



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Reviewed and Updated June 2023

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT FROM THE PASTOR OF MVCM

As we continue to become aware of the changing legal requirements for people working with children in NSW, relevant changes and updates will be made to our policies.

There are changes over the past 12 months that have now become part of Manning Valley Covenant Ministries policies and procedures and are a requirement to be followed without exception. It is essential that each person knows and understands their personal responsibility and the legalities that are enforceable under acts of Parliament. Those working with children need to familiarise themselves with these policies to ensure that they uphold a high standard of compliance in this vital area. The safety and wellbeing of the children we care for is of highest importance and these policies represent our commitment to those children.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the children of our church and the ministries involved.

Blessings,
Pastor Glenn Hodson

1. INTRODUCTION

Policy Statement

The Manning Valley Covenant Ministries Inc. is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all its Members, Leaders and particularly to children.

The Church's Policy & Procedures aim to reduce the risk of Abuse occurring, and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur.

The Policy & Procedures apply to all Ministries authorised by or under the control of the Church, including those ministries undertaken at the Church's premises or away from the Church's premises.

Policy Review

The Policy & Procedures will be reviewed annually. Church decision makers will inform the ministries involved when the date of review will occur. All stake holders will be invited to assist with the review process and will be asked to submit any recommendations regarding policy change in writing. Proposed changes will be discussed at the annual Leadership and Training Seminar, and will be submitted to the Church Leadership for approval before being implemented.

Definitions

Child - Any person under the age of 18.

Abuse - Can consist of one or more of but is not restricted to the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect.

Church - The Manning Valley Covenant Ministries Inc., located at 6 Coolabah Drive Taree 2430

Leader - Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is the person recognised and authorised by the Church as head of a ministry. A leader could include but is not limited to: Pastors, Elders, Home group Leaders, Music, Drama or other Ministry Leaders, Counsellors, Youth Leaders and helpers, Sunday School Leaders and helpers, Teachers, Kid's Club Leaders, Scripture Teachers.

Helpers - Any unpaid person over the age of 16 who assists a leader in their Ministry.

Members - Any person, including children, who attends or participates in Church Ministries.

Ministry - Any organised activity that is authorised by the Church.

2. OBLIGATIONS

Spiritual

The core beliefs of the Church require us to treat all people with love and dignity and to care for those who are less powerful and in need of nurture and protection.

Legal

The Church and its Leaders are subject to Federal and State legislation and principles established through common law.

Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as Abuse but are unacceptable behavior for Church Leaders. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature.
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.
- Inappropriate, but accidental touching.
- Inappropriate literature or media (e.g. PG, M, MA, R or X rated material used with young Children).
- Acts of violence committed by a leader in the course of an activity.

The age of individuals is recognised as one of the determinants in deciding what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Ministry Leaders will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

3. SELECTION & SCREENING

Leaders and helpers involved in Children's Ministry must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to Leaders or helpers commencing Child-related Ministries, the following precautions will be taken:

- Volunteer Leaders and helpers will be Members of the Church and have regularly attended the Church for at least 6 months.
- All adult leaders and helpers in Children's Ministry must attend a weekly Home Group and be accountable to their Home Group leaders.
- Candidate Leaders and helpers must come with the recommendation of at least one current Elder of the church, and their Home Group Leader.
- A Working with Children Check verification which complies with the legislative requirements of New South Wales will be requested and received prior to the Leader or helper commencing their proposed role.
- The applicant will sign and agree to abide by the MVCM Code of Conduct.
- A Prohibited employment Declaration form will be completed by the applicant.
- In the instance that a Helper is under the age of 18, they do not require a Working with Children Check. They must be Members of the Church and have regularly attended the Church for at least 6 months. They must be participants in the MVCM Youth Group and be accountable to their Youth Leader.

Where the Church has identified that an applicant has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence they cannot, under any circumstances, be considered for child related ministries. (These offences do not preclude the applicant from serving in other Ministries and the church would welcome their contribution in more appropriate areas.)

4. TRAINING

All those working with children within ministries of MVCM will:

- Be issued with a copy of the Child Protection Policy and the Church's Code of Conduct

- Receive training in the content and application of these policies
- Receive training in reporting procedures and the associated legal requirements
- Be invited to attend the annual Leadership and Training Seminar for those working with children

5. A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Incidents of Abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, wherever practical, two Leaders will always be present when working with or supervising Children.
- Leaders will not visit Children in their homes unless a parent is present or another Leader accompanies them.
- When transporting Children, Leaders should never be alone with a child in a car. Where this is not practical, Leaders will take Children directly to and from arranged venues and will not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.
- All personal counselling is to be carried out within sight of another Leader.
- Leaders will respect a Member's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.
- Adults and Children are expected to respect each other's privacy during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No Leader will be alone in a room with a Child while either is changing.
- All aspects of every Child-related programme will be open to observation by parents/guardians.
- Leaders have the right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at Child-related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

6. DISCIPLINING CHILDREN

It is not the responsibility of the Church or its Leaders to discipline a Child. If a Child does not abide by the rules set down by the Leader, or is an obstruction to the care of other Children or may cause harm to other Children, the Child will be removed and referred back to their parent or guardian.

At no time will a Leader administer any form of physical, emotional or mental discipline.

7. REPORTABLE CONDUCT SCHEME

The Reportable Conduct Scheme monitors how organisations, including religious bodies, investigate and report on types of conduct that are reportable allegations or reportable convictions made against their employees or volunteers who provide services to children. An employee is considered any volunteer that holds, or is required by the religious body to hold, a Working With Children Check Clearance.

Click on the link below to view more details on the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

<https://ocq.nsw.gov.au/organisations/reportable-conduct-scheme>

Reportable conduct comes under these headings:

- **Sexual offence** – sexual touching of a child, grooming, or possession of child abuse material
- **Assault** – any act of violence (hitting, dragging, kicking, etc) or threatening to physically harm a child
- **Ill treatment of a child** – unreasonable AND seriously improper, inhumane or cruel conduct towards a child
- **Neglect** – failing to protect a child from harm or abuse or danger. Failing to provide appropriate food, medical aid or supervision, etc
- **Behaviours that cause emotional or psychological harm** to a child (Not transient harm but patterns of behaviour over time)

Failure to Protect Offence

An adult working in an organisation doing child-related work will commit an offence if they know another adult working there is at serious risk of abusing a child (under 18 years) and they fail to reduce or remove the risk through negligence.

(Section 43B of the Crimes Act 1900, NSW)

Failure to Report Offence

All adults in NSW are required to report information to police if they know, believe or reasonably ought to know that a child (under 18 years) has been abused.

(Section 316A of the Crimes Act 1900, NSW)

8. CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended 10 child safe standards. MVCMM takes these standards seriously and they have been embedded into our policies and Code of Conduct.

Click the link below to view these standards in detail.

<https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-scheme>

9. MVCMM CHILD SAFE CONTACT OFFICERS

There will be a minimum of 2 people appointed to this role at any time. Child safe contact officer's names and contact details will be made readily available to children and families within the church.

The role of child safe contact officers includes:

- Talking with children and young people about the fact that they have the right to feel safe, to be listened to, and have their views respected.
- Discussing with children what they should do and who they should approach if they feel unsafe or hurt, or if they suspect that someone else is unsafe or hurt.
- Give pastoral support to any child or family who raise concerns about child safety and welfare.
- Report any concerns or allegations to the MVCMM Child Safety Committee.

10. CHILD SAFE COMMITTEE

The Child Safety Committee is comprised of the following:

- The Senior Pastor of MVCMM
- A minimum of two Elders of MVCMM
- A minimum of two Child Safe Contact Officers
- A minimum of one other MVCMM congregation member

The role of the Child Safety Committee includes but is not limited to:

- The handling of any reports or allegations of breaches of child safety, or abuse, whether they occurred on the Church's premises or elsewhere, and whether they involve a perpetrator within or from outside of the Church.
- The handling of any disclosures made regarding a child within the Church.
- Following the process of reporting to appropriate government agencies.
- Following the process of internal report writing. Keeping detailed notes of all information and steps taken.
- Overseeing the pastoral care and restoration of any child who has suffered abuse or harm.
- Refer any alleged perpetrators within the Church to an appropriate pastoral support team.

11. DEALING WITH A DISCLOSURE

If a disclosure of abuse is made, the person who receives the disclosure will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure. This will include:

- Treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim.
- Not pushing the Child to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation.
- Assuring the Child that they are understood: that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault, and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- Immediately report the abuse to at least one member of the MVCM Child Safety Committee, who will assist in reporting the abuse to the police and the church's insurer.
- Not making contact with the alleged perpetrator.
- If the alleged assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the Child should be retained and handed to the police for forensic examination.
- Maintaining confidentiality.

Any disclosures by a Child and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.

The Church reserves the right to carry out Church disciplinary procedures in accordance with the constitution of the Church and its Code of Ethics.

Where an allegation is made against a member of the Church, the accused Leader will be removed from all Children's ministry pending the outcome of all investigations.

12. REPORTING PROCEDURES

To help keep children safe, we must create, maintain and improve our child safe reporting practices to ensure they remain effective. Everyone in our organisation must:

- know what to report, how to report it, and who to report it to
- report any concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or young person immediately
- feel confident that concerns and allegations will be dealt with honestly and fairly
- feel confident in reporting unacceptable behaviour around children and young people
- ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount when an allegation is made

All complaints should be reported. This includes:

- criminal conduct
- risk of significant harm (ROSH)
- disclosures of abuse
- unacceptable behaviour around children that breaches the MVCM Code of Conduct
- suspicion of harm or abuse to a child or young person
- reportable conduct

Complaint Process

Once a complaint has been made, the following process will be followed:

- Steps are taken to remove the child from harm.
- Incident is recorded in detail by the first person contacted using the MVCM Complaints and Allegations Form.
- MVCM Child Safety Committee is informed.

- Reporting obligations to other parties are met, if necessary.
- Investigation is conducted, keeping everyone involved up to date with what's happening.
- Offering ongoing support to the child and family as needed.
- Reviewing the incident and updating the organisation's child safe policies, if necessary.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporters are required to make a report to the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 or DCJ's ChildStory online system if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or children are at risk of significant harm and those grounds arose during the course of their work. The mandatory reporter must make a report as soon as practical, providing the name of the child and the grounds for suspecting that they are at risk.

Mandatory reporters include "A person in religious ministry or providing religion-based activities to children (for example, minister of religion, priest, deacon, pastor, rabbi, Salvation Army officer, church elder, or religious brother or sister)."

All volunteer leaders and helpers within MVCM can receive assistance with reporting by members of the Child Safety Committee.

13. ALCOHOL & DRUGS

The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on Church grounds or during an activity is not to be condoned by any Leader. Any Child found to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so the Child can be returned home immediately.

Any Child required to take prescription medication will provide a letter from the parents/guardians to the Ministry Leader.

14. OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

Manning Valley Covenant Ministries has implemented additional policies which are specific to the children's ministries during church services. The ministry for 0-5 year olds is Arrows, and for 5-12 year olds is Rev 22.

- Information and Consent Forms: We require all parents and carers of children in Arrows and Rev 22 to fill in an information and consent form, outlining any medical conditions, allergies, or behavioural issues prior to any child going out to Arrows or Rev 22. This form also gives the parent/carer's consent to the child participating in Arrows and Rev 22 activities.
Each leader needs to familiarise themselves with the information sheets regarding the children in their group, including allergies, medical conditions and behavioural issues.
- Authorised adults: In order to provide a safe environment for children, only adults who are authorised leaders and helpers of Rev 22 and Arrows are permitted to stay in the rooms with children. It is acceptable for a parent/carer to stay with their child for a short time (up to 10 mins) to settle their child.

The only people authorised to stay in the rooms with children must comply with the following:

1. Have been an active member of MVCM for at least 6 months
2. Have been through the process of application for Children's Ministry
3. Have a current Working With Children Clearance verification
4. Be familiar with and adhere to the church's current policies and procedures
5. Have signed the MVCM Code of Conduct and a Prohibited Employment Declaration Form

15. PROHIBITED EMPLOYMENT DECLARATION

- A Prohibited Employment Declaration is to be made by anyone applying for a paid or unpaid position working with children. According to the Prohibited Employment Act 1998 it is an offence for a Prohibited Person to apply for, undertake or remain in child-related employment;
- employers must ask existing employees, both paid and unpaid, and preferred applicants for employment to declare if they are a Prohibited Person or not;
- all child-related employees must inform their employers if they are a Prohibited Person or remove themselves from child-related employment. A Prohibited Person is someone who has been convicted of a serious sexual offence or, who has had a finding for a charge of a serious sexual offence proven in court, even if a conviction was not recorded.

Policy last reviewed June 2023

APPENDIX 1 – Legal Obligations

Below is a précis of legislative requirements with respect to Child Abuse that apply in NSW. Every attempt has been made to ensure this information is accurate however a review should be undertaken regularly to ensure the information remains correct and current.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Our policies are written to comply with the following legislation:

Crimes Act 1900
The NSW Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998
The NSW Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998
Child Protection (Working With Children) Act 2012
Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
Children's Guardian Act 2019

The Working with Children Check applies to people in child-related employment. Child-related employment means any employment of a kind listed in Section 3 of the NSW Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998 that primarily involves direct, unsupervised contact with children. Work in a religious organisation is identified in that list.

Anyone applying for child-related employment, including volunteers, must make a Prohibited Employment Declaration confirming they have not been convicted of a serious sex offence or the kidnapping or murder of a child.

Police Checks

In addition to Prohibited Employment, background checks are mandatory for preferred applicants for paid child-related employment, as defined in the Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998, anyone seeking to provide foster care ("authorised care") to children, and ministers of religion or other members of a religious organisation seeking child-related employment.

The term "other members of a religious organisation" covers those members whose work is analogous to that of a minister of religion.

APPENDIX 2: Complaints and Allegations Record Form



COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS RECORD FORM

This form should be used to record a suspicion, allegation or disclosure of child abuse, or a complaint of unacceptable behaviour.

Your name and position	
Name of the child or young person involved	
Name of person making complaint	
Name of person who the complaint was made against	

1. Nature of the complaint: include time, date, location, what happened and who was involved (this can include observations of the child's behaviour).

2. Details of any injuries and if the child received medical attention.

3. Accurately record what the child said when describing what happened – use their exact words – or record why you suspect abuse due to an indirect disclosure, such as a drawing or observed behaviour.

(In the case of an allegation of abuse, formal investigations and interviews will be carried out by DCJ and/or NSW Police. You must record what the child has said but unless it is your role to investigate, you should not interview the child.)

4. Details of anyone who saw what happened.

5. Does this complaint indicate the possibility of child abuse, such as physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Who did you make a report to?

☐ NSW Police

☐ DCJ via ChildStory

☐ DCJ via 132 111

☐ OCG Reportable Conduct Directorate

☐ Internal reporting obligations (name the relevant department or person)

☐ Other (name them)

7. People spoken to in relation to the matter (describe who was spoken to and why they were spoken to about the matter – include police officers, DCJ staff, OCG staff and anyone else you spoke to).

Signature of Person Documenting Complaint_____

Date(s): _____

APPENDIX 3 – Child Safe Contact Officers and Child Safety Committee

Child Safe Contact Officers:

Felicity Hodson
Julieanne Jones

Child Safety Committee:

Glenn Hodson (Senior Pastor)
Mark Smith (Elder)
Judy McComb (Elder)
Felicity Hodson (Child Safe Contact Officer)
Julieanne Jones (Child Safe Contact Officer)
Jason Murphy (Congregation Member)