

*St Joseph's Parish, Northcote*



## ***Child Safety Policy***

*4 June 2018*



*Date of policy: 11 July 2018  
Date of last major review: 4 June 2018  
Date of next major review: 4 June 2019*

## 1. Introduction

At St Joseph's Parish, Northcote, we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our Parish. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel (Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, [Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

The Church's social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. 'In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights' (Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, 26). Indeed it was Jesus who, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, '*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me*' (Mark 9.37).

## 2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of St Joseph's Parish, Northcote, to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children in our Parish. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our Parish environment, on site, online, and in other locations used by the Parish.

This Policy applies to all Parish personnel, including Parish employees, volunteers, contractors, and clergy.

## 3. Principles

The Catholic Church has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe (Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, [Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety at St Joseph's Parish, Northcote:**

- Our Parish has zero tolerance of child abuse.
- All children are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our Parish works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.
- All adults in our Parish, including staff, clergy, volunteers, Parishioners, contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of children are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.

- Staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, Parishioners including children and contractors should be free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the Parish leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

#### 4. Definitions

**Child:** A person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

**Child abuse** includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
  - (i) a sexual offence
  - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) (grooming)
- (b) the infliction on a child of:
  - (i) physical violence
  - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child.

**Child safety** encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

**Child neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours including shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also included in this definition of “Child physical abuse”.

**Child protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm.

**Child sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person two or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them; the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion

- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year old and an 11-year old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not intended to be included in this definition of “Child sexual abuse”.

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical practitioners.

**Reasonable Belief:** When an adult is concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a ‘reasonable belief’. A ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

**Staff:** For the purposes of this policy, “staff” includes all Parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

## 5. Policy Commitments

All children at St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

### **Our commitment to our children**

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our Parish.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe Parish environment.

### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.

- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety practices, policies, and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our Parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on child safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

**Our commitment to our Parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy (called “staff” for the purposes of this policy):**

- (a) We commit to providing all St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- (b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people’s protection and wellbeing. This will include regular and appropriate learning in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, Parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, staff to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

## **6. Responsibilities and Organisation Arrangements**

Everyone employed or volunteering at St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make (Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, [Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

The Parish has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows.

### **6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Leadership**

The Parish Priest and the Parish Well-Being Committee at St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of, and shared responsibility for child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration

- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that Parish personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the Parish meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards (State Government of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, [Child Safe Standards](#)).

## 6.2 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Staff

Responsibilities of Parish staff include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative (including mandatory reporting obligations where appropriate) and Archdiocesan processes if, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the Parish's *Child Safety Code of Conduct*.

## 6.3 Organisational Arrangements

The Parish has appointed a Child Safety Officer and established a Child Safety Team, which comprises the Parish Priest, Child Safety Officer, Parish Pastoral Worker, and community representatives. Responsibilities of the Child Safety Team (including the Child Safety Officer) include:

- overseeing the implementation of the Victorian Child Safe Standards within the Parish
- preparing the Parish *Child Safety Policy* and *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and reviewing these documents and related procedures on a regular basis
- delivering training and education in child safety matters to staff and parishioners

Responsibilities of the Child Safety Officer in particular include:

- attending Parish Well-Being Committee meetings, where a discussion of child safety matters will be a standing item on the agenda for each meeting

## 7. Expectations of our Parish Staff – Child Safety Code of Conduct

At St Joseph's Parish, Northcote, we expect Parish staff to proactively ensure the safety of children at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child in the Parish environment. All staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and comply with all requirements. We have developed a *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, which recognises the critical role that staff play in protecting the children in our care and establishes clear

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expectations of staff for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our *Child Safety Code of Conduct* also protects Parish personnel through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## **8. Child Safety and Participation**

At St Joseph's Parish, Northcote, we actively encourage all children to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We provide resources to families, and discuss with our children who they can talk to if anything worries them or they feel unsafe. We listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents or carers, raise with us.

## **9. Reporting and Responding**

Our Parish records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our Parish complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and the recommendations of the Family and Community Development Committee Betrayal of Trust report (Victoria State Government Justice and Regulation, Betrayal of Trust implementation).

Our Parish adheres to the reporting policy described in paragraphs 94 to 115 of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, "May our children flourish", which sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child in our Parish environment is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report. A summary of the reporting policy and procedure is given in Appendix A of this Policy.

We work to ensure all children, families and staff know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

Our Parish has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child, as described below and in Appendix A.

The Parish Priest is primarily responsible for receiving and responding to reports and for making decisions regarding any action that will be subsequently taken, with the advice and support of the Child Safety Officer and Child Safety Team. The Child Safety Officer may assume some or all of these responsibilities in instances where the Parish Priest is not available or the person making the report is not comfortable talking to the Parish Priest.

All reports made to the Parish should be directed to the Parish Priest, except as described in Section 15 and Appendix A. In the absence of the Parish Priest, reports may be made directly to the Parish office (in person or on (03) 9489 8008). The Parish Secretary will record any relevant details, which will then be passed on to the Parish Priest or Child Safety Officer for any further action. As part of the process of responding to the report, the Parish Priest, Parish Secretary, or Child Safety Officer will contact the person who has made the report within five business days and may seek further details regarding their concerns. Where appropriate, the Parish Priest, Parish Secretary, or Child Safety Officer will also endeavour to keep the person who has made the report informed of the progress and outcomes of the process. The details of the report, any action required, and the dates and details of all communications and action taken will be documented and kept on record in the Parish office.

The action taken by the Parish in response to a report will depend on the nature of the issue or concerns raised. All allegations of criminal conduct will be reported to Victoria Police (unless this has already been done), the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, and any other relevant authorities. Other serious matters may also be reported to the authorities and the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, as appropriate. Where there is a reasonable belief that a child is being harmed or abused, or is at risk of being harmed or abused, immediate action will be taken to protect the child and reduce or remove that risk. Reports regarding specific incidents or risks will also be investigated with the aim of establishing and implementing strategies to reduce or eliminate similar risks in the future. If an employee is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, disciplinary action may be taken.

Our complaints and disclosure processes are outlined and detailed in the following policies and procedures:

- Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, “May our children flourish”
- Summary of Reporting Policy and Procedure, in Appendix A of this Policy.

Our procedures for responding to general concerns or suggestions for improving the safety and participation of children in the Parish, and for managing potential risks to child safety, are outlined in Section 12.

## **10. Screening and Recruitment of Parish Staff**

St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the Parish *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and *Child Safety Policy*.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make all reasonable efforts to:

- confirm the applicant’s Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- verify the applicant’s history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant’s suitability for the job and working with children.

We have processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of Parish staff to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks.

## **11. Child Safety – Education and Training for Parish Staff**

St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, provides employees, volunteers, and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

All new employees and volunteers are provided with copies of the Parish *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and *Child Safety Policy*, and are required to attend an induction training session to understand their obligations and responsibilities regarding child safety matters. Registers of attendance at these training sessions will be kept on record in the Parish office. Regular



learning opportunities will also be provided through additional training sessions, updates in the Parish bulletin or at weekend Masses, and notices in the church foyer, as appropriate.

## 12. Risk Management

At St Joseph's Parish, Northcote, we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to child safety across our whole Parish environment (physical and online), and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

Our Parish has appointed a Child Safety Officer and established a Child Safety Team, who are responsible for overseeing the identification and management of risks to child safety. Organisers of all Parish activities and events are required to complete a child safety risk assessment prior to the event, which will be reviewed by a member of the Child Safety Team and kept on record in the Parish office. An annual assessment of ongoing risks to child safety will be conducted by the Child Safety Team in conjunction with the Parish Well-Being Committee, and a discussion of child safety matters is a standing item on the agenda for each Well-Being Committee meeting. Two child safety representatives have been assigned to each weekend Mass time, and parishioners are encouraged to raise any concerns regarding risks to child safety with these representatives or with a member of the Parish Child Safety Team or Well-Being Committee. All general concerns or suggestions for improving the safety and participation of children in the Parish will be referred to the Child Safety Team and Well-Being Committee for review and implementation.

## 13. Relevant Legislation

*Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act.

- (a) **Failure to disclose offence:** Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
- (b) **Failure to protect offence:** The offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk, but negligently fail to reduce or remove it.
- (c) **Grooming offence:** This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

## 14. Related Policies

### 14.1 Catholic Archdiocese Melbourne Policies

- Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, "May our children flourish", August 2016
- Working with Children Protocol, 9 October 2015
- National Police Record Check Policy, 9 October 2015
- Social Media Policy, 13 April 2015

## 14.2 Parish Policies

- Child Safety Code of Conduct, 2018
- Privacy Policy, 2004

## 15. Breach of Policy

Where an **employee** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, this may result in disciplinary consequences.

Where the **Parish Priest** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the Vicar General. If there is any reasonable belief that a criminal act has been committed, the concerned party is advised to contact Victoria Police.

Where any **other member of the Parish community** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the Parish Priest is to take appropriate action as outlined in this Policy and the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, “May our children flourish” or contact the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct and Ethics).

## 16. Review of this Child Safety Policy

At St Joseph’s Parish, Northcote, we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

We will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

### History of Updates to Policy

Date	Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)	Person responsible
4 June 2018	Initial release	Fr Minh Tran
11 July 2018	Image on front cover updated	Fr Minh Tran

## 17. Inclusion of All

We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

## 18. References

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, “May our children flourish”, August 2016.

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Commitment Statement to Child Safety, November 2016.

Family and Community Development Committee, Betrayal of Trust, “Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other non government organisations”, November 2013.

State Government of Victoria, Department of Justice and Regulation, Betrayal of Trust implementation, <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/betrayal+of+trust+implementation>, 30 November 2017.

State Government of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, Child Safe Standards, <http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards>, 2017.

## **19. Other Helpful Resources**

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, “Child Safe Standards”, <http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Child-Safe-Standards>

Commission for Children and Young People, <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/>

## Appendix A – Summary of Reporting Policy and Procedure

### What should you report?

Any breaches of the Parish *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, matters that cause you concern, or incidents that occur during an activity that you are responsible for should be reported.

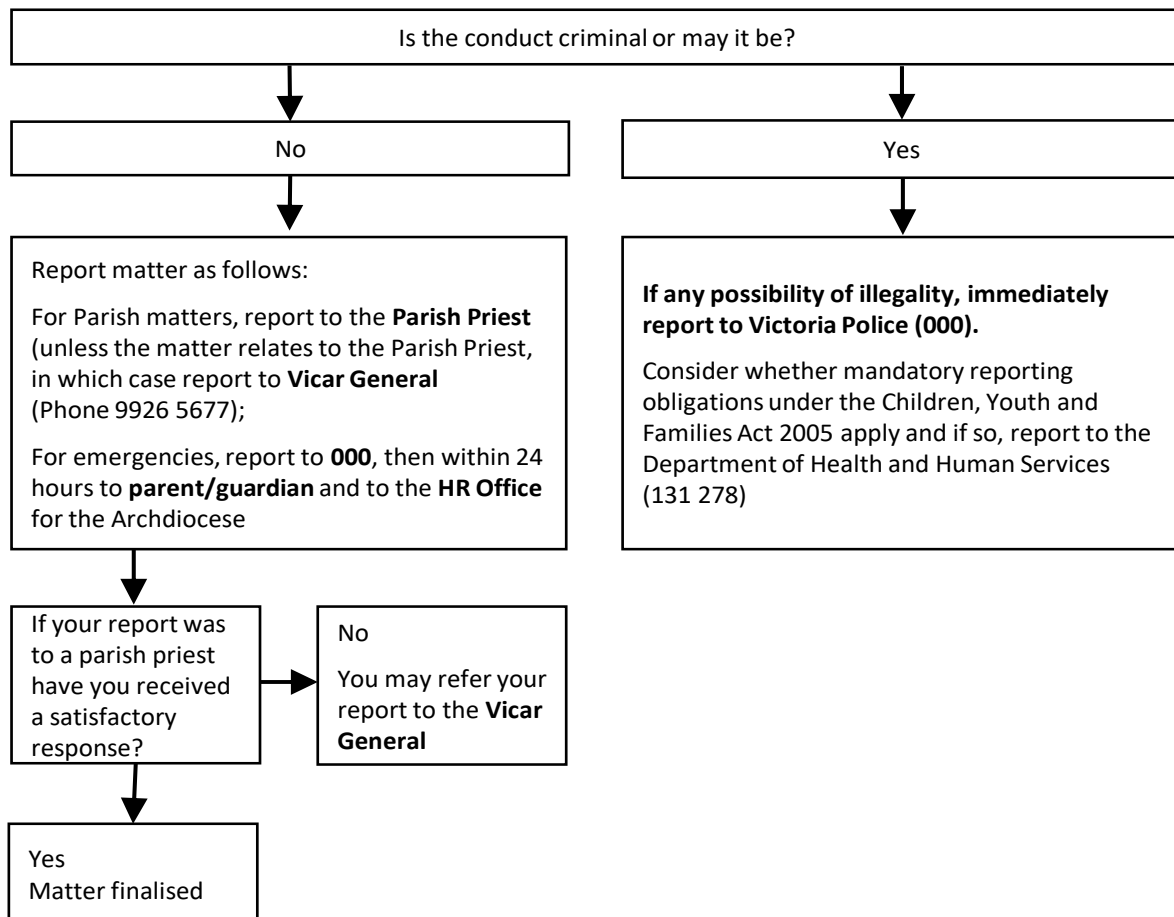
### Who may make a report?

Any person who has witnessed an event or incident or otherwise formed a reasonable belief that a child is being harmed or abused (or is at risk of being harmed or abused) can make a report. The report does not need to be made by the child involved.

### How can a report be made?

The procedure for making a report is shown by the steps in the flow chart below.

In the absence of the Parish Priest, reports regarding Parish matters may be directed to the Parish office (in person or on (03) 9489 8008), where the Parish Secretary will record any relevant details for further action or follow-up by the Parish Priest or Child Safety Officer.



## **What happens when a report is made?**

When you make a report, the person receiving the report will:

- Listen carefully and ensure they understand your report.
- Record the details of your report, as necessary and appropriate. This may be done using a confidential incident reporting form. The details of your report will be kept on record in the Parish office.
- Decide if it is appropriate or necessary to inform the relevant authorities or others within the Parish or Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. Confidentiality of all parties will be maintained at all times to the extent that this is possible.
- Determine what action will be taken (if any).
- Document all action taken and any initial or follow-up communications. This information will be kept on record together with the report in the Parish office.

Where appropriate, the Parish Priest, Parish Secretary, or Child Safety Officer will endeavour to keep you informed of the progress of your report and any actions or outcomes. You may expect to receive an initial response to your report within five business days.