

## **West Preston Baptist Church**

### **SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

We at WPBC affirm that all people have the right to be safe – physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to be respected and have their views and opinions valued.

This policy outlines the strong commitment of West Preston Baptist Church (WPBC) to upholding that right for all attendees, particularly children and vulnerable adults, regardless of age, gender, race, culture, ability and family/social background. It details the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone within our church safe, and therefore **applies across all areas of our church life, not just in those areas related to children.**

#### **SAFE CHURCH STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT:**

**We at West Preston Baptist Church commit to:**

- ✓ taking all necessary steps to keep all those within our church safe through adhering to the procedures outlined in this and related policies.
- ✓ **Child safety:** All children who come to WPBC have a right to feel safe and be safe. We have zero tolerance for child abuse. We provide a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and are respected and valued. We adhere to the Victoria Child Safe Standards.
- ✓ **Understanding and valuing diversity:** We will be mindful to ensure all program are inclusive. We will actively consider the needs of all people participating in church programs including cultural background, disabilities or gender/sexual orientation.

#### **SCOPE OF POLICY:**

The Safe Church Policy applies to all paid staff and all volunteer leaders and helpers associated with any of the ministries in our church. Where relevant, it also applies to church attendees.

*There are several other policies that help keep us safe. They are:*

- Police and working with children checks policy
- Workplace safety policy
- Misconduct and conflict management policy

## DEFINITIONS:

- **a safe environment** occurs when steps are taken to keep all those in our care safe, including ensuring their physical safety, and is free from physical, spiritual, sexual, emotional abuse (including bullying) or neglect.
- **a safe leader** – one who has been through an appropriate recruitment and screening process, understands their responsibilities, is properly trained and supervised, and has clear expectations of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. The processes for this are outlined in this policy.
- **a safe program** has had an appropriate risk assessment and has permission to proceed from the Leadership team. This is detailed in the *Workplace Safety Policy*
- **a safe facility** is adequate for its purposes, well-maintained and not likely to lead to danger or harm. This is detailed in the *Workplace Safety Policy*
- **a child** is a person who is under the age of 18 years (unless otherwise stated under legislation)
- **the Child safe standards** are Victorian legislated compulsory standards for all organisations that provide services for children. There are 11 standards in the new Child Safe Standards, which came into force in Victoria on 1 July 2022.
- **Cultural safety** – refers to the positive recognition and celebrations of cultures, not merely the absence of racism or discrimination. A culturally safe environment does not ignore, challenge or deny cultural identity, and provides information in a culturally sensitive, relevant and accessible manner, including in relevant languages where possible.
- **child abuse:** means all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse or exploitation, and neglect, and includes any actions that result in actual or potential harm to a child.
- **Vulnerable adult** is 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, disability or any other reason.

## OVERVIEW & FRAMEWORK

The Victorian Government has mandated that organizations working with children adhere to a series of standards to promote child safety, prevent child abuse and properly respond to allegations. They are known as the Child Safe Standards and these Standards were updated and expanded in 2022.



*Safe Church policy Appendix 1 outlines the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards in detail.*

*Safe Church policy Appendix 2 outlines how the Standards are implemented across our policies and procedures.*

There are 6 crucial areas for establishing and maintaining a safe church.

## 1) Child safety is embedded in our culture and our practices.

Creating a culture of child safety is vital to lowering the risk of harm to children and other vulnerable people. There is a high expectation that everyone at West Preston Baptist Church is committed to child safety, led and facilitated by the church minister and leadership team.

- a. We have made the following **commitments to child safety**, and proudly display this information: [ALL CHILDREN WHO COME TO WPBC HAVE A RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE AND BE SAFE. WE HAVE ZERO TOLERANCE OF CHILD ABUSE. WE PROVIDE A CHILD SAFE AND CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT WHERE CHILDREN FEEL SAFE, AND ARE RESPECTED AND VALUED. WE ADHERE TO THE VICTORIA CHILD SAFE STANDARDS.](#)
- b. Safe church matters including child safety are a fixed agenda item for every Deacons' business meeting and for every congregational meeting.
- c. Child safe policies and procedures are reviewed every year. Our families and church community are invited to be involved in these reviews.

## 2) We undertake safe recruiting and screening practices.

We undertake safe recruiting practices when appointing ministry leaders and volunteers, whether paid or unpaid. We will assess all prospective volunteers in all our ministries before they are appointed.

This will involve some of the following elements depending on the role:

- a. clearly identifying the role and expectations of the position, with a [written position description that also promotes child safety \(see part 3 and appendix\)](#). All external job descriptions also promote child safety and outline requirements for Working with Children checks and screening expectations.
- b. following a [minimum attendance requirement](#) – namely that a prospective volunteer will have been attending regularly WPBC for at least 6 months (there may be situations where an exemption may be made by the diaconate after careful consideration).
- c. interviewing the applicant to explore whether they are suited for the role, including discussing the [position description](#) and [Code of Conduct \(see part 3\)](#),
- d. undertaking Safe Ministry screening using the [Screening Questionnaire for Safe Ministry \(attached\)](#). This checklist for Safe Ministry is required for the following roles.
  - Minister and paid employees
  - All deacons
  - Sunday services: preaching team, worship leaders, music co-ordinator
  - Children's Ministry leaders & helpers
  - Pastoral carers
  - Prayer – prayer coordinator, Sunday morning prayer team (but not SMS pray-ers)
  - Small group leaders, Alpha group leaders
  - Our safe church concerns person/s
  - any other co-ordinator/leader role

This form addresses important pastoral, legal and insurance questions. After completion, the checklist will be given to the Ministry Coordinator or Minister and may be seen by the deacons and Compliance Team. It will be kept securely in accordance with the [Record Keeping Policy](#).

- e. ensuring that the relevant legislative requirements ([Working with Children Check and National Police Checks](#)) are undertaken – *see [Police and Working with Children Check policy](#)*.

**A police check is required for all senior leaders prior to commencing in their role and periodically thereafter.** At WPBC, the following roles require a Police Check

- Minister
- Treasurer (renewed annually)
- All deacons
- Worship coordinator
- Pastoral Care coordinator
- Children’s ministry coordinator
- Any other ministry coordinator, if new initiatives arise,
- Safe church concerns person/s
- Anyone regularly handling church money – currently this is the Hall Hire coordinator and those who count the offering.

**A valid Working with Children check is required for all adults who have regular, direct and unsupervised contact with children.** At WPBC, people in the following roles must have a WWC:

- Minister
- All deacons
- Children’s ministry coordinator
- Children’s ministry leaders (plans the program)
- Children’s ministry helpers (support the program on the day)
- Sunday morning prayer team & prayer coordinator
- Worship coordinator
- Pastoral care team
- Safe church concerns person/s

- f. undertaking [referee check/s](#) for some roles, as per their position description. An exception may be made if the individual has been attending regularly for more than 12 months.

### 3) Roles and responsibilities are defined, and we provide adequate training and ongoing supervision.

- i. We have a [written position description](#) (*see attachments*) that clearly identifies the role and expectations of the position, and also promotes child safety for the following positions:
- Minister (updated annually),
  - Deacons,
  - Church Secretary,
  - Treasurer,
  - Worship coordinator
  - Children’s Ministry Coordinator, children’s ministry team & children’s ministry helpers,
  - Pastoral Care coordinator, & pastoral care team,
  - Prayer Coordinator and SMS prayer team
  - Safe Church Concerns person,
  - Hall Hire coordinator,
  - Duty of Care Officer.
  - Compliance Team
  - Small Group Leaders

- ii. Ministry leaders will undertake a **ministry review** annually with involvement of our Minister and the deacons as appropriate, for example by providing a one page report.
- iii. **Safe Church workshops** We require that the following church leaders, attend a safe church training workshop within their first year of ministry and attend a refresher workshop every 4 years:
  - Minister and any other paid workers
  - All deacons
  - Children’s Ministry coordinator
  - Children’s program leaders – *but not helpers in the children’s program who have no direct teaching role.*
  - Safe church concerns person/s
  - Small group leaders
  - Pastoral care coordinator and all pastoral carers

This training covers the following areas:

- ✓ implementing the child safety and wellbeing policy
  - ✓ building culturally safe environments for children and young people
  - ✓ recognising indicators of harm (including that caused by other children and young people), and
  - ✓ responding effectively to child safety issues and concerns and supporting colleagues who disclose harm.
- iv. The children’s ministry team will **discuss the indicators of the various types of child abuse**, review the warning signs each year, and how to appropriately respond according to our procedures. The Safe Church Concerns person has additional resources to assist with education regarding identifying children at risk.
  - v. We provide cultural training to our church leaders – for example training provided by The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC).
  - vi. We may require all leaders to attend additional ministry-specific training as needed and will support them to do so.

## 4) We have clear expectations of appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.

We have a written **CODE OF CONDUCT** that outlines expected behaviours and responsibilities.

The following roles are required to commit to and sign our **Code of Conduct** every year. (*attached*).

- Minister and paid employees
- All deacons
- Sunday services: worship coordinator, preaching team, worship leaders, music co-ordinator, musicians
- Children's Ministry coordinator, leaders & helpers
- Pastoral care coordinator, all Pastoral carers
- Prayer – coordinator, prayer team and SMS pray-ers
- Small group leaders, Alpha group leaders
- Our safe church concerns person/s
- Duty of care officer
- Hall hire coordinator,
- IT administrator
- any other co-ordinator/leader role s

When this Code is breached, it will be managed according to the *Misconduct and Conflict Management policy*. Any allegations of child abuse or risk of harm will be responded to immediately, and in accordance with our *Responding to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm procedure document (appendix 3)*.

**For those involved in Children's Ministry programs, additional expectations apply. These are outlined in the Children's Ministry Guidelines.**

## 5) We have strategies to identify and reduce the risk of harm.

We undertake a **risk management approach** to minimise the potential for child abuse or harm to occur. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse of our children.

Full details of our risk management and OH&S issues are found in the *Workplace Safety policy* and the key elements are outlined below:

- i. Our leaders and Ministry team will serve and lead in spiritually non-abusive ways.
- ii. We will afford participants a say in the programs and the activities by valuing their ideas and intentionally encouraging involvement in decision making.
- iii. At the start of each year, the Deacons will document the approved church programs and ministry areas (**annual approval for ministry**). New initiatives are brought to the deacons for approval before commencing.
- iv. Each year we conduct a **risk assessment** for each of the church's programs and ministry areas. These focus on preventing, identifying, and mitigating risks, particularly to children and young people and considers physical and online environments.
- v. We will obtain appropriate information relating to program participants to ensure that we are able to care for their physical and emotional needs. This might involve completing an enrolment for children's ministry programs, or gathering relevant contact or health information where relevant when attending church camp. All information collected will be handled in accordance with our *Privacy Policy*.

## 6) We will respond to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm immediately and in accordance with our legislative responsibilities.

We will respond to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm immediately and in accordance with our moral and legislative responsibilities. The process is described in the *Responding to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm procedure document (appendix 3)*.

We appoint one or more **Safe Church Concerns person(s)** to manage all reports, concerns and queries about abuse of a child or other vulnerable person, in the church or its participants. We will also adhere to our responsibilities under **REPORTABLE CONDUCT LEGISLATION** for all allegations of child abuse made against employees or volunteers engaged in church activities.

The role of the Safe Church concerns person is to:

- a) receive all complaints, concerns and queries about abuse & misconduct.
- b) assist in the process of reporting abuse to the relevant authorities, through the pathway outlined in the [Responding to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm](#) procedure document ([appendix 3](#)). This may include making a report to Victoria Police, the Child Protection Unit, or the BUV Professional Standards worker.
- c) support the person who is making the report,
- d) keep confidential records on any such matters, and
- e) educate themselves as to the potential signs and indicators of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect and being a witness of domestic violence, in order to act as a resource for others.

The Safe Church Concerns Person is not responsible for the implementation of all safe ministry procedures, nor for conducting risk assessments but rather the person who responds to concerns of abuse and misconduct.

A summary of our safe-church requirements by ministry role is shown below:

	written position description (review every 2 years)	interview prior to appointment	Screening questionnaire - on commencement of role	Code of Conduct (signed annually - by end Feb.)	working with children check (checked every 6 months)	police check (review every 3 years)	Safe Church training workshop (review every 4 years)
<b>Minister / paid ministry workers</b>	review annually						
<b>Deacon - Secretary</b>							
deacon - Treasurer						review annually	
deacon							
<b>Worship coordinator</b>							
Music coordinator							
Preaching team							
worship leader							
musician							
<b>Children's ministry coordinator</b>							
Children's ministry leader							
Children's ministry helper							
<b>Pastoral Care coordinator</b>							
Pastoral carer							
<b>Small Group Leader</b>							
<b>Prayer coordinator</b>							
Prayer team (Sunday am)							
SMS pray-ers							
<b>Safe church concerns person</b>							
<b>Duty of Care officer</b>							
<b>Hall hire coordinator</b>							
IT administrator	to do						
<b>Money handlers</b>							

## **Appendices and attachments for Safe Church Policies and Procedures: *see separate files.***

- *Appendix 1* outlines the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards.
- *Appendix 2* outlines how the Standards are implemented across our policies and procedures.
- *Appendix 3* described the process for responding to allegations of child abuse or risk of harm
- Victoria Child Safe standards – plain language version, personalised for WPBC
- Code of Conduct – general, and for children’s programs
- Screening questionnaire for Safe Ministry
- Childrens’ Ministry Programs – Guidelines
- Position Descriptions for: (see ‘Position Descriptions’ folder)
  - Minister (updated annually),
  - Deacons,
  - Church Secretary,
  - Treasurer,
  - Worship coordinator
  - Children’s Ministry Coordinator,
  - children’s ministry leader
  - children’s ministry helpers,
  - Pastoral Care coordinator,
  - pastoral care team,
  - Prayer Coordinator,
  - SMS prayer team
  - Safe Church Concerns person,
  - Hall Hire coordinator,
  - Duty of Care Officer.
  - Compliance Team
  - Small Group Leader

## CONTROL SHEET

Document revision				
Review period:	12 months			
New review due:	July 2024			
Document Control				
Version	Description	Reviewed by	Position	Diaconate approval date
1	Development of policy	Elizabeth Williams and Cathy Arter	Deacons	27/6/15
	Adopted at congregational meeting			16/8/15
2	Combined with HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY	Elizabeth Williams	All deacons	15/5/2017
3.	Updated in light of Safe church workshop.	Elizabeth Williams	Secretary of Deacons	30/6/17.
4.	Incorporation of a Child Safe Statement of Commitment	Quarterly meeting		20/8/17
5.	Substantial revision to ensure compliance with Child Safe Standards and other legislative requirements, and separation of Workplace Safety Policy.	Minster and Church Deacons		6/8/18.
6.	Review, minor changes made	Paul Hicks	Deacon	3/3/19
7.	Minor changes based on suggestions by Apryl Huglin	Jonathan Mynard	Secretary of Deacons	5/1/21
8	Major rework with updated Child Safe Standards.	Compliance Team		14/8/2023