

Safe Church – PCV

Policy, Procedure and Practice Manual

(2014)



Contents

Disclaimer.....	3
What is Safe Church - PCV?.....	4
The Safe Church Unit	5
The Safe Church Unit and Privacy.....	6
PCV Safe Church Unit Organisational Structure and Accountability	7
Safe Church Basic Training.....	8
Safe Church Representatives	9
Safe Church – PCV: POLICY STATEMENT.....	10
Safe Church – PCV: CODE OF CONDUCT	12
Social Media Usage Guidelines	15
Safe Church – Children.....	18
What is Child Abuse?	19
Signs of Abuse	21
What to do if a child discloses abuse.....	22
When to make a report.....	23
Making a Report – legal duty and moral responsibility	25
Contact Details for child related issues.....	26
Safe Church – Adults	28
What are adult-related Safe Church issues?.....	29
What must be reported?	30
What may be reported.....	31
The Role of the Safe Church Unit.....	32
Historical Complaints	33
Mediated Complaints.....	34
Formal Complaints	35
Contact Details for adult related issues	36
When an allegation is made	37
Volunteers in ministry – process of approval	38
Safe Church Screening, Reference Checks and Registration with the SCU.....	40
Safe Church Forms for Ministries to Children & Audits of PCV congregations and organisations.....	42
Safe Church Audits of PCV congregations and organisations.....	44
References	45
Appendix 1 - Initial Registration with the SCU Form	46
Appendix 2 - Confidential Record of Reference Checks Form	48

Disclaimer

Safe Church Policy, Procedure and Practice Manual is provided on the terms and understanding that the writer and the Presbyterian Church of Victoria is not responsible for the results of any action taken on the basis of information in this publication, nor for any error in, omission from, this publication. The author, the publisher, its employees or any other persons involved in the preparation of the **Safe Church Policy, Procedure and Practice Manual** expressly disclaim all and any liability and responsibility to any person, in respect of anything, and of the consequences of anything, done or omitted to be done, by any such person in reliance, whether wholly or partially, upon the whole or any part of this publication. Where a specific issue/incident arises, expert professional advice should always be sought.

The information and advice is made available in good faith, reflects current knowledge, literature, legislation, regulations and standards and is derived from sources believed to be accurate at the time of publication. **Safe Church Policy, Procedure and Practice Manual** should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation and is not a substitute for it. The content will require updating in line with amendments or additions, which may supersede those cited, later in time, after the publication of this document.

What is Safe Church - PCV?

In 2013 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) voted to replace the existing policy regarding abuse in the church, known as 'Breaking the Silence', with a new policy and code of conduct, known as 'Safe Church - PCV' (from this point on, referred to as 'Safe Church'). The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct reflect the significant developments in child protection legislation, mandatory and protective reporting procedures, and government requirements surrounding child safety education in voluntary organisations such as churches.

Breaking the Silence was enacted by the General Assembly in 1993 and in the ensuing decades there have been two significant changes that have resulted in voluntary organisations altering their operations in this area:

- A greater **legal duty** placed on churches due to increased *compliance* levels set by government legislation
- A greater **public moral duty** placed on churches to *proactively prevent abuse* in churches rather than respond to the occurrence of abuse

The **highest duty** placed on the church is the duty required in all our thoughts, words and deeds by the Lord God.

Colossians 3:17 teaches: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." In Luke 18:16 Jesus said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (NIV, 1994)

These are but two of the scriptures that highlight the central Christian values of **love, mercy and justice**. The Lord Jesus Christ set the example for Christians and the church to model life upon. In the life of the PCV the church is committed to ensuring that **all of our churches and organisations are safe in every respect for everyone within them**.

The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct is the PCV's expression of this commitment. Safe Church applies to every individual, congregation and organisation within the PCV.

- Christians are required by the Lord God to think, speak and act in ways that are God-honouring, biblically obedient and motivated by the Christian values of love, mercy and justice
- The PCV is committed to ensuring that all churches and organisations within the denomination are safe places for everyone
- The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct is the PCV's expression of this commitment
- Safe Church applies to all individuals, congregations and organisations in the PCV

The Safe Church Unit

The Safe Church Unit (SCU) is responsible for the implementation of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct across the whole of the PCV.

Implementation includes providing the following services to the congregations, sessions, presbyteries, organisations and General Assembly of the PCV:

- assistance to congregations/organisations in matters of compliance
- education and basic training in Safe Church matters
- information and guidance in Safe Church procedures
- website provision
- case management
- screening for those who work with children within the denomination
- Safe Church record keeping
- support, information, advice and referrals for Safe Church matters
- establishment of compliance auditing throughout the denomination

The SCU consists of the Clerk of Assembly and the Training & Compliance Officer and is under the authority and oversight of the General Assembly of the PCV.

- The SCU serves and supports the congregations, sessions, presbyteries, organisations and General Assembly of the PCV in Safe Church matters
- The Safe Church Unit is located at

Suite 4, 9b Salisbury Avenue, Blackburn, 3130

The Training & Compliance Officer, Mrs Fiona Bligh, can be reached by telephoning:

0499 090 449

The SCU office is open on Wednesday and Thursday from 9.30am to 2.30pm.

Email: safechurch@pcvic.org.au

www.safechurchpcv.org.au

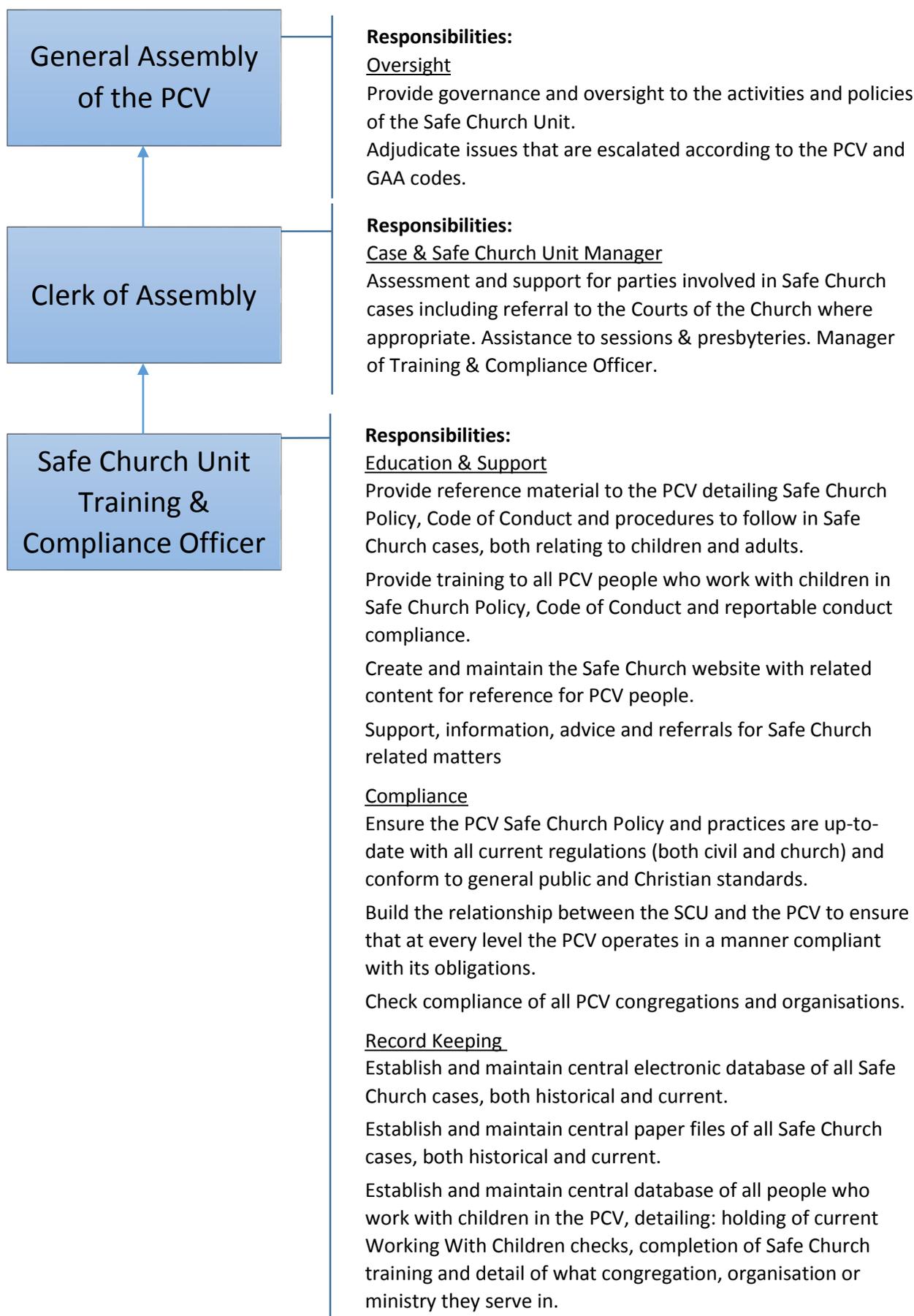
The Safe Church Unit and Privacy

The Safe Church Unit is subject to *The Information Privacy Act (1988)*, the Victorian law which regulates the handling of personal information about individuals. This includes the collection, use, storage and disclosure of personal information, and access to and correction of that information.

The SCU collects personal information in order to implement its function within the PCV and in accordance with the 'Information Privacy Principles' as described in the Act.

- The SCU complies with *The Information Privacy Act (1988)*
- All information is kept securely
- Personal information that has been given to the SCU can be accessed, updated or corrected at any time by the person it relates to, according to the Australian Privacy Principles

PCV Safe Church Unit Organisational Structure and Accountability



Safe Church Basic Training

In 2006 the Victorian Government Office of the Child Safety Commissioner published *A Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation*. Among other child-safety issues, this publication outlines what is expected of organisations in regards to

- training, support and resources for paid and volunteer staff who work with children
- screening and reference checking of paid and volunteer staff who work with children

The PCV and the SCU is committed to complying with these expectations to ensure best practice within congregations and organisations.

Basic Training

Every person in the PCV who works with children is required to complete the Safe Church Basic Training Course every three years. This one day course covers the implementation, procedures and practice of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct in all child-related ministries and operations within the denomination. Paid staff and volunteers will not be permitted to take part in any child related ministries without completing the Safe Church Basic Training.

Basic Training courses take place on a Saturday and are offered in each presbytery to maximise opportunity for participation. Participants who are unable to attend Basic Training in their own presbytery may undertake the course in another presbytery.

Courses commence in 2015. Times and locations of Basic Training courses will be made available via www.safechurchpcv.org.au and notification will be sent to presbyteries, congregations and organisations of upcoming courses. There is no cost for course participation. Registration is via email to the SCU – safechurch@pcvic.org.au

Online Refresher Course

Every person in the PCV who works with children, having completed the Basic Training, is required to complete the Safe Church Online Refresher Course every 12 months. Commencing in 2016, the Online Refresher Course will be a brief online task designed to ensure adherence to Safe Church policy, procedure and practice in relation to child-safety in the intervening time between three-yearly basic training.

Participants who have completed Basic Training will be advised on how and when to login and complete the online course. The SCU will keep a record of who has completed the course. Staff and volunteers who do not complete the brief Online Refresher Course every 12 months will not be permitted to continue in child-related ministries and activities and their congregation or organisation notified by the SCU that the course has not been completed.

- The PCV and the SCU are committed to providing child-safety related support, training and resources to congregations and organisations, in line with Victorian government guidelines
- Paid staff and volunteers who work with children in the PCV **must** complete both the Basic Training and Online Refresher courses

Safe Church Representatives

For the PCV to effectively embrace and implement the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct, Safe Church Representatives will be appointed in each congregation/organisation. Sessions and organisational leaders are to select and appoint a Safe Church Representative in their congregation/organisation.

The role of the Safe Church Representative is to support their own congregation/organisation in Safe Church matters, be responsible for working to ensure compliance and promote Safe Church Basic Training and Online Refresher Training (once implemented).

Safe Church Representatives ideally should be people

- with an interest and genuine loving concern to work towards making their own congregation/organisation a safe place for everyone within it
- of discretion and wise judgement
- able to kindly but firmly ensure compliance in areas such as Working With Checks and reference checking
- willing to familiarise themselves with and ably explain the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct

While Safe Church Representatives need to be able to capably administer compliance within their congregation/organisation they must not act in an overly officious or “police-like” manner. Rather Safe Church Representatives need to view themselves as primarily being helpers.

Responsibilities of Safe Church Representatives:

- Ensure the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct are displayed prominently in their congregation/organisation building/s
- Keep records of all people in their congregation/organisation who work with children and who have Working With Children Checks and supply copies of these records to the SCU
- Keep records of all people in their congregation/organisation who by virtue of holding positions of authority have Working With Children Checks and supply copies of these records to the SCU
- Ensure that when a new volunteer indicates that they wish to commence in ministry with children that they follow the process of appointing volunteers as outlined in the ‘Volunteers in Ministry’ and ‘References’ sections in this manual
- Promote and attend the Safe Church Basic Training course and complete the Safe Church Online Refresher Course (once implemented)
- Be responsible for completing the Compliance Audit Schedule by March each year and forwarding this document (keeping a copy for their own records) to the SCU

- Safe Church Representatives have an important role in the implementation of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct
- Safe Church Representatives are given a pack with all relevant information to enable them to fulfil this role. Packs are available from the SCU and can be ordered via email or telephone.

Safe Church – PCV: POLICY STATEMENT

- We commit ourselves to respect other people’s minds, emotions and bodies. We have established Safe Church - PCV as the public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of the church to address issues of abuse within the church.
- We acknowledge and accept the trust granted to us by those who are taking part in church activities, their families, and the wider community. We therefore commit ourselves to striving to ensure that all our actions are morally upright.
- We acknowledge that, as a church, our responses to victims in the past may have varied greatly. We express regret and sorrow for any hurt that may have been caused whenever the response appeared to be inappropriate or inadequate.
- We are committed to establishing a process that strives for truth and confidentiality. We will ensure as far as possible that a compassionate response is the first priority in all allegations, even at a time when it is not yet certain that the allegations are accurate, through offering assistance, protection and care without passing judgment or prejudicing the rights of the alleged offender. We acknowledge that concealing the truth is contrary to the character of God, unjust to victims and a disservice to offenders.
We understand and value the need for support to all parties involved in an allegation, including the aggrieved person and the alleged offender, and we actively seek to provide this support.
- We acknowledge the personal and public difficulties that a false, misconceived, malicious or vexatious allegation can cause for the person accused. We will take whatever steps are possible to address these difficulties.
- We are willing to know the full extent of the problem of abuse and the causes of such behaviour within the church. We will strive to be aware of our legal responsibilities and obligations in relation to prevention, reporting and processing requirements and seek to meet them at all times.
- We acknowledge that we have had to make changes in the way that we relate to children and young people and others, as a result, some good things have been lost, however we will bear this loss to ensure as far as possible that the vulnerable are safe.
- We will ensure as far as possible that all people in positions of authority within the church and/or working with children and young people are aware of the appropriate standard of conduct and boundaries. We require those who work on behalf of the church to indicate their agreement with this policy statement and work towards providing an environment that prevents abuse.
- We believe that churches ought to be places of safety and refuge for children, young people and others, where they should be and feel safe from any threat when on church property or involved in activities operated by the church, or accessing services provided by the church. We believe that the church should be a place where people can disclose abuse and have it dealt with effectively.
- We will establish a prevention strategy that includes screening, sound recruitment and selection procedures, clear boundaries, risk identification and management, education, support, supervision and training.
- We acknowledge that the age of consent for sexual activity is determined by legislation. However, we are mindful that this must be read in the light of our moral and spiritual responsibility. All people in a position of authority within the church, be it real or perceived, paid or unpaid, have a moral and spiritual responsibility towards those over whom they have authority. In this situation it is never appropriate to take part in sexual activity of any kind,

regardless of the person's age. We affirm that sexual behaviour belongs in a marriage relationship only and that in this context it is a good gift of God.

- All allegations will be notified to the appropriate external authorities, overseen by the Safe Church Unit (SCU), investigated thoroughly and determined as described in Safe Church - PCV.
- Irrespective of any other action that may be taken by authorities outside the church, the church reserves the right to exercise its powers according to the Code of Discipline and Safe Church - PCV wherever this action is deemed necessary.

Safe Church – PCV: CODE OF CONDUCT

The following constitutes the church's Code of Conduct for behaviour for a person in a position of authority within the church:

1. As a person in a position of authority within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You should avoid situations where you are vulnerable to temptation or where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of this Code of Conduct. You will make yourself familiar with the provisions of Safe Church - PCV.
2. You must not fail to take action to prevent to the best of your ability and report as required and of the following:
 - child abuse,
 - a child or young person at risk of significant harm,
 - reportable conduct,
 - sexual misconduct, and/or
 - conduct that breaches the Safe Church - PCV Code of Conduct.
3. Sexualised behaviour is any behaviour that may reasonably be perceived to be of a sexual nature according to the standards of the time by the person to whom it is directed. Sexualised behaviour is only permitted as set out in the Word of God. Except with one's own marriage partner, all sexualised behaviour is forbidden. If you are not married you must abstain from all sexual or sexualised behaviour.
4. You must not engage in or condone any behaviour that could be considered to be:
 - child abuse,
 - putting a child or young person at risk of significant harm,
 - reportable conduct, and/or
 - conduct that breaches this Safe Church - PCV Code of Conduct.
5. You must not engage in or condone any behaviour that could be considered to be sexual misconduct, understanding that sexual misconduct is contact or invitation, via any means, of a sexual nature which is inconsistent with the integrity of a person in a position of authority within the church. Sexual misconduct includes any behaviour that could be reasonably considered to be sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, coercion or grooming of an adult or a child or young person.
6. Sexual exploitation refers to any form of sexualised behaviour with an adult, child or young person, whether or not there is consent and regardless of who initiated the behaviour, where that behaviour is contrary to the Word of God. Therefore, you will not among other things engage in or condone any of the following:
 - behaviour or a pattern of behaviour aimed at the involvement of others in sexual acts, including but not limited to coercion or grooming behaviour,
 - sexualised behaviour with a person below the age of consent,
 - sexualised behaviour with a person with whom there is a supervisory, pastoral care, or counselling relationship,
 - the production, distribution, possession of or accessing of pornographic material of any kind,
 - taking advantage of the conscious or unconscious use of sexually provocative behaviour that some victims of abuse display,
 - engaging the services of a prostitute, or soliciting or providing such services,
 - visiting, without legitimate reason, a brothel or any place maintained for the abuse-of-sex industry,

- viewing or reading, in print or otherwise, material of a sexually explicit nature, except for a legitimate purpose,
 - participating in sexually explicit conversation via social media, chat rooms, gaming or any other means, and
 - asking, without legitimate reason, any questions about the intimate details of a person's sexual life or providing details of your own sexual life.
7. Sexual harassment means unwelcome sexualised behaviour, whether intended or not, in relation to an adult, child or young person where that person reasonably feels in all circumstances offended, belittled or threatened. Such behaviour may consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time. Therefore, you will not, among other things engage in or condone:
- implicit or explicit demands or suggestions for sexual activities,
 - making any gesture, action or comment of a sexual nature to a person or about a person in their presence,
 - making jokes containing sexual references or innuendo using any form of communication,
 - exposure to any form of sexually explicit or suggestive material, including but not limited to pornography of any kind,
 - physical contact that is inappropriate to the situation or uncomfortable or confusing for the receiver, including kissing, hugging, touching, pinching, patting or aggressive physical conduct,
 - touching any sexual part of the body, including the "only kidding" or accidental occasions of sexual touch,
 - generating or participating in inappropriate personal correspondence (including electronic communication) in respect of sexual or romantic feelings or in breach of the Code of Conduct,
 - inappropriate giving of gifts, including those of a sexual, suggestive or romantic nature that is in breach of the Code of Conduct,
 - inappropriate or unnecessary discussion of, or inquiry about, personal matters of a sexual nature,
 - inappropriate intrusion of personal space or physical privacy, including being alone in a bedroom or bathroom or allowing inappropriate exposure during activities that require dressing or changing clothes,
 - voyeurism, and
 - persistent following or stalking.
8. Coercion or grooming behaviour refers to physical or psychological actions intrinsic to initiating or hiding abusive behaviour, which involved the manipulative cultivation of relationships with vulnerable adults, children and/or young people, their carers and others in authority. You will not exhibit any behaviour that could be considered to be coercion or grooming behaviour.
9. With regard to children and young people:
- You will not visit a child or young person in their own home unless a parent is present or you visit with another person in a position of authority within the church with parental permission.
 - You will not conduct a camp or other activity involving overnight accommodation without appropriate "camp parents" (ideally a married couple over the age of 25 years, of known maturity and Christian commitment) approved by the supervising body.
 - You will not provide any form of accommodation for any reason where there is not strict segregation by sex, with the exception of married couples and families. Supervision of children and/or young people must be provided by a person of the same sex.
 - You will ensure that any activity involving children and/or young people is open to observation by parents and other adults with a legitimate interest
10. With regard to adults, children and young people:
- You will not condone or participate in bullying behaviour, where bullying is the repeated seeking out or targeting of an adult, child or young person to cause them distress and humiliation or to exploit them, including exclusion from a peer group, intimidation and extortion.

- You will not participate in or allow nude swimming or other such activities.
 - You will not participate in or allow initiations and secret ceremonies.
11. With regard to adults, children and young people, either the Presbytery or Session may make temporary variations in respect to the details of the following. These temporary variations will be formally recorded by the Presbytery or Session and will be made on a restricted basis for individuals in specific circumstances for a specific period of time. Where no temporary variation is formally recorded, the following will apply without change:
- You will take care to ensure an appropriate balance of transparency and confidentiality so that the private concerns of others are not disclosed or revealed improperly. In ordinary circumstances, when you are providing pastoral care to, or working with members of the opposite sex, you will strive to do so in an environment that allows visual surveillance and, where reasonable, have other people within hearing distance.
 - You will not allow a child to sleep in close proximity to an adult, other than a parent or guardian, unless there is a significant separation, and privacy of all parties is respected.
 - You will not allow an adult to share accommodation with one child or young person only unless they are a parent or guardian of that child or young person.
 - You will not drive a child or young person unaccompanied.

Where specified provisions cannot be followed in an emergency, the circumstances of the emergency and the actions taken should be reported to and approved by the supervising body. Where the actions taken are not approved they will be considered to be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Any breaches of this Code of Conduct for any reason will be reported to the appropriate supervising body as soon as possible. The supervising body will then report the matter to the Safe Church Unit (SCU).

Social Media Usage Guidelines

The following guidelines are to assist all people who work with young people and all people who are in positions of authority within the PCV. Where the phrase “young person” or “young people” is used it is always defined as a person or people under 18 years of age. This advice provides useful guidance in general when making use of social media.

In cases where ministry outcomes are in part effected through the use of social media then it is recommended that particular practice guidelines pertaining to that ministry are developed and clearly communicated to the leaders. The SCU is available for assistance in establishing such particular guidelines.

Safe Church

The Safe Church Code of Conduct states at point 1: “As a person in a position of authority within the church you must always be concerned about the integrity of your position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to you as a result of holding this position. You should avoid situations where you are vulnerable to temptation or where your conduct may be construed to be a breach of this Code of Conduct. You will make yourself familiar with the provisions of Safe Church - PCV.”

This point has application to your use of Social Media as a person of authority or person working with young people in the PCV.

Basic Principles

There are three basic principles when having any type of conversation with a young person:

- 1) Remember God is listening:
 - The ‘God test’ – is this conversation honouring God?
 - The ‘parent test’ – if this young person’s parents were listening/reading this, would they feel comfortable with this conversation?
- 2) Seek transparency in conversations with young people and do not converse where you can’t be observed by others.
- 3) Don’t get in deeper than you can handle – if issues arise that are greater than your ability or in an area of your weakness refer the young person to others who are better equipped to deal with it. When in doubt, ask for help.

Online communications can create an intense, relational situation because of the ease of access, the comfort of distance and its unobserved nature. A relationship can be developed far more quickly than was possible before online communication was common. Therefore, the church considers talking with young people online to be exactly the same as talking to them face to face. **The same code of conduct for leaders interacting with young people face to face applies to all types of online communication.**

Specific conduct guidelines:

Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/blogs/websites

If your church ministry or organisation establishes any of the above social media platforms as a method of communication within the group this is the best place for leaders to converse with members of the group as all conversations may be held in public. Ensure there is no option for private conversations to take place on this facility.

Best practice is for leaders not to be individual friends on social media with young people within the church or organisation. This is due to the risks inherent in private relationships which may develop over social media. These risks affect both young people and leaders.

However it is recognised that leaders may be individual friends on social media with young people where the relationship is pre-existing or established via other connections, for example they may be related or may have formed the friendship via knowing each other external to the leader/group member relationship. In circumstances where leaders are individual friends with young people on social media leaders are at all times to adhere to the basic principles above.

SMS Text messaging/emails

Best practice is to only use the above methods of communication as a “one-way” avenue for communicating within the group. Make it clear to all members of the group that while SMS texts/emails will be used for communication leaders will not reply individually to any response from group members, unless a matter of urgency arises and in every case, with a fellow leader copied in on the reply. Give parents the option of always being copied in on any communication from the ministry or organisation leaders and add those parents to the contacts list.

When sending group emails always remember to send any email to yourself first and put all contacts into the blind copy (BCC) field to ensure you do not distribute email addresses without permission. Always copy in fellow leaders. Follow the same privacy protocols if using SMS texts to do mass communication within the group.

Phone/Skype/FaceTime

In the main seek to avoid where possible individual contact with young people via phone/Skype/FaceTime. Aim to have 100% of communication to young people via group communication. Should a need arise to use phone/Skype/FaceTime you should be accountable – always get parental permission **before** you talk with a young person over the phone and tell a co-leader that you are conversing with a young person by phone. If using Skype or FaceTime again always get parental permission **before** you talk with a young person using this facility. Ensure both you and the young person are using this form of communication in an open area where people can see you or there are others present, e.g. not alone in your room.

In the case where an inappropriate message or image is sent to a leader by a group member via any social media, whether publically or privately, the leader should not reply under any circumstances and it is recommended to immediately notify the ministry or organisation leader that this has occurred. The ministry or organisation leader may then contact the SCU for advice on how to proceed.

- Social media communication has significant potential risk involved for all users
- Adhering to these guidelines will help minimise risk
- Always seek transparency in online activities
- Practice online behaviour that demonstrates a true witness to the Christian faith
- As much as possible adopt an online philosophy that uses social media as a 'broadcast' communication tool to a group
- If a situation develops online that you need advice or guidance about **call the Safe Church Unit 0499 090 449**

Safe Church – Children

The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct applies to all interactions between adults and children within the PCV. Within the Victorian legislative environment a child is always defined as a person under 18 years of age and the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct adhere to this definition. In this manual the following terms are interchangeably used to describe a person or persons under the age of 18 years: **child/children, young person/young people.**

The Safe Church Unit works to ensure that all PCV congregations and organisations are compliant with Victorian government child-related legislative requirements that are applied to voluntary organisations including churches.

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse is an act by a person or persons that endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. **In Victorian legislation and in the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct a child or young person is a person under 18 years of age.**

There are different kinds of child abuse:

Neglect

Failure to provide the basic necessities of life, such as love and affection, safety, food, clothing, hygiene, medical care and education.

Emotional Abuse

Depriving a child or young person of love and attention which can include but is not limited to constant criticism, isolation, excessive teasing or terrorising. These actions and others are used by a person in a position of power to make the child feel worthless. It may also include actions that cause serious mental anguish without any legitimate disciplinary purpose as judged by the standards of the time when the incidents occurred.

Physical Abuse

All non-accidental physical injuries. This can include but is not limited to hitting, beating, burning, scalding or shaking, and actions that cause serious pain without any legitimate disciplinary purpose as judged by the standards of the time when the incidents occurred.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes involvement in sexual activities with anyone who is older, bigger, in authority or perceived authority or more powerful where a **child or young person** is unable to give informed consent. It also includes sexual activities with a person under 18 years of age (such as another child or sibling) where a **child or young person** is unable to give informed consent. These activities may be initiated by either party. This includes but is not limited to:

- touching in a sexual way
- masturbating
- flashing
- oral sex
- sexual intercourse
- eroding the sexual boundary between two people through sexual innuendo
- kissing
- unwanted or unnecessary touching
- overly long hugs

It can involve apparently consensual intercourse or sexual activity but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential or the fact that one person has a moral and spiritual responsibility towards the other.

It also includes permitting another person to undertake these activities with your knowledge or in your presence. **It is not possible for a person under the age set by legislation to legally consent to sexual activity.**

Domestic Violence

Any of the above four forms of abuse within the context of a family is considered to be a form of domestic violence. It also includes social isolation and/or financial control or deprivation. Domestic violence can be carried out upon a **child or young person** or they can be a witness to violence. That is, to fall within this provision, the violence does not have to be directed at **the child or young person**.

- Child abuse is an act by a person or persons that endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development
- It is imperative that all individuals and organisations in the PCV understand and recognise the different forms of child abuse

Signs of Abuse

The following chart gives **examples** of possible indicators of child abuse. Note it is not an exhaustive list - for a more detailed list of indicators see www.safechurchpcv.org.au or the **Safe Church Basic Training** booklet. Note that the presence or absence of any indicators listed does not necessarily mean the child is or is not experiencing abuse.

Form of Abuse	Possible Indicators
Sexual abuse	Verbally reports or discloses sexual abuse , aggressive, overt sexual behaviour, age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual acts, wary of physical contact (especially with an adult), physical signs of injuries (generally to the genital area), poor self-esteem, poor peer relations, inappropriate expressions of friendship between a child and an adult, self-harm
Physical abuse	Verbally reports or discloses physical abuse , unexplained welts, bruises, burns, fractures, lacerations, abrasions, head injuries, appears frightened of carer, seeks affection from any adult with no discrimination, extreme aggression or withdrawal or other behavioural extremes, complaints of soreness or injuries
Emotional Abuse	Verbally reports or discloses emotional maltreatment , speech disorders, lags in physical development or failure to thrive, attempted suicide, low self-esteem, toileting problems, apathetic, withdrawn, habit disorders (such as rocking, biting, sucking)
Neglect	Verbally reports there is no carer/parent at home or a consistent lack of supervision consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress, chronically unclean, unattended physical problems, medical or dental needs, underweight, developmental delays, begs or steals food

- Child abuse is not usually a single incident but rather takes place over time
- Individuals and organisations in the PCV must be aware of and look out for all forms and indicators of child abuse

What to do if a child discloses abuse

It is possible for any person in the church, whether in a position of authority or not, to have a child disclose abuse. In such circumstances it is extremely important that the situation is not compromised in any way. The following advice is intended to assist if a child discloses abuse to someone in the church:

What to do if a child discloses abuse

1. Listen, listen, listen...and do not add anything.
2. When listening to a child **remember**:
 - that children often talk about difficult or painful things in a roundabout way
 - that children need assurance from adults that it is OK to talk about upsetting things
 - children often feel ashamed and frightened and find it hard to find the right words to explain
 - being observant will help you pick up non-verbal clues about what is wrong
 - a child may drop hints when something is wrong, for example, "I don't like so and so. Do you like him/her?"
3. Tell the child, "You are not to blame".
4. Do not press the child for information or push the child to reveal the details of the abuse. Do not ask leading questions, rather listen carefully and if possible take notes.
5. Reassure the child, "You are right to tell and I take what you say very seriously."
6. Tell the child that you and the church are there to help and you will be telling the Safe Church Unit what has been said so that the child can receive help.
7. Do not promise not to tell anyone else. Rather, say "There are people who can help you and I will tell them."
8. Finish on a positive note and tell the child "I am pleased you told me this. You are not alone."

If you consider that the child is in immediate danger call the Victoria Police 000. Stay with the child and then call the SCU 0499 090 449.

If there is no immediate danger then as soon as possible after the disclosure make handwritten notes of exactly what the child said and the date and time of the meeting. See 'Making a Report' for further details about the next step.

- Sometimes a child discloses abuse to a person who the child feels safe with or trusts. In this situation carefully **listen, reassure the child and tell them you will help them.**
- Make notes of exactly what the child has said and note the date and time
- Contact Victoria Police if you consider the child is in immediate danger and then contact the SCU
- If no immediate danger contact the SCU as soon as possible OR alternatively contact DHS Child Protection and then contact the SCU
- **The SCU must be contacted in all cases of disclosure of abuse by a child**

When to make a report

A report to the SCU or to Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Protection is to be made when an individual or organisation within the PCV **forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.**

Here, the following guidelines from the DHS Child Protection Practice manual apply:

“Forming a Belief

To form a belief, the reporter must be aware of matters and hold any opinions in relation to those matters that lead them to reasonably believe a child is in need of protection (s.186 *Children, Youth and Families Act Victoria*).

Reasonable Grounds

A ‘belief on reasonable grounds is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds (s.184 (4) *CYFA Victoria*).

For example, there may be reasonable grounds when:

- A child states that they have been physically or sexually abused
- A child states that they may know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves)
- Someone who knows the child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused
- Signs of physical or sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been abused”

Victorian laws concerning failure to report abuse

In 2014 the Victorian Parliament passed new ‘failure to report’ laws designed to protect children from sexual abuse. The new offences become law by December 2014.

There will be two new Victorian criminal offences:

1. Applying to all adults who fail to report suspected criminal child abuse to the police; and
2. Applying to people in authority in organisations who fail to reduce or remove a substantial risk that a child will become a victim of a sexual offence.

Any organisation which works with children is affected and this includes churches and religious organisations. The Board members and senior staff of these organisations need to be aware of their obligations in relation to the second offence. The pastors or religious clergy and ministry leaders of churches and other ministry organisations will also be affected.

The first offence applies to all adults and therefore all PCV staff and volunteers need to be aware of this offence. **Failure to meet the standards could result in criminal conviction.**

The first offence applies if the adult received the information or formed a reasonable belief that abuse was sustained **before** the commencement of the Act in July 2014, if the alleged victim is still under the age of 16 years. This age limit has been set by the legislation.

The second offence applies to offences alleged to have been committed on or **after** the Act commenced, even if the risk of abuse was created earlier.

- Remember: a child or young person always means a person under 18 years of age
- Reports can be made by any individual or organisation in the PCV in the first instance to either the SCU or DHS Child Protection. If uncertain report first to SCU.
- When an individual or organisation within the PCV **forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse** a report must be made to the SCU
- **Disclosure** of abuse, **witnessing** of abuse or **concerns** of abuse **must** be reported to the SCU
- If there has been a breach of the Safe Church Code of Conduct in the operations of the congregation or organisation during activities involving children this **must** be reported to the SCU
- In circumstances where an individual or organisation within the PCV forms a belief that child is in **immediate danger** Victoria Police must be contacted and then the SCU **immediately informed**
- **New Victorian laws from July 2014 mean failure to report could result in criminal conviction**

Making a Report – legal duty and moral responsibility

Under the *Children, Youth and Families Act Victoria 2005 (CYFA)* doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers and principals are classified as “mandated professionals” – that is, they are legally compelled to make a report to Child Protection if they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. This is referred to as “mandatory reporting”. The church therefore is not subject to mandatory reporting legislation from a legal duty perspective.

However section 64 of the *CYFA* makes provision for others, referred to as “non-mandated” people, to make a report to Child Protection should they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. The Victorian Department of Human Services Child Protection have a protocol for this type of reporting, referred to as “**protective reporting**”. Protective reporting describes the **moral responsibility of people other than mandated professionals**, in particular, those who have “been made aware of possible harm via [their] involvement in the community external to [their] professional role”.¹ The church is therefore compelled by **moral responsibility** to make **protective reports** to Child Protection where individuals within the church form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

The *CYFA* protects the reporter by ensuring that:

- The identity of the reporter is not revealed without written permission or unless a court or tribunal decides that it needs this information to ensure the safety of the child
- If the report is made in good faith the reporter is not subject to any liability for defamation or breach of confidence
- A reporter who makes a report in accordance with the legislation is not liable for the eventual outcome of any investigation

As a result the PCV can have confidence that, where an individual in the church forms a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse and makes a report either to Child Protection, Victoria Police or the SCU, that individual and the church itself will not be held liable for the eventual outcome of any investigation.

- Individuals and organisations in the PCV have a **moral responsibility** to make a **protective report** to Child Protection or the Victoria Police where they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.
- The identity of a reporter is kept confidential
- A reporter is not held liable for the eventual outcome of any investigation

¹ “A step-by-step guide to making a report to Child Protection or Child FIRST” Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Child Protection.

Contact Details for child related issues

Reporting

If a child is in immediate danger call Victoria Police 000

Then call the **SCU 0499 090 449**

In the case of allegations or suspected abuse there are two options:

- Call the **SCU 0499 090 449**. The SCU can then make the necessary contact with the Department of Human Services - Child Protection.

OR

- Call the Department of Human Services - Child Protection. **Local Child Protection** numbers are listed below if calling within business hours OR if after hours call **Child Protection Emergency Services 131 278**. Then call the **SCU 0499 090 449** to notify that Child Protection have been contacted.

Department of Human Services – Child Protection Contact Details for Reporting

Metropolitan Regions	
<i>Intake Unit</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
Eastern	1300 360 391
North and West	1300 664 977
Southern	1300 655 795
Rural Regions	
<i>Intake Unit</i>	
Barwon South Western	1800 075 599
Gippsland	1800 020 202
Grampians	1800 000 551
Hume	1800 650 227
Loddon Mallee	1800 675 598
After Hours Child Protection Emergency Services	131 278

Support and Referrals

Safe Church Unit: 0499 090 449

After Hours Child Protection Emergency Services: 131 278

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

- If there is immediate danger to a child call Victoria Police 000 and then call the SCU 0499 090 449
- In all situations where there is suspicion of child abuse always call the SCU 0499 090 449
- In non-urgent situations the reporter **may** choose to contact Child Protection first **before** contacting the SCU
- If in doubt, wishing to discuss concerns or needing support please call the SCU for assistance

Safe Church – Adults

The Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct apply to all interactions between adults in the PCV. Everyone in the PCV has the right to feel safe as they worship God and fellowship with one another. Safe Church aims to ensure that PCV congregations and organisations are places of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical safety for everyone.

In the life of the church, however, issues and circumstances may occur where an adult feels unsafe in any one of these aspects through their interactions with other adults. Examples include where an adult may be a victim of sexual or indecent assault, or be bullied in the church environment. In these and other such situations adults in the PCV may choose to contact the SCU for information, support, advice or assistance in proceeding with a complaint. The SCU is a resource for the PCV in such matters.

What are adult-related Safe Church issues?

The following list includes the sort of situations experienced by adults in the PCV that may be described as Safe Church issues. Note that this is not an exhaustive list but is indicative only. If uncertain about a particular circumstance contact the SCU for further clarification.

- Bullying
- Indecent assault
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual assault
- Rape
- Threatening behaviour
- Violent behaviour
- Assault
- Duress
- Fraud
- Family or Domestic Violence
- Grooming
- Stalking
- Inappropriate relationships
- Possession or dissemination of pornography

What must be reported?

In the context of adult related Safe Church issues conduct or behaviour within the PCV that is classified as criminal under the Victorian *Crimes Act (1958)* must be reported. If a person is in immediate danger always contact Victoria Police and then contact the SCU to report. If there is no immediate danger but an allegation or evidence is brought that indicates a criminal act has occurred then contact Victoria Police and the SCU. If in doubt or unsure about contacting police then call the SCU in the first instance. The SCU can then follow up as necessary with reporting to police.

Crimes such as

- Indecent assault
- Sexual assault
- Rape
- Threatening or enacting violence
- Assaults
- Stalking
- Grooming

MUST be reported. Note this is not a definitive list and is only indicative. For further clarification contact the SCU.

What may be reported

The following list gives examples of what kind of conduct and behaviour may be reported or be the subject of complaints to the SCU. Note this is not a definitive list but rather indicative. Contact the SCU for further clarification or to discuss any concerns or complaints.

Adult behaviour that may be reported:

- Bullying
- Inappropriate relationships
- Misuse or abuse of authority
- Professional misconduct
- Suspicion of grooming or stalking
- Spiritual abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Conduct, behaviour or speech that is sexually threatening or inappropriate

The Role of the Safe Church Unit

In the aspect of adult safety there are two distinct avenues available to complainants via the SCU:

1. Complaints which are assessed by the SCU and seen to resolution without proceeding to the Courts of the Church, referred to as “Mediated Complaints”.
2. Complaints which are assessed by the SCU and are referred to the Courts of the Church by the SCU case manager, referred to as “Formal Complaints”. All Formal Complaints are made in compliance with GAA, ch 8, Code of Discipline.

Further, historical complaints made by adults can be made to the SCU.

The following information explains the role of the SCU in adult related complaints:

- The SCU is an avenue for adults in the PCV to seek help in Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct related issues
- The SCU’s role is to ensure complaints are heard in an appropriate forum and due process is followed in a GAA and PCV code-compliant manner
- While it is understood that anyone in the PCV can directly bring a complaint to the Courts of the Church themselves, circumstances may arise where the complainant is unable or unwilling to do so and hence may approach the SCU for help and assistance
- Some complaints may be dealt with without referral to the Courts of the Church (Mediated Complaints)
- Some complaints may be referred to the Courts of the Church (Formal Complaints).
- The SCU is a resource for the PCV and as such can also be engaged to assist in cases that originate in sessions and presbyteries.

- The SCU is an avenue for adult related Safe Church complaints and can be contacted by any individual or group within the PCV
- The SCU ensures that complaints are heard in the appropriate forum and due process is followed
- The SCU operates in a manner compliant with the GAA Code of Discipline
- The SCU is a resource for sessions and presbyteries in adult Safe Church related matters

Historical Complaints

Historical complaints can be made to the SCU. Historical complaints may relate to any current or former PCV congregation or organisation.

It should be noted, however, that due to the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977 (known as “Union”) many former Presbyterian organisations and congregations are now the legal responsibility of the Uniting Church. As a result historical complaints relating to such organisations will be referred to the Uniting Church.

The PCV however welcomes historical complaints relating to **all** Presbyterian congregations and organisations regardless of whether or not such former bodies are now the legal responsibility of the Uniting Church. The PCV understands that the denomination has a moral responsibility in such historical cases and seeks to work with complainants towards resolution and healing.

- The PCV welcomes all historical complaints relating to current and former Presbyterian congregations and organisations
- Some complaints will be referred to the Uniting Church in Australia due to the effects of Union in 1977
- The PCV undertakes a moral responsibility to hear **all** historical complaints and seeks to work with complainants towards resolution and healing
- Historical complaints can be made at any time by contacting the SCU

Mediated Complaints

Examples of the kind of mediated complaint that may be resolved through the SCU without proceeding to the Courts of the Church:

- Historical complaints, in particular where the accused is a party no longer alive or a church institution no longer operating.
- Complaints where the complainant wishes to report events or situations (either historical or current) but does not wish to proceed with any further action. In cases where the situation is current (and providing the case does not involve a criminal act necessitating the involvement of police) the SCU may make a confidential report to the relevant court for their information. In such cases the complainant may wish to be referred to other support services, such as Christian counselling and the SCU can do this.

Formal Complaints

Formal complaints are governed by the processes in GAA, ch 8, Code of Discipline. (All code sections quoted forthwith are from the GAA Code Book). A formal complaint is where the complainant alleges the accused has committed an offence as defined by 1.03:

“An offence, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the doctrines or practices of a member of the Church which is contrary to:

- (a) the Word of God as the supreme standard of the Church as understood in accordance with the Westminster Confession of Faith as the subordinate standard of the Church read in the light of the declaratory statement as provided for in Clause II of the Basis of Union, or
- (b) an obligation imposed on a minister or member of the Church by a law of the Church.”

The majority of formal complaints brought to the SCU are by their nature abuse-related.

From time to time such formal complaints may arise that may only be resolved through the Courts of the Church. In such an instance the SCU undertakes to:

- Comply with the Code of Discipline in all dealings
- Act to assist and advise presbyteries in complaints which originate in presbyteries and not through the SCU
- Only bring complaints that allege conduct or behaviour that is contrary to 1.03 or breach the Safe Church Policy and/or Code of Conduct
- Only bring complaints that are of a serious nature and are well-substantiated
- Provide appropriate support to all parties involved in the complaint, including and not exclusive to: **the aggrieved person whether they present as a victim or complainant, the alleged offender and any others affected by an offence. For further information about support during the process and complaint related definitions see www.safechurchpcv.org.au**

When a disciplinary process against individuals under the Church’s own **Code of Discipline** is commenced, that disciplinary process takes place under the requirements of the Constitution, Practice and Procedure of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Any matter which has been commenced prior to the enactment of the Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct or subsequent revision shall be dealt with until it is concluded in accordance with the process in place at the time the matter commenced unless continuing with the former process is considered to be procedurally unfair.

Contact Details for adult related issues

Reporting

Safe Church Unit: 0499 090 449

In the case of immediate danger or criminal acts:

1. First call Victoria Police on 000
2. Then call SCU on 0499 090 449

Support and Referrals

Safe Church Unit: 0499 090 449

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria: 1800 737 732

Centre Against Sexual Assault - Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 1800 806 292

When an allegation is made

When an allegation is made against an alleged offender the following process applies:

- If the alleged offender holds a position of authority or responsibility he/she temporarily stands aside from this role while the investigation takes place.
- If the alleged offender does not hold a position of authority or responsibility and rather is a communicant or adherent member, or an attender of the congregation/ministry group/organisation, he/she is directed to temporarily cease attendance of any related activities (for example, church services, youth group meetings or Sunday School teaching) while the investigation takes place.

Standing aside and/or ceasing attendance while investigation takes place is considered best practice in that it protects all parties involved – the alleged offender, the complainant or alleged victim and others who are part of the congregation/ministry group/organisation.

- A support person may be appointed to pastorally care for the alleged offender while the investigation is under way.
- A support person may be appointed to pastorally care for the complainant and/or the alleged victim while the investigation is under way.
- There may be circumstances where the details of an allegation may be the subject of general knowledge, speculation and discussion amongst the congregation/ministry group/organisation. In order to protect all parties from rumour and misinformation an announcement may be made to the congregation/ministry group/organisation that states that the alleged offender has temporarily stood aside and/or is absenting themselves. Ideally it should be requested that people refrain from discussing the situation amongst themselves and instead speak to a nominated person in authority if they have any genuine concerns (rather than curiosity).
- The nominated person should exercise extreme caution when fielding questions or concerns. For further advice concerning this contact the SCU.
- At the conclusion of the investigation, depending on the individual case circumstances and the outcome, the relevant authority may, or may not, at its discretion reinstate the alleged offender.

It must be noted, however, that in the case of allegations made concerning abuse of children under 18 years of age, wise practice means removing that person from any ministry role or contact with children.

- Continuing active role responsibility and/or attendance by an alleged offender during an investigation is unwise and potentially unsafe for **all** parties affected by the allegation
- Acting with prudence and caution when an allegation is made is essential
- The SCU can advise and assist with procedure and concerns during this time and is a resource for the PCV in such circumstances

Volunteers in ministry – process of approval

All forms and role descriptions are available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au

Best practice for appointing people in volunteer roles working with children under 18 years is to **only appoint people who have been in the congregation or organisation for more than a year**. By adhering to this practice congregations and organisations reduce vulnerability to being targeted by potential abusers as providing an avenue to groom and access potential victims. The SCU highly recommends that all PCV congregations and organisations embrace this practice as the standard approach to appointing volunteers in roles working with children under 18.

The following process **must** be followed when a new person volunteers to work with children under 18 years of age in the PCV in either a congregation or organisation:

A person wishes to join a ministry that works with children under the age of 18 years within a PCV congregation or organisation



The person must:

- Complete the 'Initial Registration' form, giving two referees and personal information details (name, address etc), including proof of photographic identification
- Complete an application for the Victorian Working with Children Check via www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au – or provide proof of holding a current Victorian Working with Children Check
- Read and sign the relevant 'Role Description' form
- Agree to attend Safe Church Basic Training



It is the responsibility of the congregation or organisation to

- contact the referees and complete the 'Confidential Record of Reference Checks' form
- document sighting proof of photographic identification, such as a current driver's license
- forward copies of the above, the 'Initial Registration' and signed 'Role Description' forms to the SCU – copies must be kept by the congregation/organisation

The congregation/organisation must treat as strictly confidential all applications and records of contacts with referees. Such information should be marked "confidential" and all personnel files should be kept in a locked cabinet for purposes of confidentiality. Access is limited to those so authorised, and the applicant who may view only their own file.





Upon receiving the forms the SCU screens the applicant. If through screening the applicant is approved the person is then registered with the SCU database of persons who work with children under 18 in the PCV. The SCU notifies the congregation/organisation of the **approval**. The person must attend Safe Church Basic Training within the first 12 months of being approved.

If the applicant is not approved by the SCU **OR** fails to secure a Victorian Working with Children Check the person **cannot** minister or work with children under 18 in any PCV congregation or organisation. The SCU notifies the congregation/organisation that the person is **not approved**.

Remember: the following forms are to be completed and forwarded to the SCU when a new person applies to work with children 18 in any capacity in the PCV – including in a voluntary capacity

1. Initial Registration with the SCU form
2. Signed copy of the Role Description form
3. Confidential Record of reference checks form
4. Evidence of holding a current Victorian Working With Children Check (ideally a photocopy of the Working With Children Check card)

The congregation/organisation must also keep their own copies of these documents. The SCU completes the screening procedure and will notify once the applicant is approved or not approved.

A person can only commence in a role working with children under 18 in the PCV once the SCU has notified the congregation/organisation of the approval.

Safe Church Screening, Reference Checks and Registration with the SCU

The PCV and the SCU is committed to complying with recommendations concerning registration, screening and reference checking of paid staff and volunteers who work with children, set by the Victorian Government Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, to ensure best practice within congregations and organisations.

The following guidelines apply to all persons who wish to work with children within PCV congregations and organisations:

- Only persons with a current Victorian **Working With Children Check** are permitted to work with children within the PCV
- Reference checking and screening procedures are only to be completed by new leaders (from October 2014 onwards) working directly with children under 18 – not existing leaders or ministers, licentiates, deaconesses or home missionaries or those who have been church members for more than one year

From October 2014:

- When wishing to commence serving as either a paid staff member or volunteer who works with children in the PCV, a person must submit details of two referees who are willing to be contacted for a reference (ideally these referees should be recently connected with the person) and details of their previous church (if applicable) via the 'Initial Registration' form
- It is the responsibility of the congregation/organisation in which the person will be working with children to contact the two referees via telephone to check the references provided and complete the 'Confidential Record of reference checks' form
- All persons wishing to serve as either a paid staff member or volunteer who works with children in the PCV will also be subject to screening by the SCU **prior** to commencing their work or ministry. Once the two referees have been contacted and the references documented on the 'Confidential Record of reference checks' form, the person's details are referred to the SCU for screening
- All PCV congregations and organisations are to ensure that **no new person** commences work with or ministers to children in their operations who has **not** undergone reference checking followed by screening by the SCU

- All PCV congregations and organisations are to ensure that the SCU is notified of any persons **leaving** or **seeking to join** child-related operations within them
- All people who work with children either as a paid staff member or volunteer within the PCV are required to be **registered with the SCU**, providing contact details and the role they perform. This registration should be submitted by the congregation or organisation in which the person works by use of the 'Record of people holding Working With Children Checks' form.

- The PCV and the SCU are committed to undertaking screening and reference checking of all people (paid staff and volunteers) who work with children in PCV congregations and organisations, in line with Victorian government guidelines
- All people (paid staff and volunteers) who work with children in the PCV are required to have a current Victorian Working With Children Check
- From October 2014 all PCV congregations and organisations are required to comply with screening, reference checking and registration with the SCU requirements **prior** to allowing a person to commence in a role working with children

Safe Church Forms for Ministries to Children & Audits of PCV congregations and organisations

Within the PCV there are several different ministries to children undertaken by both congregations and organisations. The following forms are available from the SCU or via download from www.safechurchpcv.org.au to assist congregations and organisations with compliance with Victorian government requirements, Safe Church Policy and the Safe Church Code of Conduct:

Initial Registration and Reference Checks Forms:

- Initial Registration with SCU as a person working with children under 18 years of age in the PCV (this form is to be used when any **new volunteer** applies for such a role within a congregation/organisation and does not need to be completed by existing volunteers)
- Confidential Record of reference checks
- Working With Children Check Victoria application (this is available via www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au or via the link at www.safechurchpcv.org.au)

Role Description Forms for various ministries to children under 18 years of age:

Role Description forms describe a role and the expected conduct and behaviour of the person undertaking the role. The person wishing to work or minister in the role is expected to complete and sign the Role Description form and return it to the congregation or organisation. The person is to be given a copy of the signed Role Description form.

- Youth Group Leader
- Sunday School Teacher/Kids' Church Leader
- Sunday School Superintendent
- Kids' Club Leader
- Kids' Club Team Member
- Children's Ministry Co-ordinator
- Creche Volunteer
- General Children's Ministry Team Member

Safe Church Compliance Forms

- Safe Church Compliance Audit Schedule form for completion by Safe Church Representatives acting for sessions and organisations
- Record of people working with children under 18 and people in authority holding 'Working With Children Checks'

- Initial Registration and Record of reference checks forms are to be completed and sent to the SCU. Copies are to be kept by the PCV congregation or organisation where the person works or ministers to children under 18 years of age
- Role Description forms are to be completed, a copy given to the person undertaking the role and the original copy kept in the records of the congregation or organisation
- Safe Church Compliance Audit forms are to be completed by Safe Church Representatives acting for sessions and organisations and sent to the SCU. A copy is to be kept by sessions and organisations

Safe Church Audits of PCV congregations and organisations

In order to ensure compliance with Victorian government legislated requirements, Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct, the SCU undertakes three-yearly audits of PCV congregations and organisations. Sessions and congregations are required to complete a Safe Church Compliance Audit form every three years and forward the completed form to the SCU, keeping a copy for their own records. The process of audit is:

- Download the Safe Church Compliance Audit form at www.safechurchpcv.org.au or contact the SCU to request a form to be sent via Australia Post
- Session or the governing body of the organisation check practice within the congregation or organisation complies with the items listed on the form
- For help and guidance in audit-related matters contact the SCU
- Once the form is completed session or the governing body of the organisation must sign the declaration stating the congregation or organisation is compliant
- If there are outstanding items that need to be completed the session or the governing body of the organisation contacts the SCU to discuss these and come to an agreed timeframe within which these items will be completed
- A copy of the form is kept for session or organisational records. The signed original Compliance Audit form is forwarded to the SCU.

- Compliance Audits are a crucial part of ensuring PCV organisations and congregations are compliant with Victorian Government legislation, Safe Church policy, practice and procedure
- Compliance Audits are undertaken every three years. The SCU provides assistance and guidance in completion of Safe Church Compliance Audits and can be contacted at any time for help

References

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005) Victoria

Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) Victoria

Crimes Act (1958) Victoria

Information Privacy Act (2000) Victoria

The Privacy Act (1988) Commonwealth

A Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation (2006) Victorian Government Office of the Child Safety Commissioner

Child Protection Practice Manual State Government of Victoria, Department of Human Services

A step-by-step guide to making a report to Child Protection or Child First State Government of Victoria, Department of Human Services – Child Protection

The Presbyterian Church of Australia Constitution, Procedure and Practice, Code Committee of the General Assembly of Australia, 2011

The Code and Regulations of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, January 2014

Breaking the Silence Procedures for dealing with and preventing abuse within the church, Conduct Protocol Unit, Presbyterian Church of NSW, July 2011

Appendix 1 - Initial Registration with the SCU Form

*This form is to be completed by the applicant and the identity check sources sighted by a representative of the congregation/organisation (this may be the Safe Church Representative). A copy must be forwarded to the Safe Church Unit, along with the other necessary forms (see below), whenever a **new** person applies to work with children under 18 in any capacity in the Presbyterian Church of Victoria – including voluntary roles*

Name of applicant: _____

Date of birth: ____/____/____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____ **Mobile:** _____

Proof of identification:

This section is based on the '100 point proof of identity' approach undertaken in Australia

Primary identity source:

*This can take the form of any **one** of the following – driver's license, passport, birth certificate. This source must be sighted and details (such as driver's license number) noted below:*

Secondary identity source:

*This can take the form of any **two** of the following (all cards must be current) – Working With Children Check card, Student card, Centrelink Healthcare or Pensioner's card, Department of Veteran's Affairs card, bank statements, credit/debit card, Medicare card, Seniors card, Council Rates Notice, Rental/Lease agreement notice, utilities bill showing applicant's name and address, tax declaration. These two sources must be sighted and details (such as driver's license number) noted below:*

Source 1:

Source 2:

Name of Previous Church: _____

Details of Referees:

Name of 1st Referee: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Name of 2nd Referee: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Name of representative of the congregation/organisation who has sighted the identity sources:

Signature:

Signature of Applicant:

Please forward a copy of this form to the Safe Church Unit and keep a copy.

Remember: the following forms are to be completed and forwarded to the SCU when a new person applies to work with children under 18 in any capacity in the PCV – including in a voluntary capacity

1. Initial Registration with the SCU form
2. Signed copy of the Role Description form
3. Confidential Record of reference checks form
4. Evidence of holding a current Victorian Working With Children Check (ideally a photocopy of the Working With Children Check card)

The SCU completes the screening procedure and will notify once the applicant is approved or not approved.

A person can only commence in a role working with children under 18 in the PCV once the SCU has notified the congregation/organisation of the approval.

Appendix 2 - Confidential Record of Reference Checks Form

*This form is to be completed and a copy forwarded to the Safe Church Unit, along with the other necessary forms (see below), whenever a **new** person applies to work with children under 18 in any capacity in the Presbyterian Church of Victoria – including voluntary roles*

Name of applicant: _____

Referees Contacted:

Note: written references must always be checked by contacting the referee

Name of 1st Referee: _____

Relationship to applicant: _____

Date contacted: ____/____/____

Contacted by (Circle one): **Telephone** **Personal Conversation**

Conversation summary of the referee’s remarks concerning the applicant’s fitness and suitability for working with children under 18:

Name of 2nd Referee: _____

Relationship to applicant: _____

Date contacted: ____/____/____

Contacted by (Circle one): **Telephone** **Personal Conversation**

Conversation summary of the referee’s remarks concerning the applicant’s fitness and suitability for working with children under 18:

Name of Previous Church: _____

Name of person conducting reference checks: _____

Signature: _____

Date: ____/____/____

Please forward a copy of this form to the Safe Church Unit and keep a copy.

Remember: the following forms are to be completed and forwarded to the SCU when a **new** person applies to work with children under 18 in any capacity in the PCV – including in a voluntary capacity

1. *Initial Registration with the SCU form*
2. *Signed copy of the Role Description form*
3. *Confidential Record of reference checks form*
4. *Evidence of holding a current Victorian Working With Children Check (ideally a photocopy of the Working With Children Check card)*

The SCU completes the screening procedure and will notify once the applicant is approved or not approved.

A person can only commence in a role working with children under 18 in the PCV once the SCU has notified the congregation/organisation of the approval.