



SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Child Safe Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy reflects the Child Safe Standards mandated by the Victorian State Government in its response to the **Betrayal of Trust Inquiry** (the *2013 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations*).

The policy was drafted in January 2017 with the permission and support of documentation provided by the Professional Standards Office of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat.

Canonical Administrator:

Fr Patrick Mugavin

Parish Safeguarding Officer:

John Donegan

Drafted: January 2017

Ratified: See [Policy History](#)

Next review: February 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

The Western District Catholic Communities hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our parishes. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel.

The Church's social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. Indeed it was Jesus who, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, *'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'* (Mark 9:37)

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of the Western District Catholic Communities to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children in our parishes. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our parish environment, on site, online and in other locations used by Western District Catholic Communities.

This policy applies to all parish personnel, including parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

3. PRINCIPLES

The Catholic Church has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe.

The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety:

- The Western District Catholic Communities have zero tolerance of child abuse.
- All children are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our parish works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.

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- All adults in our parishes, including staff, clergy, volunteers, parishioners and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of children are based on honest respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, parishioners including children and contractors should be free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the Western District Catholic Community leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

4. DEFINITIONS

Child: A person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Child abuse includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
 - (i) a sexual offence
 - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (grooming)
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of:
 - (i) physical violence
 - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child.

Child safety encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

Child neglect: The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

Child physical abuse: Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours including shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer

(previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also included in this definition of “Child physical abuse.”

Child protection: Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm.

Child sexual abuse: Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person two or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them; the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion
- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors, or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Consensual sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not intended to be included in this definition of “Child sexual abuse.”

Mandatory Reporting: The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandatory persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners.

Reasonable Belief: When an adult is concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a ‘reasonable belief.’ A ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

5. POLICY COMMITMENTS

All children in the Western District Catholic Communities have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

Our commitment to our children

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our parishes.
- (b) We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- (d) We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe parish environment.

Our commitment to parents and carers

- (a) We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child- safety practice, policies and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on child safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

Our commitment to our staff parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy (called "staff" for the purposes of this policy)

- (a) We commit to providing all Western District Catholic Communities parish staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- (b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing.

This will include annual training in the principles and intent of this *Child Safe Policy* and our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#), and staff responsibilities to report concerns.

- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by Western District Catholic Community parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for Western District Catholic Community staff to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ORGANISATION ARRANGEMENTS

Everyone employed or volunteering within the parishes of the Western District Catholic Communities has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they.

The Western District Catholic Communities have allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows:

Guide to responsibilities of parish leadership

The priests and the Parish Pastoral Councils of the Western District Catholic Communities recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of, and shared responsibility for, child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that parish personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring our parishes meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Guide to responsibilities of parish staff

Responsibilities of parish staff include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and archdiocese processes if, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#).

Organisational arrangements

The Western District Catholic Communities have appointed a Parish Safeguarding Officer. The duties of the Parish Safeguarding Officer are as follows:

- Understand diocesan safeguarding policies and codes of conduct.
- Raise the profile of safeguarding in the Western District Catholic Communities and report concerns to the Coordinator for Professional Standards about the implementation of diocesan policies and codes of conduct.
- Assist the Western District Catholic Communities to develop protocols to ensure that organizations which use parish premises to conduct children's activities are compliant with the diocesan Working with Children Check and National Police Record Check policy.
- Assist parishioners in undertaking any training programs.
- Assist with proactive measures to safeguard children and vulnerable adults.
- Assist in the parish audits of safeguarding practices and the management of the implementation of statutory/policy requirements such as Working with Children Check cards.
- Ensure that child protection is standing agenda at parish council meetings.
- Liaise with the Diocesan Coordinator for Professional Standards in relation to all the above duties.

The Western District Catholic Communities have committed to a standing agenda item at all our parish pastoral council meetings which reviews child safety in our parishes.

7. EXPECTATIONS OF OUR PARISH STAFF – CHILD SAFE CODE OF CONDUCT

In the Western District Catholic Communities, we expect parish staff to proactively ensure the safety of children at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child in the parish environment. All staff must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and comply with all requirements. We have developed a *Child Safe Code of Conduct* which recognises the critical role that staff play in protecting the children in our care and establishes clear expectations of staff for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect. Each year, staff are required to review the *Code of Conduct* and sign a statement expressing their commitment to it.

Our Code also protects parish personnel through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.

Acceptable behaviours

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish council members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- adhering to this *Child Safe Policy* and upholding our *Child Safe Statement of Commitment* at all times;
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse and harm;
- treating everyone in the parish community with respect (modelling positive and respectful relationships and acting in a manner that sustains a safe pastoral environment);
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child have been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child;
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance policy towards discrimination);
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, by ensuring reasonable care is taken to cater for any additional needs being faced);
- ensuring as far as practicable that an adult is not alone with a child;
- reporting any allegations of child abuse to the police;
- understanding and complying with all reporting obligations as they relate to mandatory reporting and reporting under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.);
- reporting any child safety concerns to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or the priest in charge — or the Vicar General if the concern relates to a priest;

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- ensuring as quickly as possible that the child(ren) are safe, if an allegation of child abuse is made.

Unacceptable behaviours

Staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish council members must not:

- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse;
- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children);
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (for example, inappropriate sitting on laps);
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors or being alone with a child with no good cause);
- initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes;
- manage disruptive or unsafe behaviour by degrading or isolating a child. Corporal punishment is never acceptable. Physical restraint should only be used as a last resort or in an emergency;
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal details or social activities);
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children;
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children;
- discriminate against any child because of age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality, ethnicity or disability;
- have contact with a child or their family who is/are not socially related outside of the pastoral duties reasonably associated with the role description of the person's position in the parish without the knowledge and consent of the priest in charge or Parish Safeguarding Officer (exempt from this is accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street);
- have any online contact (including by social media, email, instant messaging etc.) with a child or their family who is/are not family or socially related (unless necessary e.g. by providing families with e-newsletters);
- use any digital communication channels/device to relay sensitive or confidential information;
- exchange personal contact details such as phone number, social networking sites or email addresses with a child or their family who is/are not family or socially related;

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- photograph or video a child without the consent of the parent or guardians;
- work with children while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs;
- consume illicit drugs on parish premises or at parish events.

8. CHILD SAFETY AND PARTICIPATION

In the Western District Catholic Communities, we actively encourage all children to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We discuss with our children what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents or carers, raise with us.

Parish staff liaise closely with the principals of our primary schools. Western District Catholic Community parish staff collaborate with our parish schools and aspire to achieve best practice in child safety and participation.

9. REPORTING AND RESPONDING

Our reporting protocol sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child in our parish environments needs protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

We work to ensure all children, families and staff know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

Our parishes have also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child. A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child needs protection from child abuse. Our parishes support and encourage that person to make a report to the police. Any person who makes a report in good faith in accordance with their reporting obligations (whether mandatory or discretionary) will be supported by the Western District Catholic Communities, and will not be penalised for making the report.

If a person is uncertain as to whether they should make a report to an external authority in relation to the safety of a child, they may speak to Child Safeguarding Officer or to one of the priests of the Western District Catholic Communities. If the allegation relates to a priest, the reporting person is encouraged to contact the Vicar General of the Diocese of Ballarat.

If an allegation is made against a parish staff member, the Western District Catholic Communities will follow the reporting procedure outlined in this policy and take all steps to ensure that the safety of the child is paramount. An initial step will involve the withdrawal of the accused person from active service.

The Western District Catholic Communities will cooperate with the directions of Victoria Police and/or the Department of Health and Human Services in relation to any investigation conducted by these authorities.

Dealing with breaches of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#)

The Western District Catholic Communities aim to deal with all reports of breaches of its [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) fairly and appropriately, and to act on the following principles:

- (a) Promoting a positive experience of the Church and creating a strong community of faith;
- (b) Preventing misconduct where this is possible;
- (c) Ensuring fair process for persons against whom allegations are made; and
- (d) Dealing effectively with any allegations which are substantiated, including responding compassionately to anyone who has been affected.

A flow chart setting out how and to whom to make reports may be found on page 7.

What should you report?

You may come across possible breaches of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#), or matters that cause you concern, in any number of ways. These might include:

- (a) A disclosure made to you by a child;
- (b) Observing events that cause you to form an objectively reasonable belief that a child is being harmed or abused, or is at risk of being harmed or abused (whether by a family member or by another person); or
- (c) Being present and witnessing an event or incident.

Alternatively, an incident may occur during an activity you are responsible for, such as:

- (a) A child being lost;
- (b) A child being injured; or
- (c) A medical emergency.

Regardless of the way in which an issue arises, you should always report circumstances that cause you concern and you should certainly always report:

- (a) Any material breach of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#);
- (b) Any incident in which a child is harmed or goes missing;
- (c) Any emergency situation including a medical emergency;
- (d) Any hazard or risk of harm to a child that is not being adequately addressed;

- (e) Any allegation of sexual misconduct;
- (f) Any disclosure by a child, or an objectively reasonable belief you have formed, that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse of any kind;
- (g) Any allegation of violence inflicted by an adult upon a child;
- (h) Any allegation in which an adult has been under the influence of drugs (illicit or misused medication) or alcohol while responsible for children;
- (i) Any incident in which a child has been harmed or injured (either physically or psychologically) or is at risk of harm or injury;
- (j) Any allegation of conduct which is or might be unlawful; and
- (k) Any conduct which would or might give rise to a mandatory requirement to report under the *Children, Youth and Families Act* or the *Crimes Act*.

If you are not sure whether to report a matter, please contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer or the priest in charge.

Who may make and investigate a report?

Any person may make a report. However, if an allegation involves sexual or other abuse of a child you should not investigate the matter yourself, or raise it with parents/guardians or the alleged abuser directly. You should report the matter using the procedures set out in this policy.

How can a report be made?

If you would like any guidance about how to report a breach of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) or a matter of concern, please contact the Parish Safeguarding Officer. The process for reporting and dealing with any concerns or breaches of the [Code of Conduct](#) will vary depending on the type of conduct and who is responsible for the conduct.

Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict the right or the legal obligation of any person to report any matter to Victoria Police or other authorities.

Reporting criminal breaches of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#)

Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence. If a person is concerned about an immediate risk to a child's safety, the person must phone 000 as soon as practicable.

A report must also be made to the Bishop and to the Victorian Director of Professional Standards in accordance with the protocols established under *Towards Healing* which have been established by the Australian Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious of Australia. These protocols guide all responses to allegations of sexual misconduct by any priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, and religious and lay persons working and volunteering within the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat.

The role of the Victorian Director of Professional Standards and the procedures that will be followed upon the receipt of a complaint can be located in the *Towards Healing* document at www.catholic.org.au/professional-standards/towards-healing.

The Bishop of Ballarat may be called on 03 5337 7111. The Victorian Director of Professional Standards may be called on 1800 816 030.

Mandatory reporters

Some professionals (including teachers, doctors and police) are required by law to contact the Child Protection Unit of the Department of Health and Human Services when they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer criminal abuse. This report must be made as soon as practicable, and after every occasion where he or she becomes aware of a further reasonable grounds for belief.

Discretionary reporters

Other members of the parish community who form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer criminal abuse, are not required by law to contact the Department of Health and Human Services, but they are encouraged to disclose that information.

The Department of Health and Human Services may be called on 131 278.

Reporting non-criminal breaches of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#)

All matters other than those within the purview of the Victorian Director of Professional Standards should be reported in the first instance to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or to the priest in charge (unless the matter involves a priest, in which case see below).

Any medical emergency, a missing child, or any other emergency situation should be reported in the first instance to the appropriate authorities (such as police, fire or ambulance by dialling 000). As soon as possible thereafter, the child's parent/guardian should be notified and a report should be made (at the latest within 24 hours) to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or the priest in charge.

The Safeguarding Officer or priest will listen to the allegations and decide what action to take in accordance with the procedures outlined in this policy. If, after a reasonable time has elapsed, you are not satisfied with this response to your report you may then refer the matter to the Vicar General of the Diocese of Ballarat (ph. 03 5331 2933).

Matters relating to priests should be reported as follows:

Any report that relates to a priest should be reported in the first instance to the Vicar General of the Diocese of Ballarat (ph. 03 5331 2933).

Dealing with disclosures by children or a reasonable belief that abuse is or may be occurring in a setting to which this protocol applies

If:

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- (a) A child makes a disclosure to you that sexual, physical or psychological abuse is occurring, or
- (b) You form an objectively reasonable belief that a child is being harmed, or is at risk of being harmed,

you should:

- i. immediately report the matter to Victoria Police.
- ii. consider whether a mandatory report must be made to the Child Protection Unit of the Department of Health and Human Services (ph. 131 278)
- iii. immediately report the matter to the Victorian Director of Professional Standards (ph. 1800 816 030), who will discuss your concerns and advise you on the next steps to take.

Be aware that the child may be feeling ashamed, guilty and scared, and may be worried about the consequences of telling someone about the abuse. Stay calm and listen carefully to the child. Tell them you believe them and that they did the right thing by telling you. Do not make promises you cannot keep such as promising that you will not tell anyone else.

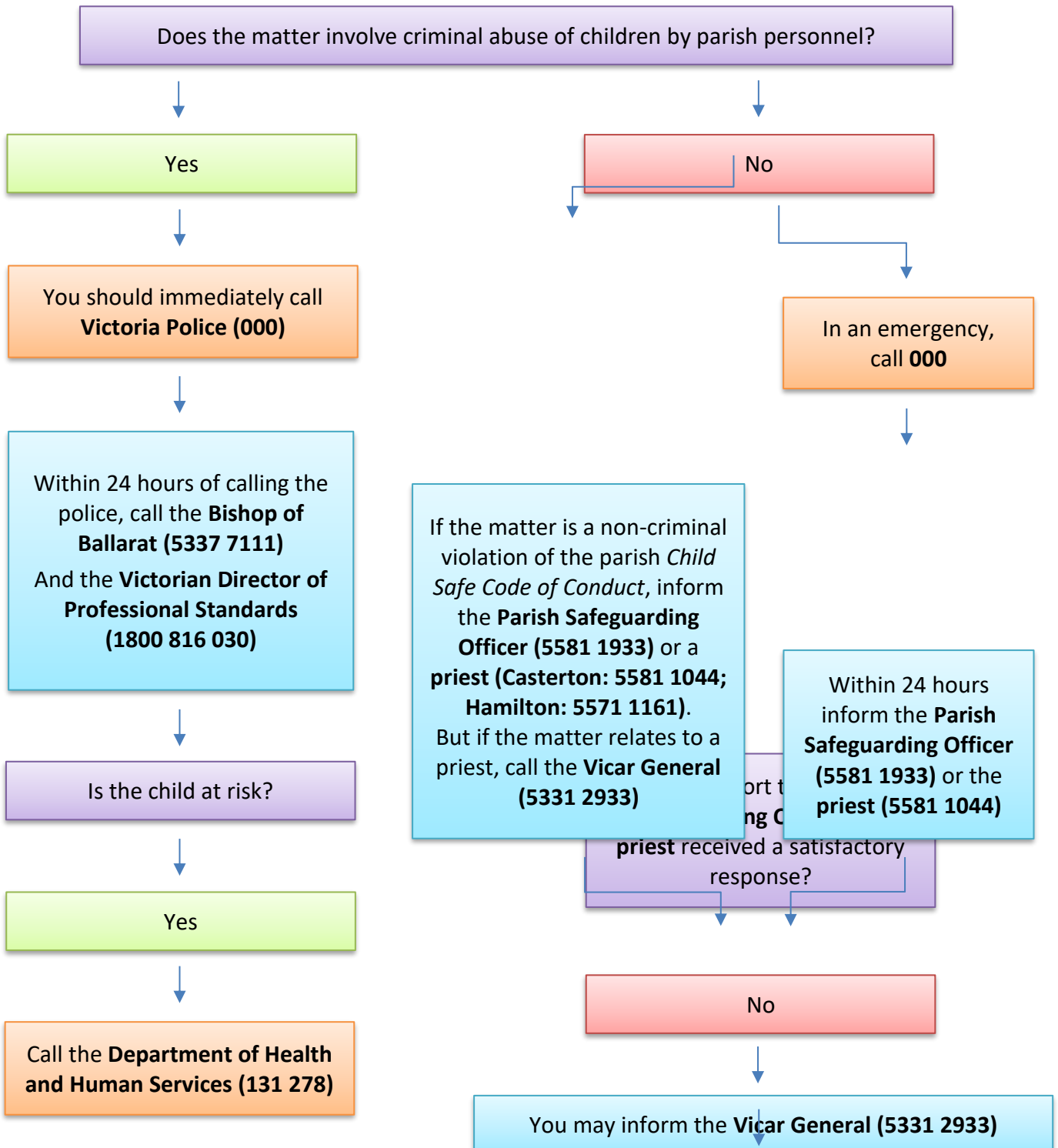
The Western District Catholic Communities' approach to reports of abuse

When a report is made in accordance with our reporting protocol, the parish staff member receiving the report shall:

- (a) Listen carefully to the report and ensure it is fully understood;
- (b) Contact the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Coordinator for Professional Standards;
- (c) Consider whether it is appropriate or necessary to advise others within the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat or to inform relevant authorities;
- (d) Determine what action will be taken (if any);
- (e) Document all action taken; and
- (f) Maintain the confidentiality of all parties (including the person making the report, and any person to whom the report relates) at all times, to the extent this is possible. In some cases, it may be necessary to inform relevant authorities or others within the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat or the person to whom the report relates. Depending on the nature of the allegation it may be necessary to:
 - i. inform Victoria Police, if the behaviour is or might be criminal;
 - ii. consider whether a mandatory report must be made to the Department of Health and Human Services, or whether a report must be made to Victoria Police.
 - iii. make or refer a report to the Victorian Director of Professional Standards.

Our parishes record any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#), and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our parishes comply with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and the recommendations of the **Betrayal of Trust** report.

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT CONCERNS YOU, SAY SOMETHING



10. SCREENING AND RECRUITMENT OF PARISH STAFF

The Western District Catholic Communities will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of our [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) and this *Child Safe Policy*.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make all reasonable efforts to:

- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant);
- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications;
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children; and
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

We have processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of parish staff to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks.

11. CHILD SAFETY – EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR PARISH STAFF

The Western District Catholic Communities provide employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

Staff Induction specifically includes:

- familiarisation with this *Child Safe Policy* and its many implications;
- familiarisation with the our *Child Safe Statement of Commitment*;
- familiarisation with and a signed commitment to the [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) contained in this document;
- specific training about child protection reporting obligations, and protocols for receiving/recording complaints, as outlined in this document.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

In the Western District Catholic Communities, we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to child safety across our whole parish environment (physical and online), and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

13. RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act.

- (a) **Failure to disclose offence:** Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
- (b) **Failure to protect offence:** The offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit an offence if they know of the risk, but negligently fail to reduce or remove it.
- (c) **Grooming offence:** This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

14. RELATED POLICIES

National Policies for the Catholic Church in Australia

- *Towards Healing*
- *Integrity in Ministry*
- *Integrity in the Service of the Church*

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat policies

- *Working with Children Check and National Police Record Check Policy*
- *Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy*
- *Code of Conduct for Caring for Children*

Parish Policies

- *Child Safe Code of Conduct*
- *Child Safe Statement of Commitment*
- *Parish Safeguarding Officer Role Description*

15. BREACH OF POLICY

Where an **employee** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, this may result in disciplinary action.

Where a **priest** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the Vicar General.

Where any **other member of the parish community** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the Parish Safeguarding Officer and/or the priest is to take appropriate action, as outlined in the reporting protocols described in this document.

16. REVIEW OF THIS CHILD SAFE POLICY

The Western District Catholic Communities are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

This policy is reviewed every three years, and we will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

History of Policy

Date	Comment (eg: major review; minor review; etc.)
Jan/Feb 2017	Policy drafted by John Donegan and Fr John Corrigan

17. INCLUSION OF ALL

We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with culturally and/or linguistically diverse communicates and people with a disability.

18. REFERENCES

Catholic Education Ballarat, *Child Safe Policy* template, June 2016

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety: A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools*, 2016.

St Joseph's School, Coleraine, *Child Safety Standards*, 28 July 2016.

State of Victoria 2016, *Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2.

Victorian Government Department of Justice, *Betrayal of Trust Implementation*, 2016.

VicSport, *Child Safe Policy – SSA & RSA* template, 2016.