

Applies To:	☐ Anglican Schools Commission	☐ Community Services Commission	☐ Diocesan Services Commission
	☐ Episcopate & Leadership	☐ Financial Services Commission	☐ Ministry Education Commission
	☐ Parishes & Other Mission Agencies Commission		
Related Documents:	☐ Procedure	☐ Form	☐ Other

This Procedure concerns responding to harm to children, or to signs of harm. Any Church workers responding to child sexual abuse should refer to the [Procedure and Information for Reporting and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Ministry Units](#) and, if the alleged offender is a Church worker, the [Protocol for Responding to Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct](#).

For the definition of key terms used in this Procedure, see the [Policy for the Protection of Children in Ministry Units](#).

This procedure applies to all ministry units within the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, except for St John's College within the University of Queensland, Anglicare, Anglican Schools and Education and Care Services.

PART A: PROCESSES FOR RESPONDING TO HARM

1. REPORTING HARM TO STATE AUTHORITIES

Harm to a child in their primary household

1.1: Church workers with information which leads them to form a reasonable suspicion that a child may be in need of protection must:

- advise their supervisor or manager (for parishes, this is the Parish Priest or Safeguarder) of their reasonable suspicion; and
- Assist their supervisor/manager to report the harm to the Department of Child Safety.

A child in need of protection is defined in section 10 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* as a child who:

- has suffered significant harm, is suffering significant harm, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm; and*
- does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from harm.*

Harm is defined in section 9 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* as *any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing*. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. Harm can be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or sexual abuse or exploitation. (see clauses 3, 5 and 6 for recognising signs of harm)

1.2: The supervisor/manager has the responsibility to report to Child Safety. Report to Child Safety, either by:

- Telephoning the Regional Intake Service ([key contacts](#))
- Making a written report to Child Safety, using [Child Safety's online reporting form](#).

1.3: When forming a reasonable suspicion that a child may be in need of protection, weigh up the urgency of the matter and whether the child is in immediate danger of significant harm. If the child is in immediate danger, call '000'.

1.4: If you have any concerns about whether a report should be made, you may contact the Office of Safe Ministry for further advice at 1800 242 544 or safeministry@anglicanchurchsq.org.au.

1.5: Unless the circumstances outlined in clause 1.6 apply, a Church worker satisfies their reporting obligations by reporting the relevant harm to their supervisor or manager.

Harm to a child by a Church Worker

1.6: If the person suspected to have caused the harm is a Church worker, the harm must be reported by the supervisor/manager to the Office of Safe Ministry.

1.7: A Church worker must report directly to the Office of Safe Ministry if their supervisor or manager is the subject of the allegations.

1.8: The attached form, [Report of Known or Suspected Child Sexual Abuse or Harm to a Child](#) is to be used when making reports of harm to a child by a Church Worker.

1.9 Upon completion of the form, email immediately to the Safe Ministry Mailbox (safeministry@anglicanchurchsq.org.au) and follow-up with a phone call (1800 242 544).

1.10 : Retain an electronic copy and file securely in accordance with ACSQ record keeping policy.

Communication with Stakeholders

1.11 When identifying harm to a child from any person, consider the relevant stakeholders and what information needs to be shared (where allowed by law). This includes, but is not limited to:

- Children and young people
- Parents, carers, and guardians
- Police or child safety
- People whose behaviour the concerns relate to
- Other organisations identified as necessary to reduce risk of harm to a child or young person.

When responding to a concern consider how the child and family can be supported. If required, seek advice from the Office of Safe Ministry to determine a plan to support the child and family.

PART B: RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES AND RECOGNISING HARM

2. RESPONDING TO VERBAL DISCLOSURES OF HARM

2.1: When responding to a verbal disclosure from a child, a Church worker must:

- stay calm and listen carefully to the child's disclosure;
- allow the child to continue at their own pace;
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing;
- reassure the child that they are not to blame for the harm;
- tell the child that you will help;
- let the child know that you will be reporting the harm; and
- report the harm in accordance with the directions set out above.

2.2: When responding to a verbal disclosure from a child, a Church worker must **not**:

- panic or dismiss the child's concerns;
- request more information from the child than you need to report the harm;
- promise not to tell anyone or that you will keep it a secret;
- make openly negative comments about the accused person;
- make assumptions or speculate as to the specifics of the harm;
- disclose details to anyone except persons to whom you are required to report; or
- under any circumstances, inform the person who is the alleged offender.

3. RECOGNISING VERBAL DISCLOSURES OF HARM

3.1: A child, or a person connected to a child, may disclose harm to a Church worker. The disclosure may be about harm happening now, in the past or which is suspected will happen in the future. The child might make the disclosure, or it may be made by someone with knowledge of a child being harmed.

3.2: Sometimes a disclosure is about a person's fear that a child is at risk of harm.

3.3: As disclosures made by children are often not stated outright or directly, it is important for Church workers to be aware of what an indirect disclosure may sound like. For example:

- Vague Disclosure: "I don't like being left alone with my new babysitter."
- Disguised Disclosure: "I know someone who has been hurt." OR "What would happen if a girl told her mother that her father had hit her, but the mother didn't believe her."
- Conditional Disclosure: "I have a problem, but if I tell you about it you have to promise not to tell anyone else." OR "Can I tell you a secret?"

3.4: If a child discloses harm to you, it will likely be unsettling and difficult. The child may approach you because they believe you may be able to help them. It is also a sign of trust that a child would tell you something so personal.

3.5: **Remember, a child will tell you about harm because they want it to stop.** This is true, even if they also tell you not to tell anyone else about the harm.

3.6: You must always take a child's disclosure of harm seriously and take action to report and respond to that harm. Remember, we all have a responsibility to keep children safe and to protect them from harm.

4. RESPONDING TO PHYSICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS OF HARM

As a Church worker, if you identify physical or behavioural signs of harm to a child you must:

- a. if you are able to do so without risking further harm to the child, gently ask the child how they got the observed injury, or what has caused the noted behavioural change. This is to be done using opened ended questions such as *"What happened to you?"*. Avoid questions which suggest the answer such as *"Did Mr X do this to you?"*.
- b. if the child's explanation raises concerns (or if you are unable to question the child in accordance with clause 4.a), discuss your concerns with your supervisor/manager (for parishes, this is the Parish Priest);
- c. if you are uncertain whether the child has been harmed, and if you are able to do so without risking further harm to the child, without making any inappropriate physical contact, continue to observe the child for further signs of harm, though only after informing your supervisor/manager of your intent;
- d. if you believe the child has not been harmed, but is upset, offer support to the child;
- e. if you have a reasonable suspicion that the child has been harmed, report that harm in accordance with clause 1 of this Procedure.

5. RECOGNISING PHYSICAL SIGNS OF HARM

5.1: Often there is a reasonable explanation for physical injuries. While care must be provided to an injured child, there may be no immediate reason to suspect the injury is caused by neglect or abuse. However, in some instances there may be no reasonable explanation or cause provided, and this may be a sign that the child has been harmed.

5.2: Physical signs of harm include:

- a. direct physical injuries consistent with abusive behaviour, such as bruises or welts, broken bones, burns or scalds, bites, cuts, marks on the neck and damage to teeth;
- b. signs of neglect, such as poor personal hygiene, poor muscle tone, being severely underweight or overweight compared to children of the same age;
- c. young children showing significant physical developmental delays;
- d. untreated physical or medical conditions, as well as constant hunger or tiredness; and
- e. frequently inadequate or inappropriate clothing for weather and a consistent lack of parental supervision during observed activities.

6. RECOGNISING BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS OF HARM

6.1: Where a Church worker has contact with a child over time, they may notice changes in the child's behaviour that may indicate the child is being harmed.

6.2: Behavioural signs of harm can be difficult to identify but may include:

- a. truancy or habitual lateness to scheduled activities, and general underachieving;
- b. expressed feelings of worthlessness about life, poor self-image and low self-esteem;
- c. indications of anxiety or depression, as well as self-harm and suicidal thoughts;
- d. apathetic behaviour, including a lack of interest in forming interpersonal connections;
- e. an apparent lack of trust in others, particularly where this was not previously an issue;
- f. overly compliant or passive behaviour, including excessive submission to authority;
- g. extremely demanding, aggressive or attention-seeking behaviour;
- h. anti-social or destructive behaviour, including compulsive lying or stealing;
- i. the sudden onset of soiling, wetting or similar behavioural changes; and
- j. regressive behaviour, such as baby talk or thumb sucking.

6.3: The behaviour of a child's parent/guardian may also be a sign a child is being harmed. For example, if the parent/guardian constantly criticises, threatens, belittles, insults, or rejects the child, particularly if this is done in a public setting.

7. THE DAMAGING IMPACTS OF HARM ON A CHILD

7.1: Harm to a child commonly causes them to experience psychological and spiritual damage, and without intervention, will likely lead to the long-term impairment of their social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and intellectual development and/or to disordered behaviour.

7.2: The effects of such harm can extend well beyond the offender and the victim child. Families of the victim, as well as their communities, can also experience a high degree of distress when revelations of harm emerge.

7.3: The family of the offender may experience similar issues.

7.4: Within the victim's family or community, some may deny the disclosure and reject the victim rather than face the reality of the offending. Once the reality is confronted, members of the community will often experience profound shock, guilt, and disillusionment.

8. AWARENESS OF RISK FACTORS FOR HARM

8.1: In addition to recognising signs of harm, Church workers must also be aware of the risk factors that may lead to a Church worker, or another person, harming a child. When a child is harmed, the person causing the harm is often someone that the child knows in their own home or community, rather than a stranger.

8.2: The causes of harm are often complex and multifactorial. There is likely no single or simple explanation, but Church workers are to be aware of, and able to identify, the following signs that are known to contribute to the risk of a person causing harm to a child.

- a. stress, including poverty and financial stress;
- b. a lack of interpersonal support and/or a sense of isolation;
- c. drug and alcohol abuse and/or gambling problems;
- d. poor childhood experiences, potentially including childhood abuse;
- e. a living environment including domestic/family violence; and
- f. unrealistic expectations of children and their behaviour.

8.3: Church workers must be aware that, given certain circumstances such as the consumption of alcohol or mind-altering drugs, or instances of poor psychological health, anyone, including a Church worker, has the potential to harm a child.

8.4: Harm may be caused to a child by a Church worker where stress, tiredness and lack of information and support combine to make the pressures of caring for a child overwhelming.

8.5: **However, always remember that nothing excuses conduct that causes harm to a child**, and any such harmful conduct must be reported as set out under clause 1, regardless of the circumstances that lead to the harm.

9. SEEKING ASSISTANCE

9.1: Deciding what to do when you have a concern for a child is not easy, and reporting harm is a difficult, challenging, but very important task. This is why it is important to discuss any concerns or suspicions of harm you may have with your supervisor or manager, so that they may assist you in determining what further action should be taken.

9.2: If at any time you are unsure how to proceed, you may also contact the Office of Safe Ministry for advice and support by phone at 1800 242 544, or by email at safeministry@anglicanchurchsq.org.au.

9.3: All queries to the Office of Safe Ministry will be taken seriously, and no adverse action will be taken against a Church worker for raising concerns.

9.3: The safety and wellbeing of children is everyone's business, and you do not have to feel that you are solely responsible. By sharing your concerns with the right people, you not only allow others to assist in meeting this responsibility, but also help to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

10. PROVISION OF PASTORAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING ASSISTANCE

10.1 : It is important that, throughout any process involving the identification and reporting of harm, pastoral support and, where applicable, counselling assistance are provided to all persons affected. This will include the child and their family, as well as any Church worker who receives a verbal disclosure of harm or otherwise becomes aware of such harm.

10.2 : Parishes and other ministry units may seek advice from the Office of Safe Ministry regarding pastoral support and counselling assistance.

10.3 : Any Church worker responding to a sign of harm should also exercise self-care. This includes seeking advice and, where needed, seeking pastoral support and/or counselling to assist you in dealing with the harm to which you have been exposed. You may speak with your supervisor/manager regarding such support.

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