of abuse", or any disclosures regarding any kind of harm or breaches of this Code of Conduct to the Safe Church Coordinator or a Church Leader.
4. **In relation to counselling, pastors, employees and volunteers acknowledge that they will:**
 - a) not step beyond their level of competency or training;
 - b) not encourage children to keep things hidden from their parents or other leaders;
 - c) avoid counselling members of the opposite sex where possible;
 - d) always counsel in an appropriate and accountable environment;
 - e) always counsel in an open area in view of others, never in a closed room;
 - f) only console a child if this is with the permission and or welcomed by the child;
 - g) only console same gender of child and with another pastor, employee or volunteer within sight;
 - h) If a child or vulnerable person makes a disclosure regarding any kind of harm, this disclosure must be divulged to church leadership, however the disclosure must not be revealed to any other person unless required by law.
5. **In relation to pornography and sexuality, pastors, employees and volunteers acknowledges that they:**
 - a) will not view pornography privately;
 - b) will not display, discuss or distribute pornography to colleagues or children;
 - c) Sexuality of staff must be under the guidelines and Lordship of Christ (i.e. crude sexual jokes, inappropriate remarks are not permitted);
 - d) will dress modestly, and not sexually suggestively. Insulting remarks or slogans contrary to Christian principles should not be displayed on clothing;
 - e) not speak or act in any way to contradict this statement or the church's beliefs, ethics and values.
6. **In relation to occupational health & safety, pastors, employees and volunteers acknowledge that they:**
 - a) must not put themselves or others in danger;

- b) must not intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything in the interests of safety;
 - c) must follow safe work practices and encourage others to do the same;
 - d) must be familiar with the operation and location of phones, asbestos register, first aid kits and fire extinguishers and should know the identity of the first aid attendant in their area;
 - e) must report all incidents and accidents.
 - f) must comply with the requirements set out in any risk management plan for any activity or special event.
7. **If there is a breach by any person, the pastor, employee and volunteers agree to:**
- a) report any suspected breaches of this Code of Conduct, or of the law to the ministry/church leadership immediately;
 - b) take careful written records of any suspected breaches and not make a report which is false, vexatious or malicious.

Schedule 2 DEFINITIONS

<i>The Act</i>	means the <i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000</i> (Qld) and any subordinate legislation including the <i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011</i> (Qld).
<i>Blue Card</i>	means the card issued by the Commission after an application is received, verifying suitability for working with children. A positive notice always accompanies a Blue Card and accordingly where the term 'Blue Card' is used in this Strategy document, this also refers to the positive notice issued by the Commission.
<i>Child / Children</i>	refers to any individual under eighteen (18) years of age.
<i>Church</i>	means Church@TheGabba and also includes the associated ministries and activities of the church.
<i>Church Leadership</i>	means the persons appointed by the church according to its constitution as responsible and accountable to the church members for the governance of the church.
<i>The Commission</i>	means the Queensland Family and Child Commission.
<i>Parent</i>	means custodial Parent or lawful guardian of the Child.
<i>Registered Church Worker</i>	means a Pastoral Assistant, a Student Pastor or a Registered Pastor of Queensland Baptists
<i>Safe Church Coordinator</i>	means the person appointed by the Church leaders to manager the practical implementation of this strategy under the guidance and directions of the church leaders. This includes responsibility for managing all Blue Card related issues which includes but is not limited to the Blue Card Register, application forms, Blue Card forms and Harm Reports. If there is no Safe Church Coordinator in the Church, this person means the most senior pastor in the church.
<i>Pastor, employee and volunteer</i>	refers to both Volunteers who have regular contact with Children, paid employees who have Regular Contact with Children, contractors or agents at the Church who have Regular Contact with Children at the Church or members of the Leadership team who make decisions about Children.
<i>Vulnerable Persons</i>	refers to individuals 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.
<i>WWCRMS Act</i>	<i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000</i> (Qld) and any subordinate legislation including the <i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011</i> (Qld).

Schedule 3 APPLICATION FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any positions (voluntary and paid) involving the supervision of children.

1. Personal Information:		
Full name		DOB / /
Address		
Email Address		
Phone Numbers	H:	M:
2. Activities:		
What types of activities are you interested in being involved in?		
Date available to begin?	/ / 20	
Length of commitment (if not for full year?)		
3. Church involvement:		
Length of attendance at Church?		
Are you a member of the Church?	Yes / No	
Name all churches you have attended or been involved in during the past 5 years.	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	
List all previous involvement in the Church involving children (identify which church next to the type of work).		
List any gifts, training, qualifications or any other facts that have prepared you for working with children.		
4. Overseas status:		
Have you lived or worked overseas for more than 12 months in the past 5 years?	Y / N	Where?
Do you consent to a criminal history check in these countries?	Y / N	
5. Referees (2 required):		
Name (first referee)		
Address		
Phone	H:	M:
Name (second referee)		
Address		
Phone	H:	M:

6. Blue Card information:		
Do you have a current Blue Card?	Yes / No	Date expires / / 20
If yes have you attached a photocopy of the card?	Yes / No	<i>*Must also hand original to leader. Have them initial here to confirm sighting. _____</i>
If no have you completed a Blue Card application and attached it to this application?	Yes / No	<i>*Please note you MUST complete an application to be considered or accepted in any positions involving Children.</i>
Has your Blue Card ever been suspended for any reason?	Yes / No	
Has any complaint ever been made against you alleging harm to a child? (provide details)		
7. Medical Information		
Medicare number		
Private health provider	(if applicable)	
Any medical condition which may impact your interaction with children?		
Any physical or other conditions/limitations affecting your interaction with children?		
8. Applicant's Statement		
<p>The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorise any churches listed in this application to give you any information they may have regarding my character and fitness for working with Children. I release all such referees from liability for any damage that may result from providing such evaluations to you, and I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Constitution and by-laws and policies of Queensland Baptists and my individual Church and refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.</p> <p>I have read and agree to abide by the following:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The Code of Conduct; and</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The Safe Church Strategy.</p>		
Signed (applicant)		Date / / 20
Signed (witness)		Date / / 20

Office Use Only		
I confirm that I have completed the following in relation to the applicant:	<input type="checkbox"/> Sighted and recorded the details of the Person's Blue Card. <input type="checkbox"/> Contacted the referees and churches and completed the 'record of references check'.	
	Details of person: Signed _____	Date / /
Full name _____		

Please note that personal information contained in this form will be treated as confidential and will be stored in a confidential place only accessible to Church Leadership. Personal information will only be provided to other persons or agencies as required to assess this application, or with your permission or where required by law.

Schedule 4 REFERENCE CHECK

1. Details of applicant:		
Full name		
2. First referee contacted:		
Full name		Date / /20
Relationship with applicant		Contacted by: <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation in person
Summary of remarks concerning suitability for working with children		
3. Second referee contacted:		
Full name		Date / /20
Relationship with applicant		Contacted by: <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation in person
Summary of remarks concerning suitability for working with Children		
4. Church contacted:		
Full name		Date / /20
Relationship with applicant		Contacted by: <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation in person
Summary of remarks concerning suitability for working with Children		
5. Church contacted:		
Full name		Date / /20
Relationship with applicant		Contacted by: <input type="checkbox"/> Phone / <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation in person
Summary of remarks concerning suitability for working with Children		

Details of person who conducted check:

Signature _____ Date _____

Full Name _____

Please note that personal information contained in this form will be treated as confidential and will be stored in a confidential place only accessible to Church Leadership. Personal information will only be provided to other persons or agencies as required to assess this application, or with your permission or where required by law.

Schedule 6 INTERVIEW WITH APPLICANT For WORKING WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH

Please note, these questions are simply a *guide*. Use your discretion to elaborate on any issues raised, or ask for more details on issues raised in application.

Questions:

1. Why do you want to be a part of our Church's ministry?
2. What involvement / experience in the past have you had with children?
3. Have you read the Code of Conduct and do you have any questions regarding the Code?
4. Why do you think that our church's Safe Church Strategy is necessary? Are you willing to cooperate and comply with the standards and requirements of the policy that relate to or affect your participation in the church's ministries and activities?
5. Have you ever been known by any other name?
6. Have you ever been the subject of a:
 - a. complaint of harm to a child;
 - b. breach of a code of conduct or policy; or
 - c. decision to be precluded from attending or participating in a church/organisation' activities?
7. If so, what steps were taken (if any) by the church/organisation in response to the above, and what was the outcome?
8. Are you aware of any other matter which if known would call into question your suitability to work with children?
9. Do you have a Blue Card? If so, who did you obtain your Blue Card through?

Please note that personal information contained in this form will be treated as confidential and will be stored in a confidential place only accessible to Church Leadership. Personal information will only be provided to other persons or agencies as required to assess this application, or with your permission or where required by law.

Schedule 7 RECORD OF DISCLOSURE OF HARM OR MISCONDUCT

1. Details of person disclosing			
Full name:		DOB	
Address:			
Phone Numbers: H:		M :	
2. Details of other persons involved in incident including witnesses (attach additional pages if necessary)			
Full name		DOB	
Address			
Phone Numbers H:		M:	
Full name		DOB	
Address			
Phone Numbers H:		M:	
3. Incident			
Description what allegedly occurred (ask open ended questions). Use additional paper for full statement.		Advisable to attach a written statement from complainant to this report.	
Location it occurred		Time occurred:	
5. Reporting			
Has the Department of Child Safety been contacted and consulted?		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> Date and time contacted _____	
Response:			
Has the church leadership been informed?		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> Date and time contacted _____	
Response:			
Have the Police been contacted?		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> Date and time contacted _____	
Response:			
Has the QB Safe Church Officer been contacted?		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> Date and time contacted _____	
Response:			
7. Records			
A record of all conversations (with dates, times and names) has been kept.		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	
File kept in a locked filing cabinet & marked "Do not destroy"		Y <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/>	

Name of person completing report _____ Position _____
 Signature person completing report _____ Signature designated person _____

Schedule 8 TRAINING RESOURCE - A Fact Sheet on Sexual Grooming

A Training Resource

A lot of information exists about how to respond to sexual abuse once it has been discovered. But the best way of protecting children from harm is to be aware of the behaviours that can lead to sexual abuse before it occurs. These behaviours are called 'grooming'. Organisations with unclear boundaries around contact with children can be magnets to people who wish to 'groom' children for sexual abuse (1). By learning about the strategies used to 'groom' children and their families and recognising them as inappropriate behaviours in your service you create an environment that will deter infiltration by sexual abusers (2).

Sexual abuse thrives in secrecy and ignorance. By being alert to potential danger signs, we are better able to understand the steps we can take to keep children as safe as possible.

What is "Grooming?"

Sexual abusers are often people we know; more than 8 out of 10 children (3) who are sexually abused know their abuser. They may hold responsible positions in their local community and can be personable or charismatic. Abusers come from all classes, ethnic and religious backgrounds and may be heterosexual or homosexual. Whilst a high percentage of abusers are men, some are also women (4). You cannot pick an abuser out in a crowd; however, you can identify behaviour that precipitates abuse. This behaviour is known as 'grooming' and research shows us that it can occur for up to 12 months before the actual sexual abuse take place (5).

Grooming is defined as communication with a child where this is an intention to meet and commit a sex offence (6). More generally it be the process by which an individual manipulates those around them – particularly, but not exclusively, the child – to provide opportunities to abuse and reduce the likelihood of being reported or discovered.

Research suggests that this process can be very deliberate, and while it can occur over a long period of time, sometimes this period is much shorter; there may not be any conscious motivation to sexually abuse a child until just before the abuse occurs. In both cases, there are often opportunities to observe and intervene, even before the would-be abuser is fully aware of what may become sexual intentions.

Unfortunately, identifying sexual grooming of children isn't always straightforward. Sometimes sexual abuse occurs as part of a pre-existing relationship in which there is genuine affection, which makes it a complex issue. But there are often clear signs that can be detected before the abuse occurs.

How Do People Groom Children for Sexual Abuse?

By getting close to children – child sex offenders will often seek out adults and groom them in order to get access to their children. The sex offender can create a relationship built on trust or dependency and gain access to the children through it. Some befriend parents or carers who are facing difficulties or who are vulnerable themselves.

By silencing children – people who want to sexually abuse children may:

- offer them gifts or treats, and sometimes combine these with threats about what will happen if the child says 'no' or tells someone
- threaten them with exclusion from their peer group or loss of favour if they do not comply
- make the child afraid of being hurt physically, or threaten what may happen to other people if the child tells
- play on the child's embarrassment or guilt about what is happening, perhaps convincing them that no one will believe them
- make the child believe he or she wanted it to happen.

Signs an Adult May Be Grooming a Child for Sexual Abuse:

There may be cause for concern about the behaviour of an adult or young person if they:

1. Exhibit frequent physical affection such as kissing, hugging, stroking hair or wrestling even when the child clearly does not want it, or it is not required.
2. Encourage child or children to sit on their lap and offer regular physical comfort or reassurance to a child without a recognised cause.
3. Seek out opportunities to be alone with a child with no interruptions.
4. Spend most of their spare time with children and have little interest in spending time with people their own age.
5. Solicit invitations to sports, events or parties where a child will be.
6. Frequently arrive uninvited to places where the child or their family will be in a series of 'coincidences'.
7. Spend a lot of time around places like arcades, playgrounds, parks and sports venues to get to know children so they are not seen as strangers.
8. Regularly offer support to the family members of the child such as offering to babysit children for free, transport children to events, and help at social occasions involving the child or take children on outings alone.
9. Offer to drive children home or collect children from events on a regular basis.
10. Frequently walk in on children in the bathroom or their bedrooms.
11. Treat a child or group of children as favoured, making them feel special compared with others in a group.
12. Find out as much as possible about the child and use that information to engage the child and drive a wedge between the child and any protective adults, e.g. parents, teachers or coaches.
13. Purchase gifts or collect items of interest regularly for a specific child or group of children.
14. Tell secrets to a child and encourage the keeping of secrets.
15. Display ambiguous sexual behaviour, e.g. showing the child pictures of other children wearing swimsuits or less.
16. Display clearly inappropriate sexual behaviour, e.g. showing the child pornographic pictures, using explicit sexual language around children.

What to do if Abuse is Suspected

Where grooming is suspected, please advise your Safe Church Coordinator who will then take the matter further.

KEY POINTS TO NOTE:

- Child sexual abuse thrives in secrecy.
- People who abuse children may spend up to 12 months 'grooming' a child before they commit a sexual act with them (7). However, the period spent grooming can also be short, with the impulse occurring not long before the abuse happens.
- People do not just 'groom' children, they also 'groom' the adults around them.
- Environments that have defined boundaries regarding appropriate behaviour are less likely to attract sexual abusers (8).
- Educators, volunteers and visitors to the service should follow defined protocols for appropriate behaviour or be excluded from the service.
- Identification of sexual grooming of children in care centres can be a complex issue. The challenge is to be vigilant without creating a siege mentality.

References

- 1 *Understanding the Grooming or Entrapment Process, CPSU briefings*
- 2 *Wortley and Smallbone 2006*
- 3 *(ABS, 1996, 2004a)*
- 4 *Pritchard, 2004*
- 5 *Wortley and Smallbone 2000*
- 6 *Understanding the Grooming or Entrapment Process, CPSU briefings*
- 7 *Child Sexual Abuse in Queensland: Offender Characteristics and Modus Operandi*
- 8 *Understanding the Grooming or Entrapment Process, CPSU briefings*

Source – Network of Community Activities publication

Schedule 9 TRAINING RESOURCE - Indicators of Abuse

A Training Resource

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult, stronger child or adolescent uses their power or authority to involve a child in sexual activity. Child sexual abuse can cause physical and emotional harm to a child. Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal or emotional and can include:

- kissing or holding a child in a sexual manner
- exposing a sexual body part to a child
- having sexual relations with a child
- talking in a sexually explicit way that is not age or developmentally appropriate
- making obscene phone calls or remarks to a child
- sending obscene mobile text messages or emails to a child
- fondling a child in a sexual manner
- persistently intruding on a child's privacy
- penetrating the child's vagina or anus by either the penis, finger or any other object
- oral sex
- rape
- incest
- showing pornographic films, magazines or photographs to a child
- having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner
- forcing a child to watch a sexual act
- child prostitution

Indicators of sexual abuse

A child may say things, do things or exhibit physical signs that are clues to sexual abuse, even if they do not disclose clear information. Some indicators of child sexual abuse may include:

- displaying greater sexual knowledge than normally expected for their age or developmental level
- inappropriate sexual play and behaviour with themselves, other children or dolls and toys
- hints about sexual activity through actions or comments that are inappropriate to the child's age or developmental level
- excessive masturbation or masturbation in public after kindergarten age
- persistent bedwetting, urinating or soiling in clothes
- persistent sexual themes in their drawings or play time
- running away
- destroying property
- hurting or mutilating animals
- creating stories, poems or artwork about abuse
- difficulty concentrating or being withdrawn or overly obedient
- having unexpected redness, soreness or injury around the penis, vagina, mouth or anus

- having torn, stained or bloody clothing, especially underwear
- recurring themes of power or control in play.

Should any of the above be present, a child may need parents or other adults to take action to keep them safe from any further harm.

Indicators of Neglect

Some indicators of neglect include:

- malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- poor hygiene, matted hair, dirty skin or body odour
- unattended physical or medical problems
- comments from a child that no one is home to provide care
- being constantly tired
- frequent lateness or absence from school
- inappropriate clothing, especially inadequate clothing in winter
- frequent illness, infections or sores
- being left unsupervised for long periods.

Information courtesy of Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

Schedule 10 ANNUAL CHECKLIST

YEAR _____

Currency of Blue Cards	
1. All Volunteers and Staff are entered into the Blue Card Register?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. All cards are current?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Any Volunteers or Staff with cards that are not current have completed new applications and we have forwarded them to The Commission?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Any persons with a negative or suspended notice are not currently employed in children's ministry?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Annual training session for all Volunteers and Staff scheduled and followed through	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes / <input type="checkbox"/> No

Signed _____ (Ministry Leader)

Full name _____

Dated _____

Signed _____ (Responsible Officer)

Full name _____

Dated _____