

VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY



NEIGHBOURHOOD CHURCH

JANUARY 2025



**NEIGHBOURHOOD
CHURCH**

VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY

We seek to play our part in seeing neighbourhoods transformed by the love and hope of Jesus.

Objective:

Neighbourhood Church is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of all people. We have zero tolerance towards the abuse of any person. Everyone working at Neighbourhood Church, including all volunteers and contractors, is responsible for the care and protection of all people, and reporting information about any form of abuse is to be normative.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to the best of our ability:

- To *facilitate the prevention of abuse* occurring within Neighbourhood Church.
- To *prevent abuse occurring* within Neighbourhood Church.
- To work towards an organisational culture of safety.
- To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for abuse and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing abuse and/or detecting abuse when it occurs.
- To provide guidance to staff/volunteers/contractors as to action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation.
- To provide a clear statement to staff/volunteers/contractors forbidding any such abuse.
- To provide assurance that any and all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.
- To affirm that all relevant State and Federal legislation will be adhered to.
- Adhere to the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

VULNERABLE PERSONS POLICY

If any person believes a person is in immediate risk of abuse, telephone 000.

Neighbourhood Church is committed to promoting and protecting the best interests of people involved in its programs.

All people, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse.

We believe that everyone should be in a safe environment whilst they are attending our programs.

We believe that parents/guardians should be able to leave their children in our care in the knowledge that they will be safe.

We believe that our teams should be able to minister to people in an environment free from emotional and physical hazards.

Neighbourhood Church has zero tolerance for any type of abuse. Everyone working at Neighbourhood Church is responsible for the care and protection of the vulnerable people within our care and reporting information about suspected abuse.

Child protection and the protection for all vulnerable people groups is a shared responsibility between the Neighbourhood Church, all employees, workers, contractors, associates, and members of the Neighbourhood Church community.

Neighbourhood Church will consider the opinions of children and all vulnerable people and use their opinions to develop protection policies.

Neighbourhood Church supports and respects all people, young and old, our staff and volunteers.

POLICY

DEFINITIONS

If any person believes a person is in immediate risk of

Vulnerable Person

A vulnerable person is a person where a position of trust exists with a representative of the organisation during their appointed role. This includes but is not limited to: children (persons under 18), elderly, intellectually or physically disabled, and emotionally vulnerable persons. In short those with a diminished capacity to whom a greater duty of care is owed.

An employee and/or volunteer

Any person (paid or unpaid over the age of 18 who is responsible for the safety of any Vulnerable Persons in their care whilst holding a formal position in a recognised activity or service of the organisation. This includes paid employees, unpaid employees, volunteers, students, people on work experience, management, board members, contractors, and others who may act on behalf of Neighbourhood Church.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Board of Neighbourhood Church has ultimate responsibility for the detection and prevention of abuse and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place. The Board is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place.

The Safeguarding Officer (SO) is responsible for:

- Receiving the initial email, verbal or written complaint and notifying the board chairperson.

The Chairperson of Neighbourhood Church is responsible for:

- In conjunction with the board dealing with and investigating reports of abuse.
- Ensuring this policy is implemented at Neighbourhood Church.

The Lead Pastor of Neighbourhood Church is responsible for:

- Ensuring that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are aware of relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures, and this Policy.
- Ensuring that all adults within the Neighbourhood Church community are aware of their obligation to report suspected abuse of vulnerable people in accordance with these policies and procedures.
- Ensuring that all staff, contractors and volunteers are aware of their obligation to observe this Policy (particularly as it relates to child safety and other vulnerable people).
- Providing support for staff, contractors and volunteers in undertaking their policies and procedures relevant to their area of responsibilities.

Continued on following page

POLICY

RESPONSIBILITIES (CONTINUED)

- Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities.
- Educate employees about the prevention and detection of abuse towards vulnerable people.

All Leads must ensure that they:

- Provide training on the purpose and implementation of this Policy.
- Provide refresher training on the content of this Policy and their departments leadership handbooks.
- Promote safety at all times.
- Assess the risk of abuse within their area of control and eradicate or minimise any risk to the extent possible.
- Ensure that two employees and/or volunteers are present whenever an individual child or vulnerable person is involved.
- Educate employees about the prevention and detection of abuse.
- Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities

Management should be familiar with the types of abuse that might occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for any indications of such conduct.

All staff and volunteers share the responsibility for the prevention and detection of abuse, and must:

- Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws and Neighbourhood Church's policy and procedures and comply with all requirements.
- Report any reasonable belief that a person's safety is at risk to the SO or Chairperson of the Board who will in turn report to the relevant authorities (such as the police and/or the state-based child protection service) once the initial investigation indicates there is reasonable suspicion of child abuse.
- Report any suspicion that a person's safety may be at risk to the SO or to the Chairperson of the Board or the Lead Pastor).
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all people's emotional and physical safety.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Neighbourhood Church will ensure that the safety of vulnerable people is a part of its overall risk management approach.

POLICY

EMPLOYMENT OF NEW PERSONNEL

- Neighbourhood Church undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workers and volunteers that aims to:
- Promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation.
- Identify the safest and most suitable people who share Neighbourhood Church's values and commitment to protecting vulnerable people.
- Prevent a person from working at Neighbourhood Church if they pose a risk to vulnerable people.
- Neighbourhood Church requires all workers/volunteers who minister to vulnerable people to pass through the organisation's recruitment and screening processes before commencing their engagement with Neighbourhood Church:
- The candidates will have to sit through a formal interview process.
- Neighbourhood Church requires all applicants to provide a police check in accordance with the law before they commence working at Neighbourhood Church, and during their time with Neighbourhood Church as might be requested from time to time.
- Neighbourhood Church requires a Working with Children Check (WWCC).
- Neighbourhood Church will undertake thorough reference checks (at least two references from non-family members).
- Complete the Volunteer Application Form (Volunteers).
- Once engaged, workers/volunteers must review and acknowledge their understanding of this Policy and their department leadership Handbook (example Children and Families Ministry Handbook).
- Employees and volunteers will be engaged on a probationary basis before a final decision is made for a more permanent engagement.
- Neighbourhood Church prohibits the employment or engagement of any person with prior convictions relating to violent or sexual related offences in the area of children or vulnerable adult ministries.

REPORTING

If someone is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical attention, call 000.

If the situation is not an immediate emergency, anyone can and should report abuse or suspected abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect) using any of the details below:

- [Online Reporting Form](#) (link)
- Physical Forms: located at church entry and Kids registration
- Lead Pastor and Safeguarding Officer: Clare Gageler safeguarding@neighbourhood.au
- Chair of the Board: board@neighbourhood.au

POLICY

REPORTING (CONTINUED)

If an affected person wishes to make a report in person, every effort must be made to have more than one safeguarding representative or staff member present. Ideally, a meeting time would be arranged as soon as possible, in a safe and acceptable location.

A safeguarding representative must not arrange a meeting one-on-one with anyone they know, or suspect, of reporting abuse. They must arrange for more than one representative to be present for any planned meeting relating to safeguarding matters.

An offer must be made to the affected person for a support person to accompany them. The support person can be someone of their own choosing, or someone nominated by the Neighbourhood Church.

If an employee or volunteer forms a reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused (physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect), this should be reported to the Safeguarding Officer immediately. On no account should this be discussed amongst the team or with anyone else.

To be clear, all parties submitting or receiving reports must have minimal interactions with the alleged perpetrator, even if requested by the affected person.

Child abuse is intolerable and must be dealt with promptly.

Aligning with best practice, all reasonable suspicions of abuse will be reported to the Chairperson of the Board of Neighbourhood Church who will in turn report to the appropriate authorities and the organisation's insurer (more detail under Investigation below).

In situations where the person having raised the suspicion does not believe that the matter is being appropriately addressed or dealt with by the board, the matter should be reported directly to the proper authorities (Ombudsman, WA Police or the Department of Communities).

Any person can report a reasonable suspicion via the Safeguarding Feedback and Disclosure Form. This form will be available at the entrance to church buildings and in the Neighbourhood Kids registration area. Once completed, it can be deposited in the secure letter post box in the church building.

Reasonable suspicions can also be reported verbally to the SO or the Chairperson of the Board.

POLICY

INVESTIGATING

The Chairperson of the Board will appoint a person independent of the alleged incident, of which a reasonable suspicion exists, to investigate. The initial focus of the investigation will be on the assessment of risk to children/youth after the allegation is made.

Following initial internal investigations, if reasonable grounds exist of abuse, the Lead Pastor will make a notification to the Ombudsman within 7 days of becoming aware of the allegation. This can be done by phoning (08) 9220 7471 or emailing reportableconduct@ombudsman.wa.gov.au

A mandatory report must also be made as soon as practicable to the Department of Communities after forming the belief regarding the sexual abuse on 1800 708 704. The best method for making a mandatory report is through the mandatory reporting website at www.mandatoryreporting.dcp.wa.gov.au

If an employee of the Neighbourhood Church church is involved, the person will be suspended immediately from work with full pay whilst the investigation is in progress.

If found guilty, employment will be terminated.

If a volunteer is involved, the volunteer will immediately be removed from all involvement and interaction with vulnerable people until all charges have been thoroughly investigated, and the approval given by the Chairperson of the Board to return to duties.

Upon a guilty verdict following the internal investigation of the church, additional authorities will be notified, including the WA Police. The affected child's parents/guardians will also be informed of the verdict and further action taken.

The person appointed to investigate the alleged incident, will develop an investigation plan, appoint people to assist him, investigate the incident according to his plan, deliver his findings, and report it to the Chairman of the Board and the Lead Pastor. The investigator will identify and manage actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest during his investigation.

Any employee or volunteer affected by this investigation will be allowed to appeal the verdict and have it reviewed by a different member of the Board of Neighbourhood Church. This finding will be final.

All investigations commenced will be completed, even if an employee or volunteer leaves the organisation.

Neighbourhood Church will provide Pastoral support for all people affected by this investigation, including children, parents/guardians, employees and volunteers who are the subject of the investigation and affected staff.

POLICY

PRIVACY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety.

Everyone is entitled to know how the personal information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will be able to access it.

All information about the case will be collated into a single file. This information will be locked in the Lead Pastor's filing cabinet to which only the Lead Pastor has a key. This information will remain in secure storage for a minimum of 50 years.

Only the person in charge of the investigation, the Lead Pastor, the Chairperson of the Board and the CEO will have access to the information.

Only the Lead Pastor or the Chairman of the Board can authorise any information to be passed on to a third party.

Any allegations that are investigated and found not to meet the threshold of reportable conduct will also be collated and filed for future reference in the Lead Pastor's filing cabinet.

REVIEWING

Every year, and following every reportable incident, a review shall be conducted to assess whether the organisation's vulnerable protection policies or procedures require modification to better protect the vulnerable people under the organisation's care.



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