



**CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
OF TOOWOOMBA (Inc.)**

One of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

**CHILD SAFETY
&
PROTECTION POLICY**

Keeping Kids Safe

CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT	3
-------------------------------	---

1. CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION

1.1. Code of Practice for team members	4
1.2. Supervision and Safety of Children	4
1.3. Reporting Unsafe Practices.....	5
1.4. Discipline of Children.....	5
1.5. Confidentiality and Privacy	5

2. CHILD ABUSE ISSUES

2.1. Recognising Child Abuse	6
2.2. Recording Allegations.....	7
2.3. Procedures for Notification	7

3. IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

3.1 ChildSafe Coordinator	8
3.2 Selection of team members.....	8
3.2 Compliance with the Blue Card system.....	9
3.4 Training of team members.....	10
3.5 Appointment of team leaders.....	10
3.6 Breaches of Policy.....	11
3.7 Review of Policy	11

ANNEXURES:

- A – Code of Practice;
- B – Permission to Proceed forms;
- C – Incident Report;
- D – Team member Application Form;
- E – Team member Role Statement;
- F – Team leader Safety and Care Agreement;
- G – Parent Information Notice;

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Christian Reformed Church of Toowoomba is committed to upholding the following fundamental principles:

- Children are made in God's image and, as such, are entitled to a fundamental respect for their personhood.
- All adults have a God-given responsibility to care for children and to protect them from any kind of abuse, as well as to positively promote their welfare.
- Recognising a child's vulnerability to harm, we, as God's people, are to uphold the welfare of children and to protect them in all situations and environments to the best of our God-given ability.

Together with the above fundamentals, the following additional principles underpin child safety and protection and the development of individual church policies, practices and procedures:

- The value of the family is to be respected but not to the detriment of the wellbeing of the child at risk.
- The rights of families are also to be acknowledged and respected throughout the processes that arise from notification of child abuse.
- Church leaders, who have access to information regarding suspected or disclosed child abuse, must observe appropriate confidentiality in relation to the matter.
- All persons involved in the notification procedure must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Investigation of concerns about child abuse and neglect should not be undertaken by the leaders but referred to the Police and/or the Department of Child Safety (and CRCA National Sexual Abuse Complaints Committee, where applicable).

The Christian Reformed Church of Toowoomba has adopted the **ChildSafe** SP3 Safety Management System and is committed to its proper implementation.

All church members involved in children's ministries are required to comply with the terms of this policy and the ChildSafe SP3 Safety Management System.

For consistency with ChildSafe, this document uses the term "**team member**" to describe anyone involved as a leader in children's ministry in our Church (eg. a Sunday School teacher). The term "**team leader**" is used to describe the team member who is given overall responsibility by the church Session for a particular ministry (eg Cadet Head Counsellor).

PART 1 – CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION

1.1 CODE OF PRACTICE FOR TEAM MEMBERS

Every person involved in ministry must treat the safety and care of children as paramount. The Christian Reformed Church of Toowoomba adopts the Code of Practice set out in the Child Safe SP3 team members guide (**see Annexure A**). Each member involved in ministry must comply with this Code of Practice.

1.2 SUPERVISION AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN

Making arrangements for the proper supervision and safety of children is one of the most effective ways of minimising opportunities for children to suffer harm whilst in the care of church personnel.

1.2.1 General Supervision of Children

- Children must be supervised at all times and not left unsupervised at any venue whether indoors or outdoors, especially any activity using potentially dangerous equipment. Team members should know at all times where children are and what they are doing.
- Team members must be satisfied that helpers and adults who accompany activities are fully competent and experienced to do so.
- Each program must have a clear arrangement for receiving children into the care of team members (eg. sign-in/out procedure). No child/children should be left unattended after an activity is finished – Team members should wait until **ALL** children have been picked up by parents or an authorised care-giver.
- As a general rule the ratio of team members to participants in any particular group should not be less than 1:8, that is at least 1 adult team member for every 8 children. For younger children this ratio may need to be less.

1.2.2 Programs and Activities

- Reference to a **program** is to a particular ministry of the church (eg. Sunday School) or a significant part thereof (eg. A Cadet Camp). Reference to an **activity** is to a particular event or activity being conducted by a ministry (eg. A swimming trip).
- All programs and activities should include preparation, planning and a schedule of the events for the children and young people involved.
- For all programs and activities the Permission to Proceed forms (**Annexure B**) must be completed prior to commencing the program each year or prior to the activity, in accordance with the procedures set out in the Child Safe SP3 Safety Management System. A program or activity cannot commence without the granting of permission to proceed by the ChildSafe Coordinator or a member of Session.

1.3 REPORTING INCIDENTS AND UNSAFE PRACTICES

- All equipment used must be regularly checked with any faults which could cause injury reported. A “**Maintenance Register**” is located in the church foyer, and any member of the church, and team members in particular, who become aware of any item which requires maintenance shall make a dated, signed entry, outlining the maintenance needs.
- In the case of an incident occurring in which a child or leader is injured, becomes unwell or safety is in any way compromised, including “near-misses”, an **incident report (Annexure C)** shall be completed and provided to the ChildSafe Coordinator and the Session. Guidelines on incident reporting are contained in the ChildSafe SP3 Safety Management Program and should be followed.
- Any person who has reasonable concerns relating to **unsafe practices** (whether concerning equipment, facilities, leadership practice or otherwise) should report the matter immediately to the team leader for that particular ministry. If, in the view of the person reporting, appropriate action has not been taken, he/she shall report the matter to Session in writing.

1.4 DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN

In the event that a child’s behaviour requires correction either for their own safety and well-being or that of the group members, it is important that the disciplinary action be appropriate to the occasion and not, in itself, perpetrating an abuse on the child. The following standards are basic for good practice:

- Children should be given clear guidelines and expectation of their behaviour.
- Disciplinary action shall not be taken without the permission of the parents **and** the team leader.
- Physical force or restraint should not be used unless the child’s safety or the safety of another child is at risk.
- If isolation of a child is an option, the child must be within eyesight supervision of a leader at all times.
- Disciplinary action should not be punitive, humiliating or aggressive.

1.5 CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

All leaders must maintain appropriate confidentiality. Confidentiality means to hold information in trust and to share it with others only in the interest of the person involved, with their permission, or in order to seek consultation with another professional. Information may also be shared without violating confidentiality in order to protect others from harm. Confidentiality is not intended to protect abusers from being held accountable.

PART 2 - CHILD ABUSE ISSUES

2.1 RECOGNISING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Child Abuse can come in many forms including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Team members should be aware of the types and signs of abuse which are outlined in the ChildSafe SP3 Safety Management System materials.

In recognising indicators of abuse and neglect, it is not necessary to prove that abuse or neglect has occurred or who is responsible for it. However a notification must be made on “reasonable grounds”. Reasonable grounds relate to the facts of concern and the nature and seriousness of the allegations, mindful of the child’s age and circumstances.

There are various ways team members may become aware of abuse, such as:

- a child discloses (tells you he/she has been physically or sexually abused);
- someone else tells you (another child, sibling, relative, friend of the family);
- observation of the child’s behaviour or knowledge of children generally leads to suspicion.

The actions of team members who are told of abuse should be guided by the following key points:

- stay calm – do not overreact;
- be a good listener;
- do not inquire into details of the abuse;
- do not interrogate the child;
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling someone;
- do not promise to keep a secret;
- report to one of the pastors or elders;
- record in writing as soon as possible what was said (in the child’s words).

More information is set out in the ChildSafe SP3 Team Members Guide.

Under no circumstance should any individual or the church itself attempt to deal with the problem of sexual or physical abuse alone. It is **not** the responsibility of the church to investigate and collect evidence in suspected cases of child abuse. These are the responsibilities of the Police and the Department of Child Safety.

When confronted with disclosures or suspicions of abuse or neglect your first responsibility is to ensure the child is safe and not in any immediate danger. Then follow the notification procedures below.

2.2 RECORDING ALLEGATIONS

When an allegation of abuse has been made, the team member must record the details in an Incident Report. The following suggested information to be recorded is intended as a guide only (Do not interrogate the child to gain any of the following information):

- name and address and phone of the child you are concerned about;
- the nature of the alleged injury/abuse;
- your reason for suspecting that the child has been abused;
- date and time when the abuse occurred;
- any other information you consider relevant;
- has anyone been consulted – if so, who?

2.3 PROCEDURES FOR NOTIFICATION

If a child discloses information about sexual or physical abuse, or you suspect such abuse is happening, the child's protection and welfare is your number one priority. In responding to disclosure of abuse the following guidelines shall apply:

- If a child discloses sexual or physical abuse to a team member or any person within the church group, the Police should be informed at once, preferably by the person to whom the disclosure was made. The Police should be left to investigate the claim.
- Ascertain whether the child is at risk or in danger – take action to ensure that the child is safe.
- In all cases where a child discloses abuse, the child's parents (if not the perpetrator) must be notified, preferably in consultation with the Police.
- In all cases where a child discloses abuse, this must be reported to a Pastor or Elder.
- If there is any uncertainty that what the child has disclosed is abuse, involve a Pastor or Elder.
- Since it is important that confidentiality be maintained, if possible the person reporting the incident should be the person to speak to the Police and to a Pastor or Elder.
- **It is imperative that you do not contact the perpetrator.**

In other situations not involving physical or sexual abuse the matter should be reported to a Pastor or Elder. In those situations, where a team member forms a reasonable suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm AND does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from the harm, then the matter should be reported to the Department of Child Safety.

Consideration should also be given by Session to referring families in need of assistance to some form of support service such as the Department of Child Safety's 'Family and Child Connect' service.



PART 3 – IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

3.1 CHILDSAFE COORDINATOR

This is the person appointed by the church Session as the person responsible, along with all members of Session, for implementing the ChildSafe SP3 Safety Management System.

The ChildSafe Coordinator is authorised, along with all members of Session, to provide training and advice to team members and team leaders, consider risk assessments and safety plans, grant permission to proceed, receive incident reports and notifications of abuse or unsafe practices, and provide input to Session in dealing with complaints and breaches of policy.

The ChildSafe Coordinator shall also be responsible for ensuring a **register** of team members working with children is maintained. This register is to include the blue card status of each team member and the expiry date of each blue card.

To avoid doubt it is stated that it is the responsibility of Session to ensure compliance with this policy and legislative requirements and to deal with complaints and breaches.

3.2 SELECTION OF TEAM MEMBERS

Regardless of standing, all persons are to undergo these procedures.

3.2.1 Application and Appointment of team members

Before anyone is able to commence working in children's ministry in the church they must be appointed as a team member by the Session. They shall be required to fill out an application form (**Annexure D**).

3.2.2 References and Interview

If the applicant is applying to be a team member for the first time in this church, two references will be required from their previous church and/or from someone who can vouch for the applicant's experience with children. At least two representatives appointed by the Session will conduct an interview at which information contained in the application form can be further explored. This interview must also refer to this Policy and ensure that the person has the ability and commitment required for the position.

3.2.3 Defining the team member's Role

When a team member is appointed to a particular ministry, they shall be given a clear description or outline of what their role is, and whom they are accountable to. This shall include the information contained in **Annexure E** and such other information that is relevant to their particular ministry.

3.2.4 Supervision

Any person appointed to be a team member for the first time, shall have a mentor for the first 6 months. The mentor will be the team leader of the group, unless someone else is appointed by Session. Thereafter Session shall conduct regular appraisals, preferably annually, of all leaders of children's and youth ministry.

3.2.5 Junior Leaders

A communicant member who is not yet 18 years of age can serve as a junior leader in a children's / youth ministry role. They are not required to hold a "Blue Card" until they turn 18 years of age, but are still required to fill out an application form as above. It must be remembered that junior leaders are themselves children and require supervision. They cannot be counted for the purposes of the number of team members required to supervise a program or activity.

3.3 COMPLIANCE WITH QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT BLUE CARD SYSTEM

3.3.1 Blue Card Requirement and Responsibility

All people over 18 years of age who are working with children must hold a valid blue card and positive notice from the Queensland Government before they commence involvement in children's ministries. The ChildSafe Coordinator is responsible for managing blue cards within the Church;

3.3.2 Working with Children screening form

Along with the Leadership Application, a prospective team member must complete the Queensland Government approved Blue Card Application / Screening Form. This form must be signed in the presence of the ChildSafe Coordinator or a member of Session who must sight the relevant identification documents required by the form and warn the applicant that it is an offence for a 'disqualified person' to sign a blue card application or renewal form;

3.3.3 Blue Card Register

A **register** shall be kept of all persons involved in children's and youth ministry which shall include:

- whether or not the person requires a blue/exemption card;
- the type of application/blue card (e.g. paid or volunteer) or exemption card;
- when the person applied and/or the date of issue of the positive notice and blue/exemption card;
- the blue card/exemption card number and the expiry date of the blue card;
- the renewal date;
- whether a negative notice has been issued;
- any change in status to a blue/exemption card or exemption card (such as a change in police information, or the cancellation or suspension of a blue/exemption card);
- where there is a change in police information, the date Blue Card Services was informed;

- where a person leaves the church and the date Blue Card Services was informed, and
- any change to the person's personal information, including the date they informed Blue Card Services.

3.3.4 Blue Cards from other organisations

If a person already holds a Blue Card the card and positive notice must be sighted and the details entered in the register. An *Authorisation to Confirm a Valid Card/Application* must be completed and lodged with Blue Card Services.

3.3.5 Changes in information

Team members must advise the ChildSafe Coordinator AND the Session of any change in their police information. Any such changes must be reported to Blue Card Services by lodging a *Change in Police Information Notification*. These forms are available from the Queensland Government website.

3.3.6 Negative notices and events

A team member shall immediately cease involvement in children's ministry in any of the following circumstances:

- the team member receives a negative notice or is a known disqualified person, or
- the team member has their blue card or exemption card cancelled or suspended, or
- the team member has their blue card application withdrawn, or
- a notification in relation to a serious change in criminal history is received from Blue Card Services.

In those instances the Session should also consider whether the person should be dealt with under the National Sexual Abuse Complaints Committee high-risk individuals protocol.

3.4 TRAINING OF TEAM MEMBERS

Team members who work with children are a valuable resource to the church. All team members shall be required to undertake appropriate induction, which must include ChildSafe SP3 Team Members training and training in the content and operation of this Policy. A register should be kept of which team members have completed which training.

3.5 APPOINTMENT OF TEAM LEADERS

Team leaders are required to undergo extra training consistent with their added responsibilities as set out in the ChildSafe SP3 Safety Management System. Team leaders will be required to complete a Safety and Care Agreement form prior (**Annexure F**) to their appointment by Session as a team leader.

3.5 BREACHES

3.5.1 Responsibility

All team members are responsible for the implementation of this policy and reporting any breaches of this policy. A **breach** is any action or inaction by any member of the Church that fails to comply with the terms of this policy;

3.5.2 Reporting

If any person becomes aware of a breach, or suspected breach, of this policy that person should immediately report the breach to the ministry team leader who shall in turn report the breach to the ChildSafe Coordinator or a member of the Session. If the breach, or suspected breach, involves the ministry team leader, the person should report the breach directly to the ChildSafe Coordinator or a member of Session;

3.5.4 Dealing with breaches

If the breach is a minor breach the ChildSafe Coordinator or member of Session may counsel the team member involved. If the breach is a major breach, or repeated minor breach, the team member shall be asked to provide a written report to the Session providing an account of how the breach occurred and what steps are to be taken to remedy the breach and prevent it from re-occurring.

3.5.5 Action on major breaches

In the event of a major breach, or a repeated minor breach, the Session may take what other action it considers appropriate in the circumstances, including removing the team member from their position.

3.6 REVIEW

3.6.1 Annual Review

At least once annually the Session shall review all aspects of the contents and implementation of this policy, taking into account any feedback from team members, parents and children.

3.6.2 Incident Review

After each reported incident the Session shall review the contents and implementation of this policy to ensure its continued efficacy.

3.6.3 Information for parents

Session shall keep parents informed of changes to this policy and shall provide all parents of children attending programs with a copy of the Parents Information Notice (**Annexure G**).