

HR-00 Child Protection Strategy

CHILD PROTECTION STRATEGY

1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 The safety and welfare of children is of paramount concern to the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland (the Society). The Society's Child Protection Strategy arises out of the Society's Child Protection & Wellbeing Policy and is part of an overall Child Protection Framework that aims to assist Society Representatives, consultants and contractors to implement best practice that minimises the risk of harm to children and promotes their participation and wellbeing.
- 1.2 Society Representatives, consultants and contractors must, at all times, treat all children with dignity and respect and must actively promote, in word and deed, every child's right to feel safe and cared for. Society Representatives, consultants and contractors must not take part in or tolerate any form of abuse, grooming, or bullying of children or any form of behaviour which challenges the safety and wellbeing of children.
- 1.3 All child protection action arising out of this Strategy, including the reporting of concerns, is aimed at:
- Protecting the child from harm
 - Preventing harm from reoccurring
 - Promoting the best possible outcome for the child, including addressing any ongoing need that they or their family may have for assistance
 - Partnering with families, caregivers or other care systems, including community agencies and statutory agencies, to ensure that the child is no longer at risk
- 1.4 The Strategy also supports the rights and welfare of all Society members, volunteers and staff and encourages their involvement in creating and maintaining a safe, aware and welcoming environment for all.

2 SCOPE

- 2.1 Whilst all Society programs and activities may not involve regular contact with children by Society Representatives, consultants or contractors, it is the decision of the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland's State Council that all Society Representatives, programs and activities will be subject to this Child Protection Strategy.

The procedures outlined in this Strategy apply to St Vincent de Paul Society Representatives, consultants and contractors, whilst working or operating from any Society controlled entities and/or workplaces including work conducted through visitation.

3 DEFINITIONS

Child – any person under the age of 18.



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Child Abuse – is an act or omission which endangers a child’s physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident, but usually takes place over time.

Conference - a Conference is a group of members who come together to fulfil the Mission of the Society in accordance with the Rule. A Conference may be established within any community, such as a parish, town, suburb, school, university, workplace, ethnic or social group.

Council – a group of Conference, Regional and Diocesan presidents who meet to facilitate joint action, communication and provide resources to assist the working of Conferences and the works of the Society.

Disclosure - a disclosure is when a child tells someone that he or she feels unsafe or has been harmed. A disclosure can also be made by an adult, including parents, carers, or any person in contact with the child, where that person reveals that they believe a child has been harmed or is likely to be harmed.

Member – a volunteer who joins a Conference and attends regular meetings. A member takes part in the work of the Society, providing assistance through charitable works such as visitation. An associate member is connected to the Conference and involved in the work of the Society, but does not attend meetings. A volunteer member is an unpaid person assisting with activities undertaken by the Society, including Special Work programs and Centres of Charity.

Special Works – programs established where a Conference or Council identifies a special need which cannot be satisfied within the normal scope of the Conference or Council activity.

Staff – paid Society employee.

State Council – the governing entity operating as a board to oversee the mission and operations of the Society.

Society Child Protection Officer - designated Society Representative responsible for handling questions, concerns or reports about a child’s safety and/or wellbeing.

Society Representative – all members, associate members, volunteer members, staff; not including consultants and contractors.

Society Activity – any form of work or program organised by Society Representatives. For example: Conferences, visitation, Centres of Charity, Special Works.

Society Child Related Activity - Any Society activity that is organised by Society Representatives specifically for children. For example: Buddies Days, Kids Camps, VoRTCS, Homework Clubs.

Society Activity Leader – the Society representative responsible for leading the Society activity or Society child related activity, for example: Conference President, Vinnies Centres of Charity Store Manager, Tutoring Program Coordinator, Kids Camp Supervisor.

Centres of Charity – Vinnies Stores/ Retail operations selling pre loved goods to the general public. The surpluses from the retail operations are used to fund the works of the Society.



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Stores also provide emergency assistance in the form of material aid to those referred by conferences.

4 CHILD ABUSE AND CHILD PROTECTION

- 4.1 Every person has a moral and legal responsibility to prevent and report suspected child abuse.
- 4.2 Society policy requires that any Society Representatives, who reasonably believe a child is at risk of being harmed, or has been harmed, must immediately follow the Society's Child Protection Reporting Process.

5 TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

- 5.1 **Physical abuse** - occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child. The abuse can take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures. This does not mean reasonable discipline, though it may result from excessive or inappropriate discipline.
- 5.2 **Emotional abuse** - occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected or frightened by threats. The abuse can involve name calling, being put down or continual coldness from a parent or caregiver to the extent where the behaviour of the child is disturbed or their emotional development is at serious risk of being impaired.
- 5.3 **Exposure to Domestic Violence** – occurs when children witness or experience the chronic domination, coercion, intimidation and victimisation of one person by another within a domestic relationship. Domestic violence may occur by physical, sexual or emotional means.
- 5.4 **Neglect** – occurs when there is a failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical attention or care, to the extent that the health, safety or development of the child is significantly impaired or placed at risk.
- 5.5 **Sexual abuse** - occurs when a child is used by an adult, another child or adolescent for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification. These can be contact or non-contact acts, including grooming by perpetrators, inappropriate touching, penetrative abuse, exposure to pornography or accessing child pornography.
- 5.6 **Grooming** – occurs when communication or conduct is linked to the intention of facilitating the involvement of a child less than 16 years of age in sexual behaviour with an adult. Indicators include but are not limited to:
 - Developing special relationships with, favouring or giving gifts to a child
Inappropriate interactions with children either in person or via forms of media and electronic devices
 - Asking a child to keep a secret of any aspect of their relationship
 - Testing of or ignoring professional boundaries or rules



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6 CHILD PROTECTION OFFICERS

- 6.1 The Society will maintain an appropriate structure and network of Child Protection Officers to handle questions, concerns or reports about a child's safety.
- 6.2 The Society will provide its Child Protection Officers with mandatory Child Protection Awareness Training.
- 6.3 A Senior Child Protection Officer will be nominated and responsible for development and review of the overall child protection framework.

7 RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING OF SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES

The Society takes the recruitment and screening of all Society Representatives seriously. The Society's Screening & Suitability Policy requires that a National Criminal History Check be undertaken for all Society Representatives upon joining to ensure that all persons involved in Society activities, including those whom the Society assists, are protected and to ensure that the organisation meets legislative and governmental requirements. This policy also requires all Society Representatives over the age of 18 who have direct 'non-incident' contact with children to possess a valid Queensland Working with Children Check (Blue Card) which registers them as the Society's representative with the Public Safety Business Agency. It is the responsibility of Society Representatives to renew their Blue Card when it expires. Further information can be sought from the Society's Screening & Suitability Policy.

8 SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES INDUCTION

- 8.1 It is important that all people involved in the Society understand that the Society is committed to being a child safe organisation. As part of their induction, Society Representatives will be informed of the basics of this Strategy, given access to a copy of this document and asked to acknowledge understanding of this Strategy.
- 8.2 Appropriate ongoing familiarisation and training will be provided by the Society's Child Protection Officers or delegated persons.

9 RELATED CHILD SAFETY LEGISLATION

The principal legislation underpinning this Strategy and other related legislation includes:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The UN Convention is the foundation for child protection across the globe. The fundamental principle is the recognition of children's rights as human rights. The Convention sets out a framework of minimum standards for the protection and wellbeing of children

Article 19 states "Parties shall protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse"

Principal Act:

Child Protection Act 1999

Other relevant Acts:



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Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000

Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2014

Public Guardian Act 2014

Family and Child Commission Act 2014

Education (General Provisions) Act 2006

Public Health Act 2005

Adoption of Children Act 1964

Family Law Act 1975

For more information on the legislative context of child protection in Queensland, visit the Legislation section of The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services website.

10 SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHILD RELATED ACTIVITIES

The Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities (see Attachment A) outlines to Society Representatives expected behaviours and appropriate boundaries when working with children and is part of the mandatory training provided before the Society Representative can work in any child related activities. All Society Representatives must seek clarification if needed to fully understand the Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities and must agree to abide by it at all times.

11 BREACH OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND STRATEGY OR SOCIETY CODE OF CONDUCT

Any breaches of the Child Protection & Wellbeing Policy, including this Strategy and the Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities, will result in action being taken. This may include:

- Meeting to discuss breach
- Written warnings
- Performance review
- Further education and training
- Suspension pending outcome of an investigation
- Termination of service within the organisation

12 CHILD SAFE PRACTICES FOR SOCIETY CHILD RELATED ACTIVITIES AND OTHER SOCIETY ACTIVITIES WHERE CHILDREN ARE PRESENT

12.1.1 Planning a new Society child related activity

Prior to commencing any new Society child related activity, Society representatives must submit a program plan and have it approved by the relevant Diocesan Executive Officer or State Youth Manager. Program plans are not required for repeat activities which have



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previously been approved (e.g. every time a Conference runs a Buddies Day, Kids Camp etc).

12.1.2 Society representatives who will be participating in the child related activity must meet all necessary training and screening requirements before the activity commences.

12.1.3 Every Society child related activity will have a handbook which outlines the specific operational structures and procedures used to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and Society representatives.

12.2 **Adult Society representative: child ratio for child related activities**

12.2.1 Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Society will provide at least one (1) Society adult representative to every four (4) children for all child related activities. The ratio for activities at either a pool, beach, river, lake or other body of water must be one Society adult representative to every two children.

12.2.2 Society Representatives must never be alone with a child, except in the case of professional counselling services provided by the Society to the child or children). Child Code of Conduct for Society child related activities

The Child Code of Conduct aims to assist children to develop positive and respectful relationships with each other and adults, whilst participating in Society child related activities. It also helps to keep them safe and happy by encouraging communication with Society representatives as needed. The Child Code of Conduct will be communicated to children participating in Society child related activities, for example: Kids Camps, SENSE Mentoring, Buddies Days and VoRTCS.

12.3 **Visitors at Society child related activities**

Any visitor to a child related activity must:

- Sign in & out with the Society Activity Leader
- Comply with the Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities
- Be accompanied by a Society representative who will actively supervise their interaction with children at all times
- Comply with the Society Activity Leader's requests, including leaving if asked to do so

12.4 **Images of children at Society child related activities**

Images (photo or video) may only be taken by approved Society representatives for purposes which are communicated to parents/guardians, with parent/guardian signed approval and in accordance with the Society's Media Policy. Images of children at a Society child related activity must not be kept on personal devices by Society representatives, or other child participants.

13 **RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE**

13.1 Children or adults who disclose should be listened to and supported by the Society representative receiving their disclosure.

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- 13.2 Where the disclosure is made by a child, the Society representative should take special care to:
- Listen and reassure
 - Maintain a calm appearance
 - Let the child use their own words and take the time the child needs to tell the Society representative
 - Thank the child for sharing and tell the child the Society representative believes them
 - Not make promises that they cannot keep, and tell the child that they will need to tell somebody else
 - Make detailed notes and report it
 - Recognise the limits of their role
- 13.3 Society Representatives must not investigate any disclosures or speak to any persons associated with the disclosure, unless requested to do so by any person or body responsible for investigating the disclosure.

14 REPORTING PROCESS

In order to promote the safety, health and wellbeing of all children, all Society representatives will deal with concerns, observations or disclosures as efficiently, consistently and sensitively as possible. In order to do this, Society Representatives should follow the Society Child Protection Reporting Process as outlined in this Strategy.

14.1 What should be reported to the Child Protection Officer?

14.1.1 Society Representatives should report reasonable concerns relating to:

- Indicators of abuse
- Indicators of grooming
- Breaches of the Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities

14.1.2 These include (but are not limited to):

- Any expression of concern from a child regarding their personal safety
- Suspicious bruising, cuts, fractures, burns
- Lack of food, clothing or place to sleep, which is impacting the child's ongoing health or wellbeing and the parents/guardians are unwilling or unable to provide for the child
- Regular and/or severe negative self-talk, unusually aggressive behaviour, overly compliant and fearful behaviour, overly anxious behaviour or regressive behaviour
- Persistent or significantly inappropriate discussion, writing or drawing about sexual activities, particularly sexual interest or information that is age-inappropriate
- Ongoing and unexplained health or wellbeing concerns such as tummy aches, headaches, crying or sensitivity



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- Disclosure of suicidal thoughts or plans
- Observations or disclosures relating to the grooming behaviour of any adult in contact with children, including any combination of special gifts, secrets, time alone together, special names or online contact
- Concerns about the actions or behaviour of any Society Representative, including suspected or confirmed breaches of the Society's Code of Conduct for child related activities

14.1.3 There are many indicators of child abuse. The presence of a single factor or even several factors does not prove that abuse has occurred. However, the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the occurrence of several indicators together, should alert a Society Representative to the possibility of child abuse.

For matters of significant or imminent risk to a child, reports should be forwarded to a Society Child Protection Officer within 24 hours. For matters of immediate and significant risk, where emergency services are needed, call 000.

14.2 How should it be reported?

14.2.1 **Contact your Society Child Protection Officer** to discuss the matter and seek advice. The only other person you may discuss your concerns with before you do this is your Activity Leader/Conference President. A Society Child Protection Officer is a trained Society Representative who is responsible for handling questions, concerns or reports about a child's safety or wellbeing. Contact your relevant Diocesan Central Council Office for the contact details of your regional Society Child Protection Officer.

Next

14.2.2 If after discussion with your Child Protection Officer, it is deemed necessary to progress the matter further, you will be asked to complete an internal Society Child Protection Report Form (Attachment B) which will be provided to you by your Society Child Protection Officer if you do not already have one. Your Child Protection Officer can help you fill out this form which needs to be returned within 24 hours.

Next

14.2.3 Your Society Child Protection Officer will get back to you about the action taken as a result of your report and whether a formal report has been made by the St Vincent de Paul Society to external child protection authorities.



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14.2.4 Once the report has been made to the relevant Society Child Protection Officer, a decision will be made by the Child Protection Officer, in consultation with the relevant Diocesan Executive Officer and Diocesan President, about how the concern will be handled. Any or all of the following may occur:

Assessment of severity of the report and risk to the child

- Interviews with necessary and appropriate parties
- Consultation with relevant Senior Manager/s, Chief Executive Officer and/or State President

14.2.5 If deemed appropriate the matter will be escalated and one or all of the following may occur:

- Further internal investigation
- A report to a Family and Child Connect Service (FACC)
- A report to the Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services
- A report to police

14.2.6 If, after consideration, the St Vincent de Paul Society has decided that the matter does not warrant reporting to external child protection authorities, you still have the right to report directly to the Department of Communities Child Safety Services, if you believe it is necessary.

All Society Child Protection Reports will be dealt with as a matter of importance to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child. Any and all concerns, observations or disclosures must be reported to the Relevant Society Child Protection Officer who will ascertain whether or not a formal Society Child Protection Report needs to be lodged with the Department. The only other person you may raise these matters with prior to contacting the Child Protection Officer is your direct Society Activity Leader.

For the name and contact details of your relevant Society Child Protection Officer, please contact your Diocesan or State Office.

14.3 Report Confidentiality

14.3.5 All reports, including the names of people involved and report details, will remain confidential. The Society Representatives making the report is only permitted to discuss the matter with the relevant Society Activity Leader and/or Society Child Protection Officer, unless otherwise directed by the Society Child Protection Officer.

14.3.6 During the investigation process, the Society Representative making the report may be directed by the Society Child Protection Officer to give further information relating to the reported concerns to the relevant authorities, including the Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services and police investigation units.



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14.4 Report Outcomes

Once a finding has been made one or more of the following will occur:

- No further action: report filed for reference
- Ongoing monitoring
- Further communication, education and/or training provided
- Performance review/disciplinary action for internal breaches
- Further Society support
- Referral to external support services
- Report made to the Department of Communities, Child Safety & Disability Services

All reports and supporting documentation will be forwarded to the State Child Protection Officer for approval and sign off.

14.5 Follow up and support for the people involved

14.5.5 The Society may refer the child and their family/guardians to appropriate external support or counselling services, if needed.

14.5.6 The Child Protection Officer will ensure debriefing with Society Representatives involved occurs as necessary, and will refer the Society Representative to appropriate external support or counselling services, if needed.

14.6 Report Storage

14.6.5 Reports will be retained and stored securely by the relevant Child Protection Officer receiving the report.

14.6.6 All files and reports will be securely archived and kept indefinitely.

14.6.7 Reports may be digitalised and stored in an online confidential document management system indefinitely.

15 CURRENT RELEVANT POLICIES:

This Strategy touches on the principles contained in a broad range of the Society's policies, such as:

- Screening & Suitability Policy
- Workplace Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Workplace Bullying Policy
- Media Policy
- Society Code of Conduct

All policies are available on VOLT or by contacting your Diocesan Central Council Office.



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16 REVIEW

16.2 This Strategy is subject to review every two years, from the date of implementation.

16.3 Any changes to relevant legislation or statutory requirements will result in immediate review.

16.4 Any Society Representative who wishes to make any comments about this policy may forward their suggestions to the Human Resources Manager.

17 FURTHER ASSISTANCE

Any Society Representative who requires assistance in understanding or interpreting this Strategy or its application, should first consult their Society activity leader. Should further advice or clarification be needed, they should contact their relevant Society Child Protection Officer, Chief Executive Officer or State President.



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APPENDIX A: GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A PROGRAM HANDBOOK/RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

The list below should be used as a planning tool for developing appropriate management strategies for the operation of Society child related activities:

- Purpose and nature of the activity
- Roles and responsibilities of Society representatives, children and parents/guardians involved with the activity
- Leadership and accountability
- Attendance commitment
- Ratios
- Visitors
- Code/s of Conduct
- Images
- Appropriate (and inappropriate) relationships between participants
- Movement in public areas and interaction with the public
- Attendance records and guardian handover
- Transport or drop off/pick up arrangements
- Toileting &/or showering
- First Aid & allergies
- Medicine storage and administration
- Assistance for children with special needs or disabilities
- Age appropriate activities
- Communication of information to children and parents/guardians
- Training for Society representatives
- Supervision of children during activities and breaks
- Minimum age of participants, including Society representatives who can supervise/lead
- Limiting public identification of children and the organisation
- Water safety and supervision
- Sun protection and other activity specific safety gear
- Extreme weather responses
- Evacuation procedures
- Lockdown procedures
- Mobile phones and devices (including cameras)



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- Internet access
- Sleeping arrangements
- Storage of personal property
- Bullying
- Appropriate physical, verbal, written, social media contact before, during and after the activity
- Behaviour management
- Wellbeing concerns
- Difficult or dangerous situations (including grief and loss, physical or verbal aggression and presence of weapons)
- Recognising and responding to indicators of abuse or grooming
- Participant enrolment and medical indemnity forms
- Incident report forms
- Privacy and record keeping
- Safe food handling
- Site visit and check (including access to water, boundaries and access by public)
- Occupational Health & Safety risk assessment (including checklist)
- Child protection risk assessment (including checklist)

