

 the grainery church	THE GRAINERY CHURCH, NEWCASTLE, AUSTRALIA POLICY	DOCUMENT NO: POLICY - S01
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		APPROVERS: Senior Pastor, Elder, Leader
SAFE CHURCH POLICY		

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God (2 Cor 6:3-4).

1. PURPOSE

The Grainery Church (TGC) is committed to ensuring staff, church members and visitors (e.g., attending celebration services, working at or visiting church premises) are spiritually, emotionally, relationally and physically safe. To this end, this policy focuses on the areas that are currently considered to be the biggest threats to personal safety. The aim of this policy is to provide the people concerned (listed in the section below) with **knowledge in these areas**, an understanding of their **responsibilities**, the importance of **planning to prevent** incidents, the need to be always **vigilant** and, where appropriate, **take action** and/or **report** to a church Pastor or lodge a formal report.

2. SCOPE

This policy document includes guidelines and procedures, and shall apply to:

- all TGC staff members,
- volunteers with overseeing responsibilities such as TGC connect leaders,
- everyone involved in running or supporting children, youth and young adult TGC programs,
- TGC approved counsellors who provide services (counsel, advice and prayer) at or outside TGC premises, and
- everyone who provides prayer counselling, on a one-to-one basis or part of a team

As child abuse is a major safety concern in the national Christian church and appears to be widespread, a significant part of this policy addresses children's safety. There is another policy devoted solely to the protection of children and provides more information on this area. All of the above people who work with children must also be familiar with the Child Protection Policy.

3. REFERENCES

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/chinese/center/chbus/events/hurights/english.htm>
2. TGCP-S02 Child Protection Policy

3. TGCP-S03 Small-group Ministry Policy
4. TGCP-S04 Youth Connect Group and Meeting Policy

4. DEFINITIONS

Shall	- To be used for stating mandatory and/or compulsory instructions
Should	- To be used for stating recommended instructions
Mandatory	- Required by law to do
Compulsory	Required by this Policy to do
Mandatory reporters	- Persons who: a) in the course of his or her professional work or other paid employment, deliver health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement, wholly or partly, to children; or b) hold a management position in an organisation, the duties of which include direct responsibility for, or direct supervision of, the provision of health care, welfare, education, children's services, residential services or law enforcement, wholly or partly, to children
Child	- Anyone under 18 years old
Human rights	- Basic standards of treatment to which all people are entitled, regardless of nationality, gender, race, economic status or religion.
Abuse of power	- The act of using one's position of power in an abusive way.
Disclosure	- Whenever a child or young person tells you that someone is abusing him/her
Sexual grooming	- Sexual grooming is a pattern of nonsexual behavior aimed at engaging a child, as a precursor to sexual abuse.
Child abuse	- A child can be abused physically, sexually, emotionally or through neglect. It can be a single incident, or can be a number of different incidents that take place over time.
Formal Counselling and Prayer	- When an appointment is made with a church counsellor or leader specifically for the purpose of asking for practical and spiritual guidance and/or prayer. This scenario usually involves one or two counsellors meeting with the person or persons seeking help.
Informal Counselling and Prayer	- An example is when someone goes to the front of the church to 'request for prayer' at the end of a church celebration service. Before praying commences a conversation may take place and counsel given. Another example is the gathering of small groups of people to share and pray e.g., at connect groups or at the end of a TGC celebration service.

5. WHEN IS OUR CHURCH A SAFE CHURCH?

Our aspiration is to be a safe church, which means:

- We share God's heart through affirming the dignity and worth of children and the vulnerable - the widow, the poor, the orphan and the alien (foreigners living in Israel) according to Deut. 10:18-19 - and will do our utmost to protect them from all forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and family violence.
- We shall respect and support human rights consistent with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- Duty of care shall be extended to all people in church premises and especially in protecting the more vulnerable. The needs of the people are the primary concern and not programs.
- People in leadership positions shall operate within the codes of conduct of TGC and do not abuse their power.
- There shall be a high level of transparency and accountability, resulting in good governance and high level of confidence in the leadership.
- Allegations of misconduct and/or abuse shall be addressed promptly internally and, where appropriate, reports lodged externally e.g., with government departments.

To this end, the staff and leadership of TGC will endeavor and strive to make TGC a Safe Church.

5.1 God honored

TGC can only honor God through providing a safe environment to carry out ministry programs. Our aim is to achieve standards that exceed mandatory requirement in all our operations and programs, to fulfil the Biblical challenge to 'loving your neighbor as yourself'. With respect to this policy, the challenge is manifested not only in how we act to prevent and respond to claims and cases of sexual misconduct in our faith communities, but also in how we assist our leaders and congregation to discharge their duty of care responsibilities, and build a godly community through an understanding of the dynamics and power of godly relationships.

5.2 Human rights upheld

Every person is entitled to certain fundamental rights, simply by the fact of being human. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights has 30 articles and the three most relevant to this policy are:

Article 3. The Right to Life - we all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

Article 29. Responsibility - we have a duty to other people, and we should protect their rights and freedoms.

Article 30. No One Can Take Away Your Human Rights.

Essentially, this means that TGC has the responsibility to protect all its people and visitors when they are under its care, principally when at the church's premises or attending functions organized by the church. This includes their freedom, rights and safety, and that these are not taken away or violated through poor duty of care, power abuse, mental and sexual abuse.

The protection of our staff, congregation and visitors is clearly top priority, taking into consideration the following remarks: "within Australia some people have sought to abuse victims, be they children, young people or adults and these 'predators' have seen churches as an area where they can exploit the innocent. Often this is because, by its very nature, the church has historically been a trusting body and sometimes an 'easy target'." Gillian Calvert, a past Commissioner for Children And Young People in NSW

There are important areas that we must take responsibility and these are described in greater detail below. Where appropriate, some examples are given of actions that can be taken and the violations to be reported.

5.3 Duty of care extended to all

Responsibility – We must do everything reasonably practicable (e.g., to buildings, kitchen and car

parks) to protect people from harm. In legal terms this means the ability to show that everything that we could reasonably do to 'discharge' our duty of care has been done. In other words, we have done all we can to ensure that harm and/or distress does not occur. Lack of care or attention, or acts of inattention or omission are also considered negligence and not doing all we can. Applies from the time the gates of the car park are unlocked and/or the building is opened until the last person has left, and the gate is locked.

Actions - Discharging duty of care includes: implementing policies and procedures to protect people in our care from potential abuse or injury, and leaders from potential allegations of abuse. There is an expectation that those in leadership will be diligent in ensuring those leading programs have been recruited, screened, appointed, inducted and are supervised appropriately. There is a need to ensure that all church-authorized programs are well planned, having had all foreseeable risks identified, reduced or negated. Formal Risk Assessments shall be carried out on all authorized activities at and outside of church premises (e.g., meetings at church and camps) that involve a large group of people or when 'activities with the potential for physical injury' is involved.

Reporting – It is compulsory to report unsafe conditions (e.g., building, trip hazards, transportation), threats to personal safety (e.g., intruders)

5.4 No misuse of power

Responsibility - A power balance exists between parties in a relationship. When two or more parties have the same amount of power, it is an equal relationship. An unequal relationship often exists when the parties are not of the same age, experience, knowledge and or position, e.g., as is the case between adults and children. Power abuse occurs when one person misuses the power that they have in a relationship with a less powerful person. In a church, unequal relationships form when leaders are seen as representing God's authority. This inequality inevitably widens when the congregation member is young in age or in the faith. Leaders must exercise great care in using their powers.

Action - A person abuses his/her power, someone's 'personhood', 'rights' and 'power' to act in a healthy, life-enriching way is violated, taken away or 'robbed'. Those in positions of power in church must, therefore, have a sound understanding of and uphold appropriate relationship boundaries so as to protect the less-powerful person.

Reporting – If you observe possible abuse of power, discuss the matter with trusted church members and/or leaders first. If the consensus is that the matter should be resolved because a potential harm exists, it is compulsory that you should lodge a report with the Senior Pastor (Sue Irwin) or the Chairman of the Board (Graeme Irwin).

5.5 Sexual grooming stopped

Responsibility - Sexual grooming usually initiates with nonsexual behavior aimed at engaging a child, as a precursor to sexual abuse. This may include persuading the child that a 'special' relationship exists — through favored treatments e.g., in time, gifts and support. As trust in the child increases, the next stage often involves pushing the boundaries further through activities such undressing in front of the child, allowing the child to sit on lap, talking about sex, 'accidental' touching of private areas – genitals or breasts. The grooming may include desensitizing the parent/s and community at large as well. The church community can thwart sexual grooming activities through being vigilant and taking appropriate actions early.

Action and reporting – Discuss your suspicions, observations and concerns with other TGC leaders. When two or three people share this same view – bearing in mind that people who have just been made aware may need some time to determine if the concerns are justified – it is compulsory that the matter be reported to the Senior Pastor, the Pastoral Support Coordinator (Christine Oberg) or the Executive Pastor (Paul West). TGC leadership shall take appropriate action to stop all attempts to sexually groom children and those that need special protection e.g., people with disability

5.6 Child Abuse Stamped out

Responsibility - Child Abuse results in harm to the child's physical or emotional health, survival, development or dignity, often in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. This is a complex and difficult area (discussed in Section 6.3) but only a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse in our society is acceptable. To properly discharge our responsibility we must knowledgeable leaders – for example, research demonstrates that in church communities boys are more at risk than girls which is opposite to the general population, and that on average it takes girls 7-14 years to tell someone about their abuse and for boys the average is well over 20 years, if they ever do. Our success is clearly dependent on everyone staying vigilant and be caring enough to follow up things that we have seen or heard, all with the view to protect the victim.

Action – Clearly, every abuse must be reported to an external organization. If a child has confided to you that he/she has been abused, it is because they trust you and feel safe with you. It is highly likely that you will continue to have contact with the child/young person after a disclosure. Where appropriate and possible, you should continue to help the child. This could include: reassuring the child that telling you the matter is the right and brave thing to do, that it is not his/her fault that abuse has occurred, and that his/her safety is your primary concern. Remain calm and patient; avoid the use of leading questions which will then allow the child to use his/her own language. Appropriate action may mean the need to address the child's immediate concerns and involve moving the child to a safe place. Once a formal report has been lodged with the appropriate authorities, do not discuss the disclosure further with child.

Report – Lodging a report with the Family and Community service is described in Section 6.6.

5.7 Transparent and Accountable

Transparency is about being easy to understand, and being open, frank and honest in everything. In church this includes our motives and actions in all ministry areas. Being transparent means not only doing the right things, but also being seen to do the right thing. The church in Australia has failed miserably in transparency. Although historically seen by many as the moral police, the moral failings of church leaders were rarely spoken about, swept under the carpet and then attempts made to cover them up when exposed.

Accountability is about being responsible and being able to explain, clarify and justify to someone for actions taken. It implies that someone has a right to know and hold us and our organization to account. Church staff and leaders must do this well for we are ultimately accountable to God.

At TGC the leadership team will do its utmost to generate a transparent and accountable culture. In particular regard to a safe church, we shall:

- not attempt to conceal reports of sexual grooming and abuse, through the release of appropriate information to generate awareness and to address the problem. Every effort shall be made to respect and to protect the confidentiality, rights and safety of the victim.
- take appropriate action to address a disclosure and be held accountable for how and why a course of action has been followed. We accept that the 'best' decision will often have to be made at a particular point in time and, with hindsight, that may not be the best course of action. We shall accept failings and shall learn and improve from them. We aspire to be a 'learning organization' in all that we do.

If a person feels that their concerns and suspicions in any area – power abuse, sexual grooming, child abuse etc. – have not been investigated or handled in a transparent and accountable manner, the person has the right to take the matter to an external organization (e.g., Family and Community Services or the Police).

6. HELPFUL GUIDELINES ON REPORTING

6.1 Reportable and non-reportable conduct

Reportable conduct includes:

- Any sexual offence or sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including a child pornographic offence or an offence involving child abuse material), or
- Any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child, or
- Any behavior that causes psychological harm to a child with or without the consent of the child.

Example of what is not reportable conduct:

- Touching a child in order to attract a child's attention
- To guide a child or comfort a distressed child
- Conduct that is established to be accidental

6.2 Reportable information

It is very likely that the information acquired on child abuse is not based on observation but has been communicated verbally. In any **formal** counselling and prayer session, it is required by law that you report to the appropriate agency when a person tells you that:

- he/she is intending on self-harm,
- he/she is going to harm another person, and
- a child is under significant risk of harm.

To respect a person's confidentiality and at the same time comply with mandatory reporting requirements, you must also inform the person you are counselling that you are obliged to report on information given involving these three areas. Generally, expressed intentions to harm or self-harm are not shallow words or mere threats when a plan is in place or in the process of being put in place. Even if you feel that the intentions will not be carried through you contact either the Senior Pastor or the Pastoral Support Coordinator to discuss the matter and so that appropriate support can be given to the person.

In all **informal** counselling and prayer sessions, if you are told by a person of his/her intention to self-harm, harm another person or that a child is under risk you should persuade the person to see a counsellor and then help him/her to arrange for a **formal** counselling and prayer session. Although there is no mandatory requirement for you to submit a report, you should provide follow-up to ensure that the person is being looked after.

6.3 Mandatory reporting responsibility

Mandatory reporters are required by law to report to Family and Community Services if they suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm. The law also requires any person who manages a mandatory reporter to report suspected risk of significant harm. Essentially, this means that if you are a mandatory reporter, it is mandatory that you put in a report detailing your suspicions. Please note that the Pastors listed in Section 8 are all mandatory reporters.

All reports on child abuse in TGC should be made to the Family and Community Services by one of the four people (listed in Section 8) under TGC organization. This means that mandatory reporters need not submit a report on their own. However, if a person feels that he/she has not discharged his/her responsibility unless a report under their name is submitted, then he/she should go ahead and do that.

A non-mandatory reporter can also make a report with the Family and Community Services if he/she prefers. In the reporting process it is mandatory that accurate records are kept and stored in a safe place (Section 6.5) and a person filing a report may not be able to comply with these requirements. TGA shall keep all persons involved in making a report through the TGC organisation fully informed on the progress of the case.

6.4 Barriers to reporting

We have both a legal and biblical mandate to be involved in protecting children through reporting suspected and actual cases of children at risk of abuse. However, there are many reasons why abuses go unreported.

Don't parents have ownership of their children and the right to treat them as they see fit? The child is rightly punished for bad behavior and, unfortunately, some cultures accept more extreme and violent physical punishment– 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'.

Reporting could expose a person of high standing in the community, lead to a break-up of the family unit and has not the abused child already suffered enough without the added publicly shaming. Conclusion - it is probably better not to "get involved" in other people's business.

Not knowing what to do. Are my concerns true? Will there be retaliation should the abuser find out my name? The natural outcome is that such thoughts dampen our impetus to report. Remember that it is not acceptable to put off taking action against an alleged perpetrator unless or until they have been charged with a criminal offence. Organizations need to take appropriate action as soon as a complaint is received.

Generally, people are hesitant about making a judgment about abuse occurring in case their perception is wrong. You are not required to establish or investigate if abuse has occurred. Your role is only to report your reasonable suspicions or concerns of abuse, including the grounds for your concerns. If you are unsure about a disclosure or an incident, it is best that you contact either the Senior Pastor or the Pastoral Support Coordinator to discuss the matter and proceed from there.

6.5 Understanding forgiveness and reporting

When abuse is disclosed in the church, the Christian teaching on forgiveness must influence our attitude towards perpetrators in some way. In His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus linked the forgiveness of others to God's forgiveness: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matt 6:14-15)

It can be difficult to understand how to apply this teaching when a crime is disclosed. Too often in the past, victims have been told that they need to forgive the offender, and they have been discouraged from going to the police. Forgiveness then becomes a spiritual argument for avoiding the consequences of the crime, and for negating the need to deal with his/her offending behavior.

"The opposite of punishment is not forgiveness, for the opposite of forgiveness is resentment and ill-will. To forgive is to refuse to nurse resentment, or to try to refuse to nurse resentment: it means that one no longer says to the person 'you have done me an injury which I shall always remember and hold it against you.'...Forgiveness is a moral sentiment where ill-will is no longer retained. It may occur before or after punishment, but does not affect it." Bean (1981, p9)

A misunderstanding of forgiveness in the past has led in some cases to perpetrators being allowed to continue their pattern of abuse as they were not brought to account for their crimes nor required to address the causes of the offending behavior. The offender needs to accept and work with significant therapist help and to be able to demonstrate tangibly he/she no longer poses a risk of re-offending.

If you are unsure about reporting a disclosure or an incident, it is best that you contact either the Senior Pastor or the Pastoral Support Coordinator to discuss the matter and proceed from there.

6.6 How do I report?

To report you will need to have accurate/factual information on the child and perpetrator provided to the agency. Legislation also requires that appropriate confidential records will need to be kept in a secure place by the person or organization making the report.

You can make a ROSH (Risk of Significant Harm) report by phoning the Child Protection Helpline of the Family and Community Services. Workers in the NSW government and non-government human services and justice sector can login to HSNet (Human Resources Network) website to lodge the report. Submitting a ROSH report indicates that your concern:

- is not minor or trivial,
- has a real, obvious and negative impact on the child or young person's safety,
- is based on one incident or an accumulation of incidents, and
- is serious enough to require Community Services involvement, regardless of a family's concern.

Our recommendation for TGC members is that they engage the assistance of either the Senior Pastor or the Pastoral Support Coordinator. Both are experienced counsellors and can handle the matter on a member's behalf. It may be that they will have to seek expert external advice before lodging reports with the appropriate agencies (possibly, even the police).

7. NEED SUPPORT?

Each person has a unique response to receiving a disclosure or witnessing abuse. There may be some common reactions such as:

- shock,
- disbelief
- anger
- sympathy for the victim
- frustration
- seek justice

As a responsible team member or leader it can be very distressing to find yourself in this situation. If you are in such a situation, it is recommended that you talk to other church leaders and/or counsellors regarding your thoughts/feelings about what has been disclosed, or what you have witnessed. You do not need to give details of the abuse, simply your response to it, and how you managing your role in supporting the child.

Some people may also have severe reactions that may in some cases have an invasive impact on their ability to function effectively within their ministry and life roles (including eating and sleeping disturbances). If this occurs talk to the Senior Pastor or the Pastoral Support Coordinator about the matter as you may need additional counselling support.

8. IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Making ROSH (Risk Of Significant Harm) report

Phone Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 (TTY 1800 212 936)

For the cost of a local call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Grainery Church Pastoral Support Team

Senior Pastor, Sue Irwin, mobile number: 0412 561 825

Pastoral Support Coordinator, Christine Oberg, mobile number: 0447 047 671

Executive Pastor, Paul West, mobile number: 0402 309 096

Chairman of the Board, Graeme Irwin, mobile number: 0423 692 079

9. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Significant material in this policy is taken from Victory Life Centre, Safe Church Leaders and Team Members Training – Parts 1 and 2

Material has also been sourced from the publication, Staying Current in Child Protection, Participant Notes by Centre for Community Welfare Training and <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/home>