Mary, Help of Christians Parish Altona

Parish House

97 Railway Street
Altona 3018

Phone: 9398 2964
Fax: 9315 0577
Email: altona@cam.org.au
Web site:
www.stmaryparish.org.au

Mary Help of Christians Parish Altona

Child Safety Policy

July 2017

Date of policy: 1st January 2017
Date of last major review: 18th July 2017
Date of next major review: May 2018

1. Introduction

At Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 (CAM 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 Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 (CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety at Mary Help of Christians, Altona:

- 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*** (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.

5. Policy Commitments

All children at Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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

(a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our parish.

(b) We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.

(c) 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.

(d) We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.

(e) We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.

(f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe parish environment.

Our commitment to parents and carers

(a) 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 Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 annual training 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 Mary Help of Christians, Altona parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.

(d) We commit to providing opportunities for *St. Mary's* 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 Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 (CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The parish has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety to the **Child Safety Coordinator, Gavin Deller.**

6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Leadership

The parish priest and the parish pastoral council team at Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 and clergy
- 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.

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

Mary Help of Christians, Altona has appointed a Child Safety Team which is led by a **Child Safety Co-ordinator, Gavin Deller.**

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

At *St. Mary's* community, 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 http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/0/2015/documents/150095 Code-of-Conduct.pdf which recognises the critical role that staff play in protecting the children in our care and establishes clear expectations of staff for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect. Our Code also protects parish personnel through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

8. Child Safety and Participation

At *Mary Help of Christians, Altona* 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 discuss with our children what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns children or their parents or carers, raise with us.

For all ceremonies and events involving children, our designated volunteer coordinators will ensure the relevant protocols and procedures as per parish pastoral council guidelines are adhered to. This includes:

Altar Servers

The children arrive at the church with their parent/s and dress in their appropriate robes in a separate, private area with their parent/s caregiver. During Altar Server training, a school teacher is always present who will discuss with the children what makes them feel safe and who they could talk to if they are ever feeling unsafe.

Children's Liturgy of the Word

Children's liturgy – each week two rostered volunteers have responsibility for this at the 10.30am Mass. Children are called forward during the Mass to participate in the children's liturgy, which is held in the Church Narthex. They are escorted back to the church in time for Communion. If it is necessary for a child to go to the toilet, the toilet is located in the Narthex and is in full view of the volunteers leading the group.

Christmas Nativity Play

The annual Christmas Nativity Play is co-ordinated by the 'Children's Liturgy Team. The children arrive at the church escorted by their parent/s for the rehearsals and again at the Nativity Mass and are collected by their parent/s. Parents usually reman in the Church during rehearsals.

Parish Annual Barbecue

The Parish barbecue is held each year in the parish grounds and is co-ordinated by members of the parish staff. Children attend with their parent/s.

Sacraments – Non-school candidates

Children who attend schools other than Mary Help of Christians, Altona School are prepared for the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation under the supervision of two volunteer Catechists. Parents are welcome to remain for the duration of the session.

All candidates

The family attend with their candidate and at all times are under the direct visible supervision of the parent/s.

Youth Group – There are always two or more adult leaders, male and female present at the Youth Group's gathering. There is also a sign in sheet for the youth to register their names upon attendance.

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 *Betrayal of Trust* report.

The Child Safety Coordinator will be confirmed annually at the first meeting of the parish pastoral council. Any concerns or complaints made by staff, parents or children in relation to child safety should be reported to the child safety Coordinator.

After which, if the conduct is not criminal the matter is to be reported as follows:

(a) For parish matters report to the parish priest (unless matter relates to parish priest, n which case, report to the Vicar general),
(b) For agency matters, report to agency head; HR Office for Archdiocese.
(c) Any emergencies, report to 000 then within 24 hours to parent/guardian and to HR Office for the Archdiocese.

If there is any possibility of illegality, consider whether mandatory report obligations apply in this case, and if so immediately report to Victoria Police.

10. Screening and Recruitment of Parish Staff

Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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 the 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

Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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.

The child Safety Coordinator will ensure this Child Safe Policy is presented to each parish group for review at their first gathering of the year. Particular focus will be on any new employees or volunteers.

12. Risk Management

At Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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.

We have appointed a Child Safety Coordinator who has been ratified by Archpriest Michael Kalka.

The Parish Pastoral Council will provide child safety advice to each of the parish volunteer groups at a meeting to be held at which all relevant protocols and procedures are reviewed and validated.

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.

14.1 Catholic Archdiocese Melbourne Policies

- Working with Children Check Protocols
- National Police Record Check Policy
- Code of Conduct for Caring for Children "May our children flourish"
- Social medial policy

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 Mary Help of Christians, Altona Child Safety Policy and / or contact Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct and Ethics).

16. Review of this Child Safety Policy

At Mary Help of Christians, Altona 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)
1st January 2017	Introduction of policy draft
18th July 2017	Ratification of Child Safe Policy
May 2018	Ratification of Policy, Procedures and Protocols

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 Education Melbourne Child Safety Policy Editable Template – June 2016

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety* – September 2016

State of Victoria 2016, *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2

Victorian Government Department of Justice 2016, *Betrayal of Trust Implementation.*