



OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

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ACC SAFER CHURCHES GUIDELINES

The **Safer Churches Guidelines** ("Guidelines") have been developed by the ACC National Executive as part of the implementation of the **ACC Safer Churches Strategy** and outworking of the **ACC Child Protection Policy** ('Policy').

The ACC Safer Churches Guidelines, Training and Implementation Kit assist ACC Churches and their workers in upholding Child Protection legislation and other relevant 'people protection' legislation – e.g. Health and Safety. That is to say, the ACC Safer Churches Strategy is aimed at the protection of all people in ACC Churches.

The Guidelines are good practice procedures for the implementation of the Policy and people protection.

The Guidelines aim to ensure that all workers (paid and volunteer) in ACC Churches, are safe people who act in a protective manner with the people they serve.

The Guidelines are divided into two categories:

- those considered to be legal, Biblical and/or moral imperatives, denoted by the word "**shall**", must be implemented; and
- those considered as good practice, denoted by the word "**recommended**", are strongly recommended.

It is an expectation that all workers (paid and volunteer) in ACC Constituent Churches will follow the Guidelines.

The ACC Safer Churches Implementation Kit is located in the Safer Churches section of the ACC Pastor's Login on the ACC website.

GUIDELINE 1 – Safe Church Strategy implementation

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *Upholding this policy, relevant state or territory Child Safe legislation the nationally recognised 10 Child Safe Principles and, applicable child protection laws and regulations, as relevant in their office and jurisdiction (see document SC003), and implementing the related ACC Safer Churches Guidelines as appropriate;*
- *ACC Constituent churches shall regularly review, evaluate and improve child safe procedures and practices; and*
- *ACC Constituent churches shall ensure that clear policy and procedural documentation is up to date and readily available.*
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National Executive, State Executives and Local Church Boards **shall:**

- a. endorse and implement the ACC Child Protection Policy and ACC Safer Churches Guidelines (or alternative guideline/s that is/are at least consistent with the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines);
- b. ensure all ACC workers within their respective Constituent Church understand and adhere to their obligations in accordance with the ACC Child Protection Policy, including the implementation of the Safer Churches Guidelines as minimum standards for the protection of children and vulnerable people (or alternative guideline/s that is/are at least consistent with the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines);
- c. develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability in relation to the ACC Safer Churches Strategy. This would include making this a standing item of regular meetings of the ACC National Executive and Constituent Churches and providing opportunities for ACC People to clarify and confirm the procedures to apply when taking action in relation to Children or Young People's welfare and safety;
- d. Maintain up to date documentation of all policy and procedures.
- e. Maintain secure records for worker screening and training and of complaints of responding to concerns of risk of harm and all workplace investigations into worker misconduct (including Reportable Conduct investigations in jurisdictions that operate Reportable Conduct Schemes).
- f. implement relevant ACC Safer Churches procedures and practices (consistent with the samples found in the ACC Safer Churches Implementation Kit at www.acc.org.au).

GUIDELINE 2 – Culture of safety & wellbeing

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting the care, protection and wellbeing of Children and Young People in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and the right to be protected from harm, and to maximise opportunities for Children and Young People to realise their full potential; and*
- *Recognising and responding to the diverse needs of all Children and Young People including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young*

People and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and also the safety of Children and Young People with a disability as relevant in the local church setting ,

ACC Church workers (paid and volunteer) **shall** minister out of the love God has for everyone, by acting in the best interests of all people they serve in ministry, through:

- a. practising servant leadership (Matthew 20:25-28);
- b. respecting and valuing all people, with special care for those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island or diverse cultural backgrounds, and/or those with a disability including:
 - i. Encouraging and supporting a child's ability to express and enjoy their culture; and
 - ii. Acknowledging and appreciating the strengths of Aboriginal culture and understanding its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children;
- c. Ensuring racism, along with all forms of discrimination and abuse within the organisation are identified, confronted and not tolerated;
- d. ministry in transparent and accountable teams
- e. upholding National Privacy Principles; and
- f. providing opportunities for formal debriefing and/or counselling for families of Children or Young People who have experienced abuse and any other family in the community who may indirectly be affected by an incident.

In relation to Children and Young People, it is **recommended** that ACC People support healthy development and wellbeing through:

- a. understanding and upholding the rights of Children and Young People according to their age and stage of development;
- b. providing regular opportunities for workers to clarify and confirm the procedures to apply when taking action in relation to Children or Young People's welfare and safety; and
- c. good practice in accessing local resources when Children or Young People are experiencing distress or crisis.

GUIDELINE 3 – Promoting support networks

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *recognising the family as the primary means of providing for the nurture, care and protection of Children and Young People and to accord high priority to supporting and assisting the family to carry out its responsibilities to Children and Young People; and*
- *promoting and recognising the need to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the Child and the Child's parent, family members, leaders, mentors, spiritual advisors and significant others,*

It is **recommended** that ACC Constituent Churches:

- a. provide practical pastoral care. For example, providing information and support in practical parenting, marriage enrichment, caring for those with additional needs or in

times of crisis;

- b. assist church attendees to recognise and access their support networks within the church and also in the local community; and
- c. actively supports and facilitates participation and inclusion by Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

GUIDELINE 4 – Promoting empowerment and participation

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *empowering Children and Young People by engaging with Children and Young People and Caregivers in relation to decisions that impact them, including inviting feedback as part of our services,*

ACC Church workers (paid and volunteer) **shall:**

- a. listen to the views of, and respond appropriately to, concerns of all people they serve; and
- b. encourage all church attendees to speak to their local church Safer Churches Officer if they are concerned about harmful behaviours or harmful situations.

In relation to Children and Young People, ACC People **shall:**

- c. actively promote the empowerment and participation of all people at their church in the protection of Children and Young People, including:
 - i. providing opportunities for Children or Young People to tell us their views, express their culture, and give feedback about the services we provide to them;
 - ii. making information about the Child Protection Policy available to Children, Young People and Parents/Carers;
 - iii. ensuring that Children, Young People and Parents/Carers have access to adequate and age-appropriate information about child safety and how to protect themselves;
 - iv. ensuring that Children and Young People have access to adequate support to promote safety and intervene early in concerns that they raise; and
 - v. listening to Children or Young People and appropriately address any concerns that they raise with us, in the least intrusive way possible, that is consistent with the paramount concern to protect the Child or Young Person from harm and promote the Child or Young Person's development.

GUIDELINE 5 – Appointment of workers (paid and volunteer)

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting the provision of services that foster the health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity of Children and Young People including by ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children and Young People within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall**:

- a. screen, appoint, and induct all workers (paid and volunteer) using a formal accountable/transparent process, including:
 - i. compliance with State and Territory legislation with regard to Working with Children/Vulnerable Persons Checks (refer to SC003);
 - ii. self-declarations (refer to SC014);
 - iii. referee checking (at least two referees); and
 - iv. police background checking for paid employees.
- b. provide adequate and role-relevant induction training as required by Health and Safety legislation;
- c. store securely and permanently all successful applicant worker appointment documentation; and
- d. **not** allow an individual to work or continue his/her work if he/she has been charged or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance. It is illegal in all States and Territories for a person who does not, or cannot, hold a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) to engage in any child related work. The church board will need to complete a full risk assessment to ascertain the current risks, and then implement a risk mitigation strategy to protect children and young people. This risk assessment must include seeking advice from the ACC Safer Churches Helpline and the church insurance company. ACC People who have been charged or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance have an ongoing obligation to inform the Constituent Church of this matter.
- e. It is **recommended** that ACC Churches conduct annual ministry role reviews for workers. This process should be made clear to applicants at the time of appointment, as part of the induction process. This provides an opportunity for workers to say they will or will not be available next year/time, which is important for the health of committed teams.

GUIDELINE 6 – Safer Churches training

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting the provision of services that foster the health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity of Children and Young People including by ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children and Young People within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping,*

ACC Credential and Certificate holders **shall** complete ACC Safer Churches training every three years at a minimum in order for Credentials or Certificates to be renewed.

This training develops the Credential Holder's awareness of their responsibilities under the ACC Child Protection Policy and ACC Safer Churches Guidelines. ACC Safer Churches training includes understanding the concepts of child protection including knowledge of indicators of

Child or Young Person at risk of harm (e.g. abuse and neglect), and reporting procedures for when there are risk of harm concerns about a Child and/or Young Person.

ACC Constituent Churches **shall** provide people who have a Direct Role (as defined in SC001) with adequate training in the concepts of Child Protection at a minimum of every 3 years. Additionally, in states where specific legislation applies, such as Reportable Conduct and / or Child Safe Standards, awareness raising and ongoing training in the specific requirements of those laws shall occur.

This shall include indicators of Child or Young Person risk of harm (abuse and neglect), and the reporting procedures for when they have risk of harm concerns about a Child and/or Young Person who is involved in the church.

It is **recommended** that ACC Constituent Churches provide all workers with adequate, appropriate, and ongoing training in Safer Churches related policy, procedures and practices.

GUIDELINE 7 – Supervision of workers (paid and volunteer)

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting the provision of services that foster the health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity of Children and Young People including by ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children and Young People within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall**:

- a. adequately and appropriately supervise all workers, including provision of a Code of Conduct (see Ministerial Code of Conduct [SC013] and sample Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct [SC014]). Additional requirements may be required of employed workers);
- b. provide adequate support for workers in line with Health and Safety legislation; and
- c. make adequate provision for developing workers. This may include things such as regular team meetings, praying together, eating together and planning together. It is also advisable to invest in leadership development, both through in-house and external training events.

GUIDELINE 8 – Responding to concerns

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *promoting caring attitudes and responses towards Children or Young People, so that the need for appropriate nurture, care and protection is understood, risks to a Child's wellbeing are quickly identified, and any necessary support, protection or care is promptly provided including child focused responses to allegations of risk of harm or harm in line with Safer Churches Guideline 8,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall** know and follow their State and Territory Legislation (SC003).

Response processes **shall** be child focused and uphold the rights of Children and Young People in line with Child Safe Standards (SC068).

Children

It is **recommended** that Constituent Churches appoint a Safer Churches Person/Team, whose roles

include: receiving reports, assisting in the process of reporting of Child Protection concerns, and keeping accurate records permanently and securely in accordance with privacy legislation.

ACC People **shall** report concerns when:

- a. a Child or Young Person discloses they have been, or are at risk of being harmed;
- b. someone else (regardless of age) discloses that they know of a Child or Young Person who has been/is at risk of being harmed; or
- c. there are concerns that the Child or Young Person may have been, or is at risk of being harmed based on their physical appearance or behaviour.

ACC People **shall**

- a. put the rights of a Child or Young Person to the protection of harm ahead of any cultural and religious practices of families in their ministry programs;
- b. follow reporting procedures without hesitation in response to concerns no matter who is involved; and
- c. co-operate with police and/or other formal investigation procedure.

ACC People are not required, as an initial response, to establish or investigate if harm has occurred, but rather report reasonable suspicions or concerns of harm, including the grounds for concerns, to the Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team (or equivalent).

In making Child Protection - Mandatory Reports in States and Territories where this legislation is in place, it is essential that you follow the process mandated for reporting¹.

If a Local Church Safer Churches Person is not available, and the harm is currently occurring, or there are reasons to believe that a Child or Young Person is at risk, a report should be made immediately to the police and appropriate authorities.

Process for reporting:

- a. Report to the Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team (**note SA reporting to CARL*).
Report concerns to one of the appointed Local Safer Churches People, except when a disclosure occurs at a program or event where the Local Safer Churches Person/Team is not available, or a Child's/Young Person's immediate safety is at risk (sexual and physical abuse). In this case, immediately phone the police and organise appropriate support for the Child/ren. This can be done with the help of the most senior on-site leader, who will also need to assist with managing the immediate situation.
If the allegation involves the Local Safer Churches Person, then this should be reported to the most senior person available, who will take the role of the Safer Churches person in this instance.
- b. Complete applicable form/s and/or online reporting.
The Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team will keep permanent and secure records for the Constituent Church, upholding privacy principles.
- c. Take the appropriate action with your Local Church Safer Churches Person including:
 - i. police/government child protection agency reporting;

¹ For example in *South Australia, individuals who have a reasonable concern must report directly to CARL (Child Abuse Report Line on 13 14 78)*.

- ii. contact the **National Safer Churches Helpline (1800 070 511)** for advice and assistance and/ or to ensure ACC is aware of all child-related matters of concern; and
 - iii. initiate the correct complaints handling processes if the allegations are about ACC Workers/Credential Holders.
- d. Provide ongoing support, pastoral care and risk management processes.

It is the role of the Local Church Board to implement pastoral care and support for all parties involved, including the Child or Young Person and family, as much as is practical. There may also be Local Church risk management action plans that need to be implemented, e.g. stepping aside a leader/Credential Holder who has been accused of harming a Child or Young Person whilst the investigation occurs.

Adults

ACC Church leaders **shall** report to police and/or government agencies all concerns involving adults as required by their State or Territory Legislation.

It is **recommended** that ACC Church leaders follow good pastoral practice in relation to concerns of harm or risk of harm in adults.

(Refer to SC026 in the Implementation Kit at the ACC Pastor's login on the ACC website for more information.)

GUIDELINE 9 – Responding to conflict

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting the care, protection and wellbeing of Children and Young People in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and the right to be protected from harm, and to maximise opportunities for Children and Young People to realise their full potential; and*
- *promoting and recognising the need to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the Child and the Child's parent, family members, leaders, mentors, spiritual advisors and significant others,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall**

- a. consider the pastoral, legal, and insurance implications of the conflict or allegation, and respond with transparency and accountability;
- b. use the ACC Grievance Procedure for Certificate Holders (Refer to SC033) when responding to allegations of misconduct and/or abuse by ACC Credential or Certificate holders; and
- c. work through an appropriate process that affords natural justice to all parties when responding to allegations of misconduct and/or harm by those who are not ACC Credential or Certificate holders. (Refer to SC034 and SC035 in the Implementation Kit.) Your ACC State Safer Churches Officer can provide assistance working through such a process if required.

GUIDELINE 10 – Safe environments

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting a Child safe culture in both physical and online settings that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer or access an ACC program, service or managed facility,*

1. Safe online and digital practices

ACC People **shall** be mindful of the position of trust they hold by:

- actively being safe in all online and digital interactions, including maintaining transparency and accountability in the use of electronic communications with Children or Young People as far as is practical, that is as a team, not as individuals, e.g. group emails/text messages/Facebook.
- not** transmitting, downloading or storing any communication that is:
 - discriminatory or harassing;
 - derogatory;
 - obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic;
 - defamatory;
 - threatening;
 - for any purpose that is illegal or contrary to the Code of Conduct relevant to their position;
- reporting any communication to their Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team that breaches the requirements outlined above; and
- not** sending any electronic communication that attempts to hide their identity or represent the sender as someone else.

It is **recommended** that communications with Children under 16 occur with the full knowledge of the Parent/s or Carer/s of the Child or Young Person.

It is **recommended** that photos or videos of Children under 16 not be shared without the consent of the Parent/s or Carer/s of the Child or Young Person.

2. Compliance with WHS legislation

It is **recommended** that each ACC Church:

- elect a **Health & Safety Team**, including at least one Board member, to oversee implementation of WHS compliance;
- write and implement Health and Safety policies, including privacy policy and evacuations procedures;
- keep Health and Safety on the agenda at every Local Church Board and team meetings;
- notify incidents such as serious events and dangerous incidents within a prescribed period to the Health & Safety Team;
- address health and safety concerns within a timely manner of the concern being communicated to the Health & Safety Team;
- use incident report documentation to report serious incidents to your insurer and your

ACC State Safer Churches Officer;

- g. ensure all workers know and follow the church's abuse reporting and grievance procedures; and
- h. have the Health & Safety Team undertake a safe environment audit of all church facilities at least twice a year.

3. Annual program approval

It is **recommended** that all Children or Young People's programs be approved by the Local Church Board through a formal, annual written approval process.

4. Managing event and/or program risks

It is **recommended** that ministry coordinators manage individual program risk according to risk management good practice, including annual risk management as part of the annual program approval process.

5. Safe physical environments

It is **recommended** for the safe running of programs and events that the following matters are considered:

FIRST AID including:

- a. at least one on-site leader should have current first aid training; and
- b. a suitable, up-to-date and accessible first aid kit is to be available at all times and in all locations;

TRANSPORTATION including:

- a. never be alone in a car with a Child or Young Person;
- b. at no time should there be more passengers in a car than the number of seat belts that are in working order and available for use;
- c. all cars will be registered, in good working order and driven by licensed drivers abiding by any licence restrictions (e.g. Provisional licence passenger conditions); and
- d. if a Child/Young Person is travelling in a vehicle driven by a worker, prior written consent should, wherever possible, be given by a Parent/Carer, except in the case of emergencies.

FOOD SAFETY including:

- a. prepare a food preparation & storage practices guide;
- b. display food preparation and storage practices guide in the kitchen or food preparation area; and
- c. checking with relevant council to ensure compliance with local requirements in relation to food handling.

SUPERVISION NUMBERS including:

- a. ACC People should ensure that adequate numbers of leaders are present to supervise the program;
- b. precise numbers of leaders are hard to determine and will depend greatly on the size of the group, their age, and the level of physical and/or emotional risk inherent to the activity. Programs aimed at younger children and those with an additional need require more supervision due to the increased level of risk involved;
- c. when considering supervision numbers, risk assessment should include how supervision

would be affected by an accident or emergency. Adjustment to required leader numbers should then be made to reduce any reasonably foreseeable risk; and

- d. an example may be requiring a minimum of two adult leaders on site for all programs in addition to the leader-to-participant ratio of 1:10. This will allow for safe supervision if and when accidents or critical incidents occur. Of course, many more leaders will be needed for high-risk activities such as taking Children or Young People off-site, swimming, bushwalks, games nights or the like, or if the group is large.

It is **recommended** that ACC People running Children's or Young People's programs:

- i. make the distinction between those adults who are part of the team, and who are junior leaders (under 18 years). Junior leaders are not to be counted in the supervision ratios;
- ii. use adult helpers age 18 or over who are not leaders of the group, but rather are present on-site for supervision purposes. Such adult helpers, though still Volunteer Workers, would not actually run activities, whereas junior ministry leaders may run many. Adult helpers are important to help ensure the safety of the Children or Young People;
- iii. do not allow leaders or helpers to be alone, one-on-one, with a Child or Young Person. One adult with a small group may be fine as long as there are other adults on site. Where possible, have both male and female leaders to provide support for both boys and girls; and
- iv. in relation to camps or overnight settings, it is not advisable that leaders sleep in the same room as Children or Young People. Leaders should be sleeping in a designated leaders' space (cabin) nearby.

MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-RISK ACTIVITIES including:

- a. for high-risk and off-site activities: e.g. water sports, swimming excursions, white water rafting/caving/bungy jumping, inflatable sumo suit wrestling, gladiator games, horse-riding, high ropes activities, roller blading/skating, skateboarding or activities involving live animals, an employee/leader with appropriate (certified) training for the event should be running the activity;
- b. active supervision is required at all times. Supervisors must not be involved in any additional activities that will distract from their role as a supervisor;
- c. all participants involved in high-risk activities should have a signed liability release from each Parent/Guardian. However, it is important to note that a liability release form does not actually indemnify against an accident. Individual leaders may be protected where all due care has been taken, but a church may still be deemed liable, where duty of care failures are proven; and
- d. contact the church's insurance broker/company for advice before running high-risk activities as some high-risk injuries may be excluded from the Church's liability cover.

GUIDELINE 11 – Responding to incidents

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5),

- *providing for and promoting a Child safe culture in both physical and online*

settings that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer or access an ACC program, service or managed facility,

ACC Church workers **shall**

- a. respond to incidents appropriately and promptly and take adequate follow up action;
- b. use appropriate report forms. Injuries or accidents requiring secondary medical attention, e.g. visit to a doctor or medical centre, are to be written up on an incident report;
- c. report incidents of a serious nature to your local church insurer; and
- d. report all incidents to parents and/or caregivers of Children or Young People, and in instances where the impact has been felt by a wider group, report, with the permission of those involved in the incident, to the wider concerned group.

GUIDELINE	Implementation Kit supporting documents
1	SC001-9, SC011, SC024, SC048, SC075, SC077
2	SC020, SC044
3	
4	SC006, SC016, SC017, SC018, SC019, CPP INFOGRAPHIC POSTERS
5	SC003, SC012, SC014, SC015, SC027-29, SC030-32, SC053, SC056-60, SC076
6	SC021
7	SC013-14
8	SC021, SC023-26, SC036, SC068, SC078
9	SC033-35
10	SC022, SC037-45, SC049-56, SC061-66, SC069-74
11	SC046-47