



Creating Safe Spaces Safe Church Health Check

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted that churches have not adequately protected children from harm in the past and that this history has tarnished our witness in the community. We have a moral duty to better protect children in the future, and a lot of work to do to restore and protect the reputation of the church.

In addition, the Royal Commission has issued recommendations that involve church denominations ensuring that all affiliated churches are compliant with minimum Child Safe Standards. One initial response to this recommendation in 2018 was for my office to offer a pilot 'Safe Church Certification' to churches who chose to undertake a voluntary safe church audit. My aim being to support churches to become compliant not to penalise them in any way.

Since launching of this pilot program, there have been several legislative changes and advice from Baptist Insurance Services indicating that at some time in the near future, (most likely commencement date is September 2020) churches will need to engage in an 'audit' process which will verify their compliance with the minimum standards set out by the Royal Commission. If a church is not audited by my office then they will no longer be able to access public liability cover for damages arising from any sexual abuse which occurs in the future.

As a result of these changing requirements, we are in the process of working on a church audit tool, the 'Safe Church Health Check'. We are also updating our suite of sample policies and procedures. The 'Safe Church Health Check' will provide churches with resources and information to assist them to comply with minimum standards.

You can expect to receive detailed information about the 'Safe Church Health Check' in the coming months. At this stage we hope to launch this in April or May 2019 after legal review and approval from Baptist Insurance Services.

In the meantime, we appreciate your patience, and suggest that beginning to work through the attached minimum compliance requirements and checklist will give you a head start when you begin your 'Safe Church Health Check'. If your church does not have Safe Church policies and procedures in place already, it would be prudent to wait to receive our updated sample policies and procedures, which will be released as part of the 'Safe Church Health Check' package.

Feel free to contact me or my assistant Joseph Lam if we can provide any assistance.

Rev Jonathan Bradford - Ministry Standards Manager

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Safe Church Minimum Compliance Requirements (March 2018)

1. Appoint a Safe Church Team (preferably including at least one male and one female) to assist the church with Safe Church compliance requirements and to ensure that any reports of harm are reported appropriately.
2. Appoint a WHS team to oversee the implementation of Safe Physical Environments (including emergency procedures, risk assessments, privacy policy and safe food handling). The WHS team & paid pastors should complete the online Baptist Insurance Services WHS training.
3. Ensure that the church has adopted an appropriate Safe Church Policy which is accessible to the congregation
4. Ensure that the church has formal procedures to recruit, screen, appoint, induct and review all paid and volunteer workers.
5. Ensure that your church collects and verifies online a WWCC number for all staff members and volunteers prior to them engaging in child related work. A register of WWCC numbers should be kept for management and audit purposes.
6. Ensure that all those engaged in child related work, including ministry leaders, pastors, elders and deacons attend a Creating Safe Spaces (CSS) workshop (or another face to face workshop endorsed by the SCTA) once every 3 years. All those engaged in child related work should complete the online module of CSS prior to commencing in this role and should complete the face to face component within 9 months of commencing. A register of CSS workshop attendance should be kept for management and audit purposes. Each Baptist church is encouraged to host a CSS workshop at least once every three years if minimum numbers can be met.
7. Ensure that all volunteers sign and agree to the church volunteer code of conduct
8. Ensure that permission/consent forms are received from parents/guardians for all children's and youth ministry programs, and that records (permission forms, attendance records, incident reports) are preserved for a minimum of 45 years.
9. Ensure that the church conducts a National Police Check for all paid pastoral staff members prior to commencement of employment
10. Ensure that all paid pastoral staff members sign the Baptist Association Code of Conduct
11. Ensure that the church has a formal grievance/complaints policy and procedure to manage any complaints received against staff or volunteers
12. Ensure that the church leadership has adopted and follows the Australian Baptist Ministries endorsed process to manage Persons of Concern or Known Sexual Offenders in the congregation.
13. Ensure that all associated agencies (schools, child care, OOSH, foodbank etc) and any third party groups who hire church facilities and who provide services to children or young people (dance groups, tutoring etc) report to the church on an annual basis that they are committed to adhere to the Child Safe Standards.
14. POSSIBLE OPTIONAL REQUIREMENT: Churches are encouraged to limit the use of the title "Pastor" to only Accredited or Recognised Ministers of the Baptist Association of Churches of NSW/ACT. It may be appropriate to use the title "Pastor" where a pastor intends to apply to be an Accredited or Recognised pastor when eligible. Discussions are underway with the Committee for the Ministry about the implications of this recommendation.
15. POSSIBLE OPTIONAL REQUIREMENT: Ensure that all church pastors engage with appropriate pastoral or professional supervision.