



## WWEC 04 Procedure

### Child protection reporting, managing incidents and risk

#### Introduction

Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church is committed to actively ensuring that every person attending church feels safe. At the same time, all people should be welcome to be a part of church, including an individual who may be a ‘person of interest’. In considering how to balance these two concerns, priority must be given to protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. Persons of interest also need protection from the opportunity to commit offences and from false allegations<sup>1</sup>.

This information outlines necessary procedures for proactively identifying and managing potential or real risks in relating to child protection, and the processes relating to mandatory (external) reporting.

#### 1. Prevention

The best strategy in terms of child protection is prevention. Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church implements policies and procedures designed to keep children safe by preventing undesirable practices in children's/youth ministry (see Related policies and procedures).

- ▶ Procedures relating to screening and training children's / youth ministry workers are outlined in WWEC 02 Procedure - child protection screening and training children's / youth ministry workers.
- ▶ Information regarding the expectations and accepted ways of interacting with children are outlined in WWEC 03 Procedure - Serving in children's / youth ministry.
- ▶ Details relating to child protection reporting and managing incidents and risk are outlined in WWEC 04 Procedure - Child protection reporting, managing incidents and risk
- ▶ Procedures relating to child protection record keeping are outlined in WWEC 05 Procedure - Child protection record keeping

The best protection against child abuse is prevention. Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church has implemented strategies aimed at preventing any situations that may compromise the care of our

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<sup>1</sup>Guidelines for parishes regarding sexual and child abuse offenders and persons of suspicion <http://www.psu.anglican.asn.au/index.php/p2/guidelines>

children or young people or give rise to concerns or complaints relating to care provision. These strategies include:

- ▶ stringent screening processes for every person prior to commencing in a children's/youth ministry role
- ▶ defined roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities for everyone involved in child related employment
- ▶ comprehensive written procedures relating to all aspects of children's/youth ministry
- ▶ a documented code of conduct summary in line with the NSW Commission's guidelines and template resources that is widely circulated
- ▶ established pathways for parents and members to raise concerns or make suggestions in relation to improving children's/youth ministry
- ▶ an agreed, documented quality improvement strategy in relation to child protection policies and procedures, including regular monitoring and review.

To maximise prevention it is Wagga Wagga Evangelical Churches policy that ministry workers should not be alone with a child or young person, except in an emergency situation that would warrant completion of an incident report.

## **2. Managing of non reportable complaints**

The document WWEC 03 Procedure - Serving in children's / youth ministry outlines the roles, responsibilities and procedures for receiving, reporting and managing any issues, concerns, or complaints raised by parents or any person attending Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church. This refers to suggestions, or minor concerns that are raised by parents or anyone attending Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church. It may include suggestions for improvement, minor concerns, or issues that are unlikely to affect others or result in a necessary change in practice.

These procedures outlined in WWEC 03 Procedure - Serving in children's / youth ministry aim to ensure a matter is reviewed and addressed appropriately. Generally at Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church this involves escalating any issue, concern or complaint to the relevant children's/youth ministry team leader. In addition to addressing the immediate concern, this process enables the identification of opportunities for improving children's/youth ministry at Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church.

## **3. Managing disclosures and allegations**

A disclosure is where a child or young person 'discloses' or 'reveals' information to a children's/youth ministry worker that causes concern for their safety, welfare or wellbeing. In relation to child protection, an allegation is where a person 'declares', 'states', or 'asserts without proof' that harm has occurred to a child or youth. In this instance the matter is also immediately escalated to the child safety officer and senior pastor.

When a disclosure or allegation occurs issues of confidentiality often arise. Confidentiality is an important aspect of relationships with children and young people, however it is important that we make it clear that there are limitations. There are times when you will have a responsibility to report information that has been disclosed to you, even though this may breach confidentiality. This may include:

- ▶ when a person is in danger

- ▶ when a person threatens to harm themselves or others
- ▶ if you become aware that a criminal offence may have been committed.

In instances where a disclosure or allegation raises significant concern for safety, welfare or wellbeing:

- ▶ DO stay calm and listen to what you are being told
- ▶ DO convey that you hear what they are saying (avoid strong reactions to what you are hearing)
- ▶ DO satisfy yourself that there are reasonable grounds for suspecting abuse or risk of harm
- ▶ DO write a record of what you said and what the child or young person said as soon as possible
- ▶ DO report the alleged abuse to the appropriate person in your organisation as soon as possible
- ▶ DO reassure the child you are there to give support
- ▶
- ▶ DON'T be dismissive of what they have told you
- ▶ DON'T reflect back to a child what they are saying (ie restate what they have said in your own words)
- ▶ DON'T promise not to tell (as you may be obliged to break confidence)
- ▶ DON'T ask more questions than are necessary to be clear about what the child is telling you
- ▶ DON'T ask leading questions (i.e questions that suggest an answer)
- ▶ DON'T touch the child
- ▶ DON'T feel you have to prove what has been disclosed (this is not your role)
- ▶ DON'T promise the abuse will stop or that you can resolve the situation
- ▶ DON'T discuss the matter with anyone other than the appropriate person
- ▶ DON'T notify the parents or caregivers<sup>2;3</sup>

## **4. Reporting of disclosures and allegations**

As a children's/youth ministry worker you should initiate the reporting process when you have reasonable grounds to suspect a child or young person is at risk of significant harm.

- ▶ 'Reasonable grounds' means your concerns are well founded and based on information you know, or have received from a reliable source. A useful consideration is whether another person, when presented with similar information, would draw the same conclusion.
- ▶ 'Significant' means your concerns are sufficiently serious to warrant a response by an authority, and that the situation may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial impact on the child or young persons' safety, welfare or well being. This could be a single act or omission or an accumulation of incidents.

While anyone can report concern for a child or young person externally to the relevant authority, at Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church this process is undertaken in consultation with the Child safety

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<sup>2</sup> Disclosure of risk by a child/young person guidelines <http://www.psu.anglican.asn.au/index.php/p2/youthworks>

<sup>3</sup> Safe ministry (Youthworks) training manual

officer and the Senior Pastor. The reasons for consultation in regards to reporting include the following:

- ▶ To allow another person to evaluate the information to determine if they come to the same conclusion
- ▶ To collaboratively determine the correct course of action and to which authority to report
- ▶ The senior pastor has the statutory responsibility for compliance with child protection requirements including reporting, documenting, and managing child protection issues and risk.
- ▶ To allow external professional advice to be sought if necessary
- ▶ To ensure the person reporting externally is appropriately supported throughout the process.

It is vital that you notify and discuss your concerns with Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church's child safety officer as soon as possible, especially where you have current and immediate concerns for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child.

Where risk of harm or abuse is disclosed, and the abuser is NOT involved in the church in any way (i.e a member of the general public), you can notify the child safety officer without disclosing the identity of people involved. It is not possible to withhold the identity of those involved when the alleged or suspected abuser is involved in the church, or the incident of concern occurred at a church related activity or event.

### **Mandatory reporting**

If the matter is a mandatory reporting event, the complaint will be referred to the appropriate government authorities at the earliest opportunity. The child safety officer is primarily responsible for liaising with these authorities. If the child safety officer is the subject of the complaint, the Senior Pastor is to nominate an alternative child safety officer.

To undertake the mandatory reporting the child safety officer will undertake all the steps required in the NSW Mandatory Reporter Guide. This is an online tool where a series of 'tick-a-box' questions are used to generate a 'decision tree' that most closely matches the concerns you have. The Guide displays a 'final report' on screen which advises:

- ▶ whether your concern meets the statutory threshold for reporting risk of significant harm and should be reported externally
- ▶ which external authorities should be notified, by which method, and the relevant contact details. located at <http://sdm.community.nsw.gov.au/mrg/app/summary.page> will be utilised to generate a 'decision tree' that most closely matches the concerns you have.

It is preferable that the Mandatory Reporting Guide is completed jointly with the person who raised the concern, the child safety officer, and the senior pastor. However to ensure a timely response, if this is not possible each person can complete the Mandatory Reporting Guide separately, then confirm they arrived at the same 'final report'. In all cases the final report generated by the Guide should be printed and retained on file to justify and evidence your decision making process, and facilitate external reporting if this was indicated.

## **5. Action following a report**

The senior pastor is responsible for managing/overseeing actions that must be undertaken following a reportable instance of child abuse. The authorities to which the external report was made will provide direction regarding necessary actions and requirements which Wagga Wagga Evangelical church will action promptly.

The senior pastor will also as a matter of priority take immediate action to protect any children or young people at risk. This will involve undertaking a formal risk assessment with the assistance of the Sydney Anglican Network's Professional Standards Unit. If allegation has been made against a ministry worker it is likely that a component of the action plan resulting from the risk assessment will require immediate suspension from children's/youth ministry positions (with due process for paid ministry workers), even though that person is innocent until proved guilty. If there emerges a level of certainty that any accusation is false, vexatious or misconceived, the restrictions may be lifted.

### **Support for people involved**

Appropriate support will be determined and provided for all people involved in the incident in consultation with the Sydney Anglican Network's Professional Standards Unit, and other professional experts.

### **Support for people who have been abused**

In the event that a child has been found to have been abused during a church activity, the church will provide appropriate support to assist in recovering from the abuse. This may include financial support where appropriate. The child or young person may require immediate specialist counselling or other support. Family and friends of the child or young person (after notification) may require similar support. The pastoral team will need to decide how to provide sustainable ongoing contact, support, and updates on how the management process (and prosecution process where relevant) is progressing. It is important that limitations are acknowledged and that there is an understanding of when it may be more appropriate to achieve support via referral to experts such as doctors or counsellors.

### **Support for people who have been accused**

It is also necessary to deal fairly and provide support to the person against whom the allegation has been made assuming they are a member or regular attendee of Wagga Wagga Evangelical church. It will be necessary to provide pastoral support that is separate to the support provided to the person who raised the allegation and the child/young person and their family.

### **Actions against perpetrators**

Where abuse of any nature is found to have occurred, the following actions may be taken by the church in response, depending on the severity of abuse found (these are in addition to any legal ramifications):

- ▶ Requiring counselling
- ▶ Restrictions in participating in particular church activities

- ▶ Removal from leadership role(s)
- ▶ Exclusion from church
- ▶ Removal from Partnership (subject to the church's Rules)

## **6. Record keeping**

It will be necessary to keep very comprehensive records of all allegations and actions including dates of relevant conversations, conclusions reached, and action taken.

On completion of the matter there is an obligation to report all disciplinary action involving allegations of child abuse, sexual misconduct in the presence of or involving children, acts of violence at work or violence in the presence of or directed at children to the Commission for Children & Young People (CCYP). An unsubstantiated allegation, prematurely aborted action, warning, reprimand or removal as a result of such allegation must be also reported. No report is required where the allegation is found to be false, vexatious or misconceived. The respondent must be notified of this report. The Sydney Anglican Network's Professional Standards Unit is able to advise on this issue.

In accordance with Wagga Wagga Evangelical church's "child protection record keeping procedures", all records will be retained by the Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church Pastor responsible for Ministry

## **7. Previous offenders and person of suspicion**

In any situation where it is suspected or becomes known that a person attending Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church is a prohibited person, a person of interest, or a person who has been accused or suspected of child abuse even if not convicted (see Appendix 1 - Definitions) Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church will implement the Sydney Anglican Network's Guidelines for parishes regarding sexual and child abuse offenders and persons of suspicion.<sup>4</sup>

The Guidelines provide information regarding:

- a. Identifying offenders and persons of suspicion
  - ▶ sources of information
  - ▶ investigating and verifying information
  
- b. Action required on confirmation of information
  - ▶ assessment of risk
  - ▶ negotiation and implementation of boundaries
  - ▶ recording arrangements for supervision, accountability and support
  - ▶ appointment of mentor/s
  - ▶ implementation of supervision and accountability
  - ▶ review of supervision and support
  - ▶ inter-agency cooperation.

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<sup>4</sup> Guidelines for parishes regarding sexual and child abuse offenders and persons of suspicion <http://www.psu.anglican.asn.au/index.php/p2/guidelines>

The Guidelines also provide template for the development of a Memorandum of Understanding which is completed in collaboration with the person of interest, that sets agreed appropriate appropriate boundaries. This Memorandum is to be completed for all suspected or known persons of interest who wish to be involved in any Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church's activities.

## **8. Related procedures**

WWEC 01 Procedure - Privacy and information management guidelines

WWEC 02 Procedure - Child protection screening and training children's / youth ministry workers

WWEC 03 Procedure - Serving in children's / youth ministry

WWEC 05 Procedure - Child protection record keeping

## **9. References**

The information contained in this document has been developed with reference to:

- ▶ Employer Guidelines issued by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People in March 2010 [http://kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/  
WWCC\\_Guidelines\\_Feb2010\\_full.pdf](http://kids.nsw.gov.au/uploads/documents/WWCC_Guidelines_Feb2010_full.pdf)
- ▶ the Sydney Anglican Network's Safe Ministry Resources <http://www.psu.anglican.asn.au>
- ▶ Department of Human Services (Community Services)' website  
[www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)
- ▶ NSW Premier and Cabinet website <http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au>

## **Review**

This policy will be reviewed before September 2021.