

## BELLARINE ASSEMBLY CHILD SAFETY: STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT AND POLICY

*"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." I Peter 1:16*

*"...but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation,  
in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." I Timothy 4:12*

*"...whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." Philippians 4:8*

### Our commitment to child safety

The Bellarine Assembly is committed to the welfare and safety of children and young people at our church. We aim to create an environment where children and young people feel safe, have fun and enjoy coming to church and our family and child-specific activities. Children and young people are encouraged to be active participants in our church meetings and Sunday School program.

**The church regards the protection of children and young people in its care as being of the utmost importance and we have a zero tolerance for any form of abuse.**

We are committed to maintaining a child safe culture within our church by regular training of our church officers and volunteers in our child safe program.

### Our children and young people

Children and young people are vital and active participants in our church. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

*"...Jesus called unto them and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of Heaven. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Luke 18: 16-17*

Members of our church come from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. Adult members of our church and many young people and children have received the Holy Spirit and been baptised by full immersion in accordance with Bible requirements.

We are committed to:

- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and young people; and
- ensuring that children and young people with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

## Our officers and members – child safety code of conduct

Officers and adult members first and foremost should ensure their conduct is at all times appropriate to that of a spirit-filled person and in accordance with New Testament teachings.

*“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” Ephesians 5:15*

All officers and adult members of our church must abide by this policy document. Officers and adult members must respect and keep safe all children and young people in attendance at our church and church activities. This includes children and young people who are regular church members and visiting children and young people.

Officers and members **must**:

- treat all children and young people with respect and valuing their opinions, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, etc;
- be an example and exercise good conduct and judgment around children and young people by:
  - being mindful of actions, behaviour and conversation with and around children and young people; and
  - ensuring all contact and communication with children and young people is appropriate.
- actively promote and take responsibility for the physical and emotional safety of children and young people in attendance at our church;
- encourage open communication with children and young people and allow children and young people to participate in decisions which affect them;
- take responsibility to ensure accountability, including by not placing him/herself in a situation where a risk of an allegation being made could occur. For example, it is prudent to ensure at least two adult members of the church are present in any situation involving the supervision of children or young people;
- be transparent in actions and whereabouts;
- encourage children and young people to feel they are in a caring environment and can actively speak out about situations they feel uncomfortable with;
- challenge unacceptable behaviours and abide by this policy including reporting any concerning behaviours or suspicions regarding abuse by any church member or visitor;
- ensure programs and activities are made accessible to children or young people with a disability;
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of children, young people and their families and only disclose information to persons who need to know;
- at all times, comply with Commonwealth and State government laws regarding child safety and protection.

Officers and adult members **must not**:

- engage in behaviour or conversation which could shame, belittle or humiliate children or young people, including using inappropriate, discriminatory, sarcastic or sexually provocative language;

- act in a way which shows unfair or deferential treatment of certain children or young people;
- condone or participate in behaviour with children or young people which is unsafe or physically or emotionally abusive;
- hit or physically discipline a child or young person;
- seek to make inappropriate conduct or spend one-on-one time with a child or young person;
- take images (photographs or video) of a visiting child or young person without the consent of a parent or guardian (in relation to children or young persons who are regular members of the church, parental wishes in relation to photographs or video images must be respected at all times);
- post images (photographs or video) online of any child or young person without the consent of a parent or guardian;
- make contact online with a child or young person without the consent of a parent or guardian;
- initiate unnecessary physical contact with a child or young person or assist a child or young person with things of a personal nature (such as dressing, toileting or showering) where the child or young person is capable of doing those things him/herself.

Officers are to recognise that particular caution is required when discussing sensitive issues with children or young people.

Young adults looking after Young Peoples' groups in particular should be mindful of relationships with young people under the age of 18 which could be perceived to be one of a 'power-imbalance'.

## Awareness of child safety and supervision of members

Education of our church officers and members is important to ensure that everyone understands that **child safety is everyone's responsibility**.

We train our officers and members to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse. We also support all church officers and members to understand and promote the safety and participation of children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal children and young people, and the safety of children and young people with a disability.

Officers and members involved directly with the supervision of children and young people, including in Sunday School, crèche, Young Revivalists and Young Peoples' activities, will be supported and supervised to ensure they understand that everyone has a role to play in keeping children and young people safe and protecting them from abuse.

All people engaged in the supervision of children and young people are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check to Pr John Andrews.<sup>1</sup>

## Fair procedures for our officers and members

The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to our officers and adult members. The decisions we make when assessing and investigating

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the [Working with Children Check](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) website for further information: [www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au).

incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be Bible-based, in accordance with any Commonwealth or State laws and thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

Any allegations of abuse and safety concerns are recorded by Pr John Andrews, including any investigations which may occur. All records are securely stored and the privacy of individuals involved is respected. Personal information of all persons involved will be protected, unless there is a risk to someone's safety.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to the child, young person and family involved (as appropriate) on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

## Legal responsibilities and reporting of incidents

If an adult has a **reasonable belief that an incident of abuse has occurred or observes inappropriate behaviour towards a child or young person, then they must report the circumstances or incident to Pr John Andrews.**

This may include:

- a child or young person states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child or young person may in fact be referring to themselves);
- observing behaviour of a child or young person consistent with that of an abuse victim;<sup>2</sup>
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it; or
- observing suspicious behaviour.

As a church we have specific legal responsibilities, which we take seriously. These include:

- **Failure to disclose:** Any adult in Victoria who has a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to the police. This should be reported immediately by calling triple zero (000)<sup>3</sup>
- **Failure to protect:** Any person of authority in our church will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.<sup>4</sup>
- **Mandatory reporting:** Any persons in our church who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their legal duties.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For example behaviour, please see [An Overview of the Victorian child safe standards:](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/creating-child-safe-organisations)  
<<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/creating-child-safe-organisations>>.

<sup>3</sup> A person will not commit this offence if they have a reasonable excuse for not disclosing the information, including a fear for their safety or where the information has already been disclosed.

Further information about the failure to disclose offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence)  
<[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+disclose+offence)>.

<sup>4</sup> Further information about the failure to protect offence is available on the [Department of Justice and Regulation website](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)  
<[www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/safer+communities/protecting+children+and+families/failure+to+protect+offence)>.

<sup>5</sup> Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals, police, psychologists, out of home care workers, youth justice workers) must report to child protection authorities if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse. See the Department of Health and Human Services website for information about [how to make a report to child protection](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting)  
<<https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting>>.

## Head of Organisation - obligations to investigate and report

Pr John Andrews will report any incident or reportable allegation through appropriate channels, including to the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People and, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter, to the police.<sup>6</sup>

A reportable allegation<sup>7</sup> must be reported to the Commissioner for Children and Young People by Pr John Andrews within 3 business days of becoming aware of the allegation.

It is the responsibility of Pr John Andrews to investigate and respond to incidents and provide updates and outcomes of findings of investigations to the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People, in accordance with the timeframes set out by the Commissioner. Within 30 calendar days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation, Pr John Andrews must provide the Commissioner with detailed information about the allegation, disciplinary or other actions taken and the response of the individual to the allegation. **It is a criminal offence to not comply with these timeframes without a reasonable excuse.**

## Risk management

In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children and young people.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no officer or member is to have contact with a child or young person on social media without parental or guardian consent).

## Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families, children and young people have the opportunity to contribute.

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<sup>6</sup> The head of an organisation is required to have systems in place to prevent reportable conduct being committed, enable reportable allegations to be made, investigate and respond to reportable allegations and report allegations of criminal conduct or suspected criminal conduct to police. The head of an organisation must ensure allegations are appropriately investigated and notify the Commissioner for Children and Young People of reportable allegations and provide updates and outcomes of the findings of any investigation.

<sup>7</sup> There are five types of 'reportable allegations': sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child; sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child; physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child; any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; and significant neglect of a child.