



# ***Safety Policy for Children and All Vulnerable People***

*Date of policy: January , 2017*

*Date of last major review: July 2017*

*Date of next major review: July 2018*

## 1. Introduction

At St Anne & St Bede's Parish we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children, young people and all vulnerable 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 St Anne & St Bede's Parish to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children and all vulnerable people in our parish. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children and all vulnerable people 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, young people and all vulnerable people are respected, given confidence so that their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe ([CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to the safety of children and all vulnerable people at St Anne & St Bede's Parish:**

- Our parish has zero tolerance of abuse of children and all vulnerable people.
- All children and all vulnerable people 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 the safety and protection of children and all vulnerable people.
- All adults in our parish, including staff, clergy, volunteers, parishioners, contractors, have a responsibility to care for children, young people, and all vulnerable 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 and all vulnerable people are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children, young people and all vulnerable 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 the safety of children and all vulnerable people, 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.

**Vulnerable Person:** an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability or any other reason.

**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. Whilst it is not mandatory to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect of all vulnerable people, it is encouraged if you reasonably suspect it is the case.

**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. This also applies to all vulnerable people.

## 5. Policy Commitments

Everyone at St Anne & St Bede Parish has the right to feel safe and be safe especially children and all vulnerable people. The wellbeing of children and all vulnerable people in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate abuse of children and any vulnerable person. We aim to create a safe and friendly environment where children and all vulnerable people 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 and all vulnerable people**

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children, young people and all vulnerable people in our parish.
- (b) We commit to providing children, young people and all vulnerable people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to children, young people and all vulnerable people and respecting 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, young people and all vulnerable people are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to helping children, young people and all vulnerable people to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from children, young people and all vulnerable people 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 or all vulnerable people in their care.
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our Safety practices, policies and procedures for children and all vulnerable people.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children, young people or all vulnerable people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on safety issues for children and all vulnerable people.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children and all vulnerable people 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 staff at St Anne & St Bede’s Parish 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 the safety of children, young people and all vulnerable people’s protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of Safety Policy for Children and all vulnerable people and the Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by St Anne & St Bede’s Parishioners and staff about keeping children, young people and all vulnerable people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for staff at St Anne & St Bede’s Parish to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child, young person or all vulnerable person.

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

Everyone employed or volunteering at St Anne & St Bede's Parish has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role each plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and all vulnerable people 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 and all vulnerable people safety as follows:

### **6.1 Responsibilities of Parish Leadership**

The Parish Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council at St Anne & St Bede Parish 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 the safety of children and all vulnerable people. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children, young people and all vulnerable 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, young people and all vulnerable 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 safety matters for children and all vulnerable people
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to the protection and well being of children, young people and all vulnerable people
- ensuring the parish meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and these requirements are applied to all vulnerable people.

### **6.2 Responsibilities of Parish Staff**

Responsibilities of parish staff include:

- treating children, young people and all vulnerable people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children, young people and all vulnerable 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, young person or all vulnerable person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children, young people and all vulnerable people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to safety and the wellbeing of children young people and all vulnerable people
- assisting children, young people and all vulnerable 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 Safety of Children and All Vulnerable people Code of Conduct.

### **6.3 Organisational Arrangements & Parish Policies**

St Anne and St Bede Parish have appointed a Parish Professional Standards Coordinator for the purpose of introducing an additional point of contact, besides the Parish Priest, should a Parishioner need to report a matter that concerns them or simply to understand any aspect of the policies and procedures as listed below:

- Child and All Vulnerable People Safety Policy
- Child and All Vulnerable People Safety Statement of Commitment
- Child and All Vulnerable People Safety Code of Conduct
- Parish Checklist for the safety of children and all vulnerable people
- Child and All Vulnerable People Reporting Process

## **7. Expectations of our Parish Staff –Safety of Children and All Vulnerable People Code of Conduct**

At St Anne & St Bede Parish, we expect parish staff to proactively ensure the safety of children and all vulnerable people at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child or all vulnerable person in the parish environment. All staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to the protection of children and all vulnerable people and comply with all requirements. We have developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct (*available on the Parish website*), which recognises the critical role that staff play in protecting the children and all vulnerable people in our care and establishes clear expectations of staff for appropriate behaviour with children and all vulnerable people in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our Code also protects parish personnel through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## **8. Safety and Participation of Children and All Vulnerable People**

At St Anne & St Bede Parish, we actively encourage all children and all vulnerable people to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We discuss the safety of our children and all vulnerable people with them, in particular, what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on their safety. We listen to and act on any concerns children and all vulnerable people or their parents or carers, raise with us.

## **9. Reporting and Responding**

Our parish records any safety complaints, or disclosures or breaches of the Safety Code of Conduct for children and All Vulnerable People 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. In addition, our parish believes these obligations also apply to all vulnerable people.

Our parish's **Reporting Policy** : **“If you see something that concerns you say something”**, sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child or all vulnerable person 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.

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.

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

St Anne & St Bede Parish will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work as well as any pastoral work involving vulnerable people. Our commitment to the safety of children and all vulnerable people 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 Safety Code of Conduct for Children and all Vulnerable People and the Safety Policy for Children and All Vulnerable People.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work as well as any pastoral work involving vulnerable people, 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 and all vulnerable people
- 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 and all vulnerable people, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks.

## **11. Safety of Children and All Vulnerable People – Education and Training for Parish Staff**

St Anne & St Bede Parish provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address safety matters in relation to children and all vulnerable people. 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 abuse and neglect of children or all vulnerable people.

## **12. Risk Management**

At St Anne & St Bede Parish we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to the safety of children and all vulnerable people 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 the safety of children and all vulnerable people and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.



## 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

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

### 14.2 Parish Policies

Refer 6.3 above.

## 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 or the Parish Professional Standards Coordinator. 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 *and / or* contact Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct and Ethics). If there is any reasonable belief that a criminal act has been committed, the concerned party is advised to contact Victoria Police.

## 16. Review of this Child Safety Policy

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)
February 2017	Major Review
April 2017	Minor review in light of Parish Pastoral Council feedback

## 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.*