

INTRODUCTION

Context Of PresSafe System

Unfortunately, child abuse does occur. It is a criminal act, often perpetrated by a family member or person known to the child. The Presbyterian Church of Queensland has a duty of care to provide a safe environment for children, both biblically [John 13:34] and legally [Child Protection Act 1999; Working With Children (Risk Management & Screening) Act 2000; Work Health & Safety Act 2011]. PCQ has adopted the 'Ten Child Safe Standards' recommended by *The Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

Serving Within PCQ Ministries

As someone serving in a ministry to children within the Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ) you are required to undertake training in how to keep children safe from harm. Whether you serve regularly in a ministry program or are serving on a more limited basis you will need to:

- Have a current, positive Working With Children Check (or be exempt) OR if WWCC is not required, an individual must not be a Restricted Person.
- Undertake an interview
- Complete the appropriate **annual** PresSafe Training
- Complete an PresSafe Agreement (Under 18s will need to complete this with their parents)
- Be approved by Session or the relevant Committee.

PresSafe Code Of Conduct

The following principles provide guidance on the expected behaviour to create a safe environment and ensure children are protected from harm and abuse. *(Taken from the Presbyterian Church of Australia, National Safe Ministry Framework)*

Foundational Principles

1 In our aim to create a safe environment and in our quest to ensure that children are protected from abuse and harm, the following principles must guide the behaviour expected of all persons involved in ministry-related activities:

- 1.1 Become familiar with and act in accordance with the National Safe Ministry Framework (including its Principles, Policy, and Procedures) and any Code of Conduct and specific Procedures established by the relevant State Church
- 1.2 Understand that perpetration of any physical, psychological or emotional harm or neglect, or sexual abuse or exploitation is unacceptable, that it will be treated seriously and sensitively, and that it must be reported in accordance with the Church's Mandatory Reporting Policy and Procedure.
- 1.3 In all aspects of personal life and relationships and at all times, strive to act according to the highest standards, demonstrating courtesy, consideration and good judgement
- 1.4 Treat all people with respect and dignity regardless of age, culture, gender, religious affiliation, personal circumstances or any other point of differentiation
- 1.5 Accept and exercise the duty of care appropriate for each and all participants
- 1.6 In accord with Scripture, engage only in lawful activity and never assist persons engaged in illegal activities
- 1.7 Strive to carry out all relevant roles in accordance with the doctrines and values of the Presbyterian Church of Australia
- 1.8 Respect the authority of leaders and act in accordance with reasonable directions
- 1.9 Only engage in actions and activities that are appropriate for children where ministry-related activities involve children.
- 1.10 Complete any and all training required by the Church in relation to ministry roles; and
- 1.11 Create and maintain appropriate resources for use and training in ministry.

2 As the application of these National Principles in specific situations requires interpretation, those involved in ministry must seek advice if placed in a position of uncertainty.

Breaches of policy, procedures or the Code of Conduct are considered behaviours which do not meet the standards expected when working with children. Breaches of the Code of Conduct and procedures are to be reported to the Minister who will consult with church leaders (elders) on the appropriate course of action.

Expected Behaviour Of Team Members

The following points provide guidance to safe and appropriate behaviour when in contact with children and youth.

Do:

- Behave in a manner consistent with your position as a positive role model to children and as a representative of the organisation.
- Follow the PCQ Children's Ministry Policy and procedures.
- Treat all children with respect and take notice of their reactions to your tone of voice and manner.
- Take care as to the degree of physical contact with children. Even though it's common for children to initiate hugs and other contact, those involved in Children's Ministry should quickly redirect children to other activities.
- Allow children to determine the degree of physical contact they have with you, without showing favouritism.
- Report disclosures, allegations or belief regarding abuse to your Ministry Coordinator or Minister.
- Alert a Leader if you find yourself in a situation where a member of the opposite gender is required
- Report all concerns, issues and problems to your Ministry Coordinator or Minister ASAP.

Don't:

- Engage in inappropriately rough physical games.
- Use any physical means to control or discipline a child, other than restraint by holding to prevent injury.
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch children in an inappropriate and / or culturally insensitive way.
- Make sexually suggestive comments, even as a joke.
- Assist children to do things of a personal nature that they can do for themselves, such as going to the toilet or changing clothes.
- Enter the sleeping accommodation of members of the opposite gender, except in emergencies. Be aware of situations where children might be changing, showering or using the toilet.
- Spend time alone with a child where you can't be observed by others (e.g. taking a child to your home, meetings outside of the program activity).

CHILDREN & YOUTH RISK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

We have a compliant Child and Youth Risk Management System (PresSafe). All PCQ activities you are participating in require parental permission and will have undergone a risk assessment and all activities and leaders have been approved by the Session of the local PCQ church or relevant Committee. It is important that safe procedures are followed. If you have any concerns about the activity or program you are a part of, please contact the Ministry Coordinator or Minister.

RECOGNISING CHILD ABUSE AND HARM

Child abuse is any act that harms a child's physical or emotional health or development. It is frequently a pattern of behaviour by an adult or peer. The following table contains some general information that may help you identify abuse. This information will not cover every circumstance, so be aware of anything unusual or out of character for the child. Indicators may have other causes not related to abuse, nevertheless share any concerns/observations with your Ministry Coordinator or Minister.

RECOGNISING CHILD ABUSE

Type Of Abuse	Key Indicators
Physical Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitting & shaking • Burning or scalding • Bruises or fractures caused by excessive discipline • Poisoning • Giving children alcohol, illegal drugs or excessive medication • Domestic and Family Violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corresponding injuries • Unexplained or hidden injuries • Fearful or nervous • Aggressive OR passive behaviour
Psychological or Emotional Abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scapegoating • Persistent Rejection or hostility • Constant yelling, insults or criticism • Cultural affronts or racism • Teasing and bullying • Witness to Domestic or Family Violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low self esteem • Unexplained mood swings • Aggressive OR passive behaviour • Anxious • Attention seeking • Sudden underachievement • Age inappropriate behaviours • Developmental delays
Neglect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not providing a child sufficient food, housing, clothing, sleep, hygienic living conditions, health care, and adequate supervision • Leaving a child under 12 y.o. unattended for an “unreasonable time” • Children missing school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent hunger or malnutrition • Poor hygiene • Inappropriate seasonal clothing • Medical needs not met • Unsupervised for long periods • Withdrawn or aggressive • Indiscriminate with affection
Sexual Abuse or Exploitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kissing or holding a child in a sexual manner. • Exposing a sexual body part to a child. • Exposing children to sexual acts or pornography • Making obscene phone calls or remarks to child. • Sexual relations with child under 16 y.o. • Grooming activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genital injury • Sexually transmitted disease • Anxiety or depression • Persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity or behaviours • Regressive behaviour (eg bedwetting) • Preoccupation with sexual matters • Secretive relationships with adults or children. • Self injurious or delinquent behaviour

Mandatory Reporting

The PCQ has a policy of **mandatory reporting**. If you suspect child sexual abuse or significant harm such as neglect, physical abuse, domestic violence or psychological harm has occurred to a child who is part of the children's ministry **YOU MUST REPORT THIS**. Your involvement in a children's ministry program requires you to uphold this policy.

If the disclosure or suspicion of harm relates to child sexual abuse, please report this first to Police (131 444), then the PresSafe RMO and PCQ General Manager. This is in keeping with legislative changes in 2021 that make it a criminal offence if child sexual abuse is not reported directly to the Police. (QLD Criminal Code Section 229BB and Section 229BC, which pertains to reporting protocols.) Our organisational policy reflects the 2021 legislation changes, so that any allegations against paid staff or volunteers within PCQ must first be reported to Police.

You do not need to have proof to report any concerns you have about the safety of a child.

Indicators that represent reasonable grounds to report a suspected offence include:

- **A child or young person discloses** that he or she has suffered or is suffering non accidental physical injury or sexual abuse.
- **Someone else advises you** that a child or young person has been physically, emotionally, sexually abused or neglected.
- **Your own observations** of the child or young person's physical condition or behaviours lead you to reasonably suspect that the child or young person has suffered or is suffering non-accidental physical injury or sexual abuse.

All people involved in children's ministry should:

- Remain alert to any indicators of abuse or harm;
- Pay close attention to changes in a child's behaviour;
- Make written notes in a non-judgmental and accurate manner;
- Assure children under your care they can come and talk to you.

Responding To Disclosures

In the event that a child discloses harm or abuse to you, your response to their disclosure is very important. If a disclosure is made to you, or you have a suspicion of harm or abuse, then you will need to follow the procedure below.

1. DANGER

If a child is in immediate danger, call Police on 000 followed by immediate advice to the PresSafe Risk Management Officer (RMO) on 0416 082 024.

2. SUPPORT

If a child is disclosing abuse or harm, remember to:

LISTEN	Remain calm and listen attentively with sensitivity. No leading questions.
REASSURE	Reassure the child they have done the right thing in telling you.
RESPECT	Protect their identity & avoid promises you are not able to keep.

Make sure the child is aware that you need to report the disclosure to help keep them safe.

3. REPORT

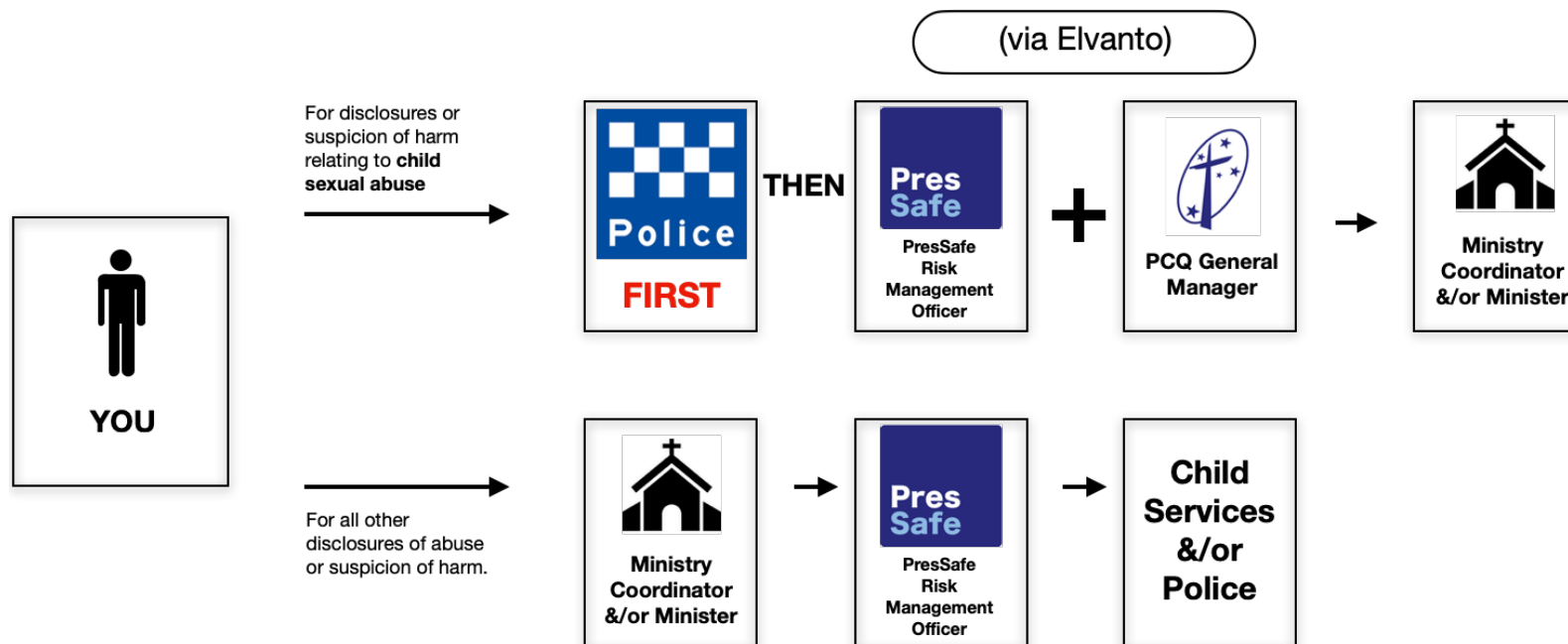
Report the suspicion or disclosure to your Ministry Coordinator or Minister as soon as possible. They will liaise with the RMO. If a suspicion or disclosure relates to a Ministry Coordinator or Minister, the matter is to be reported directly to the RMO.

If the disclosure or suspicion of harm relates to child sexual abuse, please report this directly to Police on 131 444. This action is required by law to be undertaken as soon as reasonably practicable, and our organisational policy reflects this requirement. The RMO, General Manager, or your Ministry Coordinator or Minister can provide you with logistical support to make this report (e.g., you can ask for clarity on reporting requirements or assistance with reporting to the police.)

If you are **under 18**, please notify your Ministry Coordinator or Minister immediately as they will take on the responsibility for reporting to Police.

Once you have notified Police, the next step is to submit a [Child Safety Report](#) via the PCQ [Safe Ministry with Children](#) web page. Your Ministry Coordinator or Minister can assist you with the Child Safety Report. This report notifies the PresSafe RMO and the General Manager who will then contact you about your report.

The next step, after you have contacted Police and submitted a [Child Safety Report](#) to the RMO & General Manager, is to then notify your **Ministry Coordinator or Minister** about the disclosure or suspicion of harm, if you have not already done so.



NB: Please report directly to the authorities if you have any concerns that the reporting procedure is not being followed by your Ministry Coordinator or Minister.

If any allegation is against an individual in PCQ ministry, the RMO and the General Manager will liaise with Police who will advise on suspension of the individual in accordance with their investigation. This process exists to help keep the privacy of the victim and ensures that any future legal proceedings resulting from the allegation are not jeopardised.

4. DOCUMENT

Document the disclosure or suspicion, as soon as you are able. This will be entered in Elvanto by your Ministry Coordinator or Minister. For a disclosure, please include the following:

- Names, times, locations of matter disclosed.
- Any first person statements.
- Any questions asked.
- Actions taken after the disclosure.

Do not attempt to investigate or mediate - the RMO will liaise with Police. Investigation is the role of the police and other authorities and by doing so you may interfere with any subsequent investigation.

5. PROTECT

You must protect the identity of the victim. Do not discuss the situation with **anyone** who is not part of this official process. This includes discussing the suspicion or disclosure with any other families or individuals who may be involved. For example, if the allegations are made by a child against a peer, do not confront this person or mediate with their family. This is not your role.

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CONCLUSION

If you have any questions about policy or procedures regarding child safety at your church please discuss these with the Ministry Coordinator or Minister at your church. You can also raise these with the RMO or Safety Administrator. If there is an emergency, please contact Police or an appropriate first responder.

www.pressafe.org.au

PresSafe RMO - Helen Underwood	0499 599 741
PCQ General Manager - Phil Strong	0432 210 856
Director of Christian Education - Stuart Hoadley	0407 408 067
PresSafe Training & Support - Kate Mitchell	0419 110 130

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