

ST MARY'S PARISH, ASCOT VALE

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY

POLICY ADMINISTRATION SCHEDULE

Policy Owner	Parish of Ascot Vale
Policy Application	All clergy, employees and volunteers of the Parish of Ascot Vale (excluding employees and volunteers of St Mary's Primary School and St Margaret's Primary School, which have their own specific policies).
Approval Authority	Parish Priest of Ascot Vale
Inaugural Approval Date	1 November 2020 Replacement of previous Parish Child Safety Policy.
Next Review Date	Version 1 may be subject to amendment prior to the annual review date of November 2021 as a result of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- relevant feedback- legislative changes- a review of critical incidents to promote continuous improvement.
Related documents and policies of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne	Working with Children Check Protocol National Police Check Policy Privacy Compliance Advice Email and Internet Protocol Social Media Policy Workplace Bullying Policy Sexual Harassment Policy Code of Conduct for Employees of Diocesan Agencies

Introduction

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

Duty of care

The Parish of Ascot Vale holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a fundamental responsibility of the Church. This commitment is drawn from, and inherent to, the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the dignity of each human person belonging to the heart of the Gospel. The teaching of Christ, which proclaims the welcome to be given to children in particular (*Mt 19:13-15*), is the supreme rule of all our actions, and this policy, along with all related policies, declarations and commitments, is to be interpreted in every case in the light of, and consistent with, our overarching commitment to his teaching in all its implications, which is the highest guarantee of our right treatment of, and relationship with, all people.

Right to safety and participation

A culture of safety within the Church ensures that children and young people (defined as a person under 18 years of age) can actively and fully participate in the life of the Church and realise their potential in a faith community. The Parish of Ascot Vale has a zero tolerance for all forms of child abuse and maltreatment and is committed to protecting children and young people from harm.

Child abuse

Child abuse or maltreatment is defined as an act (or series of acts) that endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development and/or a failure to provide conditions to the extent that the health and development of the child or young person is significantly impaired or placed at risk.

Categories of abuse and maltreatment include:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse including grooming
- emotional abuse including spiritual abuse
- family violence
- neglect
- unjust discrimination
- bullying

Signs and indicators of child abuse or maltreatment are not always obvious. Physical abuse may be more visible than other forms of abuse (e.g. bruising). Neglect is harder to identify as it consists of a failure to provide adequate care and attention. Likewise, you may not witness discrimination or bullying in relation to disability, mental illness, family violence, skin colour, race, or sexual tendencies. However, it may result in signs or indicators in the behaviour of the child or young person, for example social withdrawal and depression.

All children and young people are vulnerable but there are some children and young people who have an even higher risk of abuse than the general population. They are children who have experienced abuse before or who have a disability, are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those experiencing poverty or homelessness or out of home care. Similarly, the child safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are more acute due to a history of racism, marginalisation and dispossession.

Dignity of children and young people

The Parish of Ascot Vale values the contribution and dignity of all children and young people and creates opportunities to appropriately involve children and young people in decision-making about programs, activities and events that affect them. The Parish of Ascot Vale recognises the need for empowerment of all children and young people, especially those at greater risk of abuse. Their involvement in decision-making can be a significant protective factor in preventing abuse within Church organisations.

Informing and involving parents (and guardians) in promoting child safety

The Parish of Ascot Vale acknowledges that effective child safety within parishes, agencies and entities cannot be undertaken without the involvement of parents (and guardians) and seeks to engage parents as critical partners in promoting the safety of children and young people. The

involvement of parents and guardians of children and young people who are more vulnerable to experiencing abuse is particularly important.

Safeguarding children and young people within the Parish of Ascot Vale

The Parish of Ascot Vale acknowledges that preventing child abuse requires proactive approaches across policies, procedures and practices consistent with appropriate relevant requirements of the:

- Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria)
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Australian Human Rights Commission)
- National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (Catholic Professional Standards Limited)

In fulfilling this responsibility, the Parish of Ascot Vale, guided by the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, has developed a comprehensive framework to guide the implementation of child safety policies, procedures and practices with the aim of preventing child abuse, empowering children and young people, and responding to concerns, disclosures or allegations of child abuse or child-related misconduct.

The application of this policy extends to clergy, employee and volunteer behaviour within the context of their role within the Parish: within the physical boundaries of the Parish of Ascot Vale (e.g. churches, presbytery); beyond the physical boundaries including pastoral support, visitation or outreach on non-church property (e.g. hospitals, homes), online or via digital environments, and while travelling outside the Parish (locally, or even potentially interstate or overseas, e.g. pilgrimages, World Youth Day).

Safeguarding responsibilities

Through the Professional Standards Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, the Archbishop of Melbourne supports and assists parishes, agencies and entities to:

- implement safeguarding practices and processes
- coordinate the response to allegations and reports of child safety related misconduct and child abuse in relation to clergy, employees and volunteers across the Archdiocese
- monitor and continually improve safeguarding practices and processes.

The Parish of Ascot Vale leadership is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy and relevant procedures and practices within the Parish to protect children and young people. The Professional Standards Unit of the Archdiocese requires the leadership of each parish, with its Safeguarding Committee, to summarise its compliance with the policy requirements on an annual basis.

The Parish Safeguarding Committee plays a central role in assisting the Parish Priest with implementation of the requirements of this policy.

Further, as safeguarding children and young people is a collective responsibility; all persons in ministry, working or volunteering within the Parish of Ascot Vale acknowledge their individual responsibility to comply with clear behavioural expectations to act in manner that is caring, respectful and safe toward children and young people.

Every member of the clergy, employee or volunteer within the Parish has a moral and legal responsibility to care for, and promote the wellbeing of children and young people, and protect them from harm or abuse.

This applies to all those who may be involved in the Parish including:

- clergy, including all canonical administrators of a parish as well as visiting clergy (e.g. bishop, parish priest, assistant priest, migrant chaplains, priests in residence, supply clergy, deacons)
- Sisters, Brothers and Religious Priests holding an appointment from the Archbishop to undertake work in parish or Archdiocesan entities
- employees (including casual employees)
- lay ecclesiastical ministers including pastoral associates, those engaged in chaplaincy
- volunteers
- seminarians
- persons residing at the presbytery or on the grounds of the parish
- contractors (where applicable)

The Parish of Ascot Vale 'Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy' parallels the development of similar policies in a range of Archdiocesan organisations involved in education, health and welfare. CatholicCare, Catholic Education Melbourne, Catholic systemic schools, and Villa Maria Catholic Homes all have safeguarding policies and personnel working or volunteering in these organisations will be guided by these policies, and are not bound by the Parish of Ascot Vale Safeguarding Children and Young People Framework.

Safe personnel

Selection, recruitment and screening

The Parish of Ascot Vale, in seeking to provide safe and enriching interactions with children and young people within the context of the Parish, sets out selection, recruitment and screening processes that consider the suitability and appropriateness of persons to work with children and young people in ministry or in an employment or voluntary role to minimise the risk of child abuse occurring.

Child safety code of conduct

A specific child safety code of conduct provides guidance to clergy, employees and volunteers in the context of their involvement with children and young people in their parish role.

Induction

Induction processes incorporate safeguarding awareness to build a foundation of understanding and commitment to the safety of children and young people.

Safeguarding Training

In supporting clergy, employees and volunteers to promote the safety of children and young people and discharge their responsibilities in line with this policy, the Parish of Ascot Vale is assisted by the Professional Standards Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne to provide a range of training and education activities that equip clergy, employees and volunteers with the skills and knowledge to promote the safe participation of children and young people.

Supervision

It is a requirement of this policy that those whose roles involve working with children and young people are provided with supervision and support to undertake their role in a manner which promotes the safety of children and young people and enables detection of behaviour that may be detrimental to children and young people.

Safe programs, activities and events

Child safety risk management

The Parish of Ascot Vale safeguards children and young people by employing a risk management approach that systemically identifies and assesses risk associated with programs, activities and events involving children and young people to minimise opportunities for harm to occur.

Practice and behavioural guidelines

In addition to risk management process, the Parish utilises guidance provided by the Professional Standards Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne in practice and behavioural guidelines in relation to conducting programs, activities and events involving children and young people.

Responding to and reporting child abuse

The safety of children and young people is of gravest importance. All concerns, allegations or complaints of child abuse will be taken seriously, and acted upon in a way that is consistent with the Parish of Ascot Vale's obligations to safeguard children and young people.

Victorian law dealing with the response of adults to child abuse is contained in the following legislation:

- The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) defines when a child is in need of protection (s 162) and regulates matters concerning mandatory reporting by certain professionals working in our community (ss 182, 184).
- The *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic) sets out the Reportable Conduct Scheme.
- The *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) creates the offences of 'failure to protect' (s 490) and 'failure to disclose' (s 327), which relate to making a report, if a reasonable belief has been formed that a child or young person is at risk of or experiencing child sexual abuse.

The Parish of Ascot Vale has the duty to effectively respond to concerns, allegations or complaints of child-safety related misconduct and/or child abuse. In the first place, this response is by reporting to the appropriate authorities such as the Victoria Police, Child Protection (Department of Health and Human Services) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Commission for Children and Young People).

By this Policy, children and young people (and their families) within the Parish of Ascot Vale are to have information and support to report a concern, allegation or make a complaint through processes that are accessible and respectful.

This Policy lays down that in particular, clergy, employees and volunteers of the Parish of Ascot Vale are obliged to do all in their power to effectively respond if, in the course of their ministry or work,

they have formed a reasonable belief that a child or young person has experienced abuse, is experiencing abuse or is at risk of harm. In the first place this response is, always guided by the context of their solemn duty to do all in their power to safeguard children and young people and to act consistently with their grave obligations, to make a report to the appropriate authorities such as the Victoria Police, Child Protection (Department of Health and Human Services) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Commission for Children and Young People).

Making this child abuse report involves notifying statutory authorities and the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne in a timely manner (as soon as practicable after forming a reasonable personal belief, unless the child or young person is in imminent danger).

Reporting to the PSU ensures that parishes, agencies and entities across the Archdiocese report and respond appropriately to concerns, allegations of complaints in relation to safety of children and young people.

All reports are to be documented on the **Child-safety Related Misconduct and/or Child Abuse Report Form** and emailed to the Professional Standards Unit – professional.standards@cam.org.au – as soon as practicable.

In Victoria, alleged child abuse perpetrated by:

- clergy, employees and volunteers is reported to the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT) within Victoria Police
- a family member is reported to Child Protection - Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
- a child or young person is reported to Child Protection (DHHS) and/or the SOCIT (Victoria Police) (e.g. sexually harmful behaviour, aggression, violence, online exploitation).

VICTORIA POLICE

Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT):
www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=36448

CHILD PROTECTION (DHHS)

North and West (Metro) region: 1300 664 9777

South region: 1300 655 795

East region: 1300 360 391

West (Rural) region: 1800 075 599

After-hours and weekends: 13 12 78

PSU's role in relation to reports of alleged child-related misconduct and/or child abuse

The Professional Standards Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne (PSU) is responsible for coordinating child-safety related misconduct and child abuse reports in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and liaising with statutory authorities.

The PSU will be guided by the recommendations of Victoria Police and/or Child Protection in relation to any action that may be required to promote the safety of those involved and the integrity of the investigation process.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne is required by the Reportable Conduct Scheme to notify current and historical incidents of suspected child abuse or misconduct of clergy, employees and volunteers to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).

Serious misconduct and/or criminal behaviour will be reported to the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Commission for Children and Young People) and/or Victoria Police and be subject to internal investigation and disciplinary action (and/or administrative action subject to the requirements of Canon Law for members of the clergy).

Disciplinary action is determined by the seriousness of the misconduct.

Disciplinary action in the case of employees and volunteers may consist of:

- counselling
- training
- a verbal or written warning
- suspension (with or without pay)
- dismissal.

In the case of clergy, disciplinary and/or administrative action will be considered in accordance with Canon Law and may include:

- pastoral supervision
- counselling
- suspension of faculties
- permanent removal of faculties
- recommendation to the Holy See for a penal precept or dismissal from the clerical state (laicisation)
- excommunication.

Confidentiality and privacy in relation to reports of child abuse will be maintained consistent with the principles of natural justice and our duty of care to safeguard children and young people.

The safety and support needs of all parties involved in a report will be considered and addressed as part of this process.

The PSU will centrally record and monitor child-safety related misconduct and/or child abuse to provide the Archbishop with oversight in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across the Archdiocese.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS UNIT

- hours of operation: Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm
- phone: 9926 5630
- email: professional.standards@cam.org.au