



Child Protection Policy

Statement & Purpose

Policy Statement

The Village Church is dedicated to nurturing the faith of children and young people and taking seriously the call to make disciples of them. We are committed to facilitating this aim in an environment that is safe and concerned for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of children, young people and leaders alike.

We are committed to the protection of all children and young people and the prevention of child abuse. All cases of suspected or alleged abuse will therefore be taken seriously and handled sensitively.

We support the roles of the Police and Oranga Tamariki in the investigation of suspected abuse and will report suspected/alleged abuse to these agencies as necessary.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect children in our care against child abuse, and to protect leaders against unwarranted suspicion of any form of abuse.

Andrea Phillips is the Children's Ministry Coordinator, Juanne Wrack is the Youth Ministry Coordinator and Brennon Lanigan as an Elder are the 3 designated persons for Child Protection for The Village Church and are responsible for safeguarding children and young people. They are responsible for ensuring that child protection is a key priority within The Village Church at both a strategic level and on an operational basis.

Definitions

Child

Anyone aged 0 to 12 years old.

Youth/young person

Anyone aged 13 to 18 years old.

Churchworker/Leader/Staff:

Refers to any person working at, for, with or on behalf of, The Village Church and includes, but is not limited to church workers/Leaders/Staff employed directly by The Village Church, irrespective of whether they are paid or voluntary, or whether they are working on a full time, part time, casual or temporary basis, as well as any persons contracted or invited to provide services to children and young people associated with The Village Church.

Child Abuse:

Can involve ongoing, repeated or persistent abuse, or may arise from a single incident. Abuse of children and youth may take many forms, but it can be categorised into 5 different types : Physical, Sexual, Emotional, Spiritual, & Neglect.

Physical Abuse:

Is an non-accidental act on a child or young person that results in physical harm. This includes, but is not limited to, beating, hitting, shaking, burning, drowning, suffocating, biting, poisoning or otherwise causing physical harm to a child or young person. Physical abuse also involves the fabrication or inducing of illness.

Sexual Abuse:

Is an act or acts that result in the sexual exploitation of a child or young person, whether consensual or not.

Emotional Abuse:

Is any act or omission that results in impaired psychological, social, intellectual and/or emotional functioning and development of a child or young person.

Spiritual Abuse:

Is a form of abuse that occurs when a person in religious authority misleads and maltreats a child or young person in the name of god, or in the name of the Church by taking advantage of the child or young person's spirituality and putting them in a state of unquestioning obedience to an abusive authority.

Neglect:

Is characterised as the persistent failure to meet a child or young person's basic physical and/or psychological or emotional needs. This can occur through direct and deliberate action or by omission or deliberate inaction to care for and/or protect the child or young person.

Grooming:

Is predatory conduct and can include, but is not limited to, befriending, or establishing an emotional relationship, or connection with a child, or young persons and can extend to members of the child or young person's family, for the purpose of lowering the child or young person's inhibitions and with the objective of sexual abuse.

Family Violence:

Can take many forms and includes not only acts of physical violence, but also intimidating behaviour such as threatening to harm people, pets or property. Children and young people are always affected either emotionally or physically where there is family violence even if they are not personally injured or physically present.

Oranga tamariki-Ministry for Children:

Formally known as Child Youth and Family Services (“CYFS”). Oranga Tamariki is a government ministry dedicated to supporting children and young people in New Zealand whose wellbeing is at significant risk of harm now or in the future.

Confidentiality

The safety of a child or young person is paramount and The Village Church has a responsibility to know when and how to share appropriate information with external agencies to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. All Church Workers/Leaders/Staff are required to adhere to the Privacy Act 2020 and the information sharing provisions under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, and the Family Violence Act 2018.

Accountability & Leadership

The Village church recognises that all Church Workers/Leaders/Staff have a full and active part to play in protecting children and young people from harm. Everyone has the responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries and safe working practices, have knowledge and awareness of the indicators of neglect and abuse, whether actual or potential and to report any concerns or suspicions or allegations immediately in line with this policy.

All Church Workers/Leaders/Staff are expected to familiarise themselves with this document and actively implement it. This will ensure that any concerns, suspicions or allegations raised are taken seriously, and dealt with appropriately.

Role of the Children/Youth Ministry Coordinators

The Children's Ministry coordinator and the Youth Ministry Coordinator are responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy for their respective ministry.

The role of the Children/Youth Ministry Coordinators is it :

- Ensure that the needs and rights of children and young people come first as the safety and wellbeing of each child and young person is the paramount consideration in all circumstances
- Ensure that the protection of children and young people is a key focus within The Village Church and that appropriate protocols, procedures and training are in place.
- Adopt, implement, comply with, review, and enforce this policy in consultation with Eldership.
- Advise and support Church Workers/Leaders/Staff and, where appropriate, make any referrals to Oranga Tamariki and/or the NZ Police.
- Ensure that all allegations are managed appropriately.
- Ensure that no investigation occurs without appropriate consultation and a decision whether a response from Oranga Tamariki and /or the police is required.
- Ensure that all Church Workers/Leaders/Staff are recruited and delegated responsibilities in accordance with the guidelines identified in this policy.

Role of The Village Church Eldership

The Role of The Village Church Eldership is responsible to:

- Ensure that the needs and rights to children and young people come first as the safety and wellbeing of each child and young person is the paramount consideration in all circumstances.
- Support the Children/Youth Ministry Coordinators to ensure that all allegations are managed appropriately.
- Ensure that no investigation occurs without appropriate consultation and a decision whether a response from organa tamarki or the Police is required.

Expectations around Child Protection

Church workers/Leaders/Staff must, at all times, work for the physical, social, educational, moral and spiritual well-being of the children and young people in their care and contact.

Church workers/Leaders/Staff should maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be misinterpreted by others. Church Workers/Leaders/Staff who work with children and young people must act in a way that is considered to be safe practice. This includes :

- Avoiding situations where they are alone with a child or young person
- Ensuring that they are visible to others when with a child or young person
- Using an 'open-door' Policy where possible

- Treating all children and young people with respect at all times regardless of their gender, race, religion, political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, sexual orientation, family and social background, and culture, economic status or criminal background.
- Avoiding circumstances where their behaviour (verbal or physical) may be misinterpreted as hostile, suggestive, inappropriate, offensive, or neglectful.
- Promoting an environment where children and young people feel safe and comfortable in the care and contact of The Village Church
- Not transporting a child or young person, other than their own, alone at any time other than in an emergency situation
- Not removing any child or young person from The Village Church without prior written consent from the child or young person's parent or caregiver-except in an emergency situation.
- Acting swiftly to ensure that any perceived risk to a child or young person is immediately reported
- Monitoring visitors to The Village Church at all times
- Not taking , or displaying, images of children and young people unless they have consent to do so from the child or young person's parents or caregivers, and the child or young person themselves is appropriate
- Ensuring that all interaction and communication with children and young people, by whatever means, is transparent and open to scrutiny

Safe Recruitment of Church Workers/Leaders/Staff

- Ensure recruiting processes for church workers/Leaders/Staff have the safety, well being and care of children/young people as first priority
- Carry out Police Vetting checks on all leaders before appointing them.
- Ensure that each Church Worker/Leader/Staff had read and understood this policy before commencing working with children and young people.

The ministry coordinators will:

- Ensure that leaders and visitors are visible in all activities they perform with children.
- Ensure that preschool aged children are dismissed directly into the care of their parents/caregivers or designated responsible person on a Sunday.
- Maintain and increase team awareness of how to prevent, recognise and respond to abuse.

The Leaders will:

- Always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Familiarise themselves with this policy.
- Respond appropriately to a child who initiates physical contact for reassurance or comfort.
- Touching should not be initiated to gratify adult needs.

- Ensure that they are not left alone with a child or youth at any point, and are always within sight of another person, including in the car.
- Document and inform the ministry coordinator of any events that could be misconstrued.

Toileting and Nappy Changing

The Leaders will:

- Direct any nappy changing back to parents.
- Keep themselves accountable to the room leader by notifying them before they take a child to the toilet and again on return.
- At all the other times remain out in the hallway in plain sight.

Transport

- Cars used for transporting children must be legally compliant in regards to WOF and registration.
- Leaders are expected to operate those vehicles with sensibility and self-control, setting a good example.
- Drivers must hold a full drivers licence if required to provide transport.
- Children under the age of 7 must be in age appropriate child restraints.

Procedure for Sunday programs

- Sunday Programs are designed to be provided without the presence of a child or young person's parent or caregiver. Safe working practises will be followed at all times to protect children and young people from the risk of inappropriate behaviour from Church Workers/Leaders/Staff, and any other adult or child or young person present.
- Where a parent or caregiver is not present, only Church Workers/Leaders/Staff whose role it is to provide care for a child or young person may do so.
- Any visitors to a Sunday program must be approved by the appropriate Church Worker/Leader/Staff.
- Where possible, 'open-door' policies should be used for all spaces and no Church Worker/Leader/Staff, or visitors, should be left alone with a child or young person.
- Except in emergency situations, no child or young person is to be removed from a Sunday program by anyone other than the child or young person's parents or caregivers without express written permission.
- A minimum of 2 leaders will be maintained at all times with subsequent ratios of adults to children as follows:

Programme	Age	Ratio Adult:Child
Little Lights	18 months - 3 years	1:5
Sparx Jr	3 -5 years	1:8
Sparx	School years 2-6	1:10
Plug	School years 7/8	1:10

- If the numbers of rostered leaders fall below these ratios parents will be asked to stay for the session to ensure appropriate supervision. Parents who have not been police vetted will operate in a supervised capacity and are not to leave the classroom environment with any children except for their own.
- At the conclusion of Sunday programmes preschool aged children (Little Lights, Sparx Junior) will only be dismissed directly into the care of their parents/caregivers.
- School aged children will be dismissed at the end of the program to find their parents & caregivers, as arranged.
- Young people will be dismissed at the end of their program to find their parents or caregivers. If an event is happening off site dismissal will be as arranged in advance of the event.
- In the case where a parent needs to be contacted while the main service is still operating then a phone call will be made to the parent or the child will be returned to the parent in the service.

Process for Accusations of Misconduct

Allegations, suspicions, or complaints of abuse against Church Workers/Leaders/Staff will be taken seriously and reported directly to the Ministry Coordinators who, along with The Village Church Elders, will deal with them immediately, sensitively and expediently.

When there are suspicions of abuse by a Church Worker/Leader/Staff, both the Church Worker/Leader/Staff and the child or young person's rights are to be upheld. This means that the safety of the child or young person is of first concern, and that the Church Worker/Leader/Staff must be given the opportunity to seek access to legal and professional advice.

In the event of an accusation of misconduct...

The Church Worker/Leader/Staff will:

- Immediately notify the Ministry Coordinator if they observe signs of child abuse or if anyone reports any suspicions of child abuse.
- Maintain confidentiality about details of any allegation.
- Be entitled to anonymity as the reporter.

Ministry Coordinators will:

- Always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate sharing information only with the parties required to be involved in investigation.
- Take seriously and fully investigate any reports of incidents, allegations or suspicions of child abuse within 24 hours.
- Provide a full and objective written record to the designated Elder.

Designated Elder will:

- Where appropriate, seek the assistance of Oranga Tamariki, or police to conduct a full investigation.
- Ensure full cooperation with Oranga Tamariki and the Police in their investigations and assessments.
- If the Police decide to undertake a criminal investigation, the Church Worker/Leader/Staff will be suspended until the outcome of the investigation is known.
- Inform parents of the outcome in consultation with Police or Oranga Tamariki advisors.

- Ensure when making any decisions, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is the paramount consideration.

Implementation

Ministry Coordinators will:

- Provide annual leader training around keeping children/young people and themselves safe.
- Provide regular ongoing support for church workers/ leaders/staff.
- Make all new church workers/leaders/staff aware of this Policy Document, and require annual review for the purpose of familiarisation.
- Keep Parents informed as necessary including posting documents for public access on The Village Church website.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it is kept up to date with changes that may have been made to legislation, related policies and procedures, and in light of operational experience. The overall responsibility for this policy rests with The Village Church Children’s Ministry Coordinators and Eldership Team.

Authorised by:	Brennon Lanigan
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