



OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

Title:	Safer Churches Guidelines
Document Type:	Guideline
Version:	2025:1
Date:	May 2025
Approval:	National Executive

ACC SAFER CHURCHES GUIDELINES

The **Safer Churches Guidelines** ("Guidelines") have been developed by the ACC National Executive as part of the implementation of the **ACC Safer Churches** strategy and outworking of the **ACC Child Protection Policy** ('Policy').

The ACC Safer Churches Guidelines, Training and Implementation Kit assist ACC Churches and their workers in upholding Child Protection legislation and other relevant 'people protection' legislation –

e.g., Health and Safety. That is to say, the ACC Safer Churches strategy is aimed at the protection of all people in ACC Churches.

The Guidelines are good practice procedures for the implementation of the Policy and people protection.

The Guidelines aim to ensure that all workers (paid and volunteer) in ACC Churches, are safe people who act in a protective manner with the people they serve.

The Guidelines are divided into two categories:

- a. those considered to be legal, biblical and/or moral imperatives, denoted by the word "**shall**", must be implemented; and
- b. those considered as good practice, denoted by the word "**recommended**", are strongly recommended.

It is an expectation that all workers (paid and volunteer) in ACC Constituent Churches will follow these Guidelines or those developed by their Constituent Church, using these as the minimum standard.

The ACC Safer Churches Implementation Kit is located in the Safer Churches section of the ACC website and contains documents and templates a church may use to assist them in implementing these guidelines.

GUIDELINE 1 – Safe Church strategy implementation

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- c. Upholding this Policy, and the relevant state or territory Child Safe and Child Protection laws through the implementation of the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines;*
- d. Ensuring that ACC Constituent Churches regularly and frequently review, evaluate and improve child safe procedures and practices; and*
- e. Ensuring that ACC Constituent Churches have clear policy and procedural documentation that is up-to-date and readily available.*

National and State Executives **shall**:

- a. publicly endorse and actively promote the ACC Child Protection Policy and ACC Safer Churches Guidelines;
- b. develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability in relation to the ACC Safer Churches strategy;
- c. maintain up-to-date documentation of all policy and procedures;
- d. maintain secure records for Credential holder's screening and training;
- e. maintain secure records of complaints of responding to concerns of risk of harm and all workplace investigations into Credential holder misconduct (including Reportable Conduct investigations in jurisdictions that operate Reportable Conduct Schemes).

Local Church Boards **shall**:

- a. endorse and implement the ACC Child Protection Policy and ACC Safer Churches Guidelines (or alternative guidelines consistent with the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines);
- b. ensure all ACC workers within their respective Constituent Church understand and adhere to their obligations in accordance with the ACC Child Protection Policy, including the implementation of the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines as minimum standards for the protection of children and vulnerable people (or alternative guidelines consistent with the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines);
- c. develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability in relation to the ACC Safer Churches strategy. Includes making Safer Churches (including Child Safety and Wellbeing) a standing item of Board meetings and providing opportunities for ACC People to clarify and confirm the procedures to apply when taking action in relation to Children's welfare and safety;
- d. maintain up-to-date documentation of all policy and procedures;
- e. maintain secure records for worker screening and training, and of complaints of responding to concerns of risk of harm and all workplace investigations into worker misconduct (including Reportable Conduct investigations in jurisdictions that operate Reportable Conduct Schemes); and

- f. implement relevant ACC Safer Churches procedures and practices.

GUIDELINE 2 – Culture of safety & wellbeing

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Child safety and wellbeing in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and the right to be protected from harm by having a zero-tolerance stance for all forms of child abuse and maltreatment; and*
- *Recognising and responding to the diverse needs of all Children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and also the safety of Children with a disability as relevant in the local church setting.*

ACC Church workers (paid and volunteer) **shall** minister out of the love God has for everyone, by acting in the best interests of all people they serve in ministry, through:

- a. practicing servant leadership (Matthew 20:25–28);
- b. respecting and valuing all people, with special care for those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island or diverse cultural backgrounds, and/or those with a disability including:
 - i. encouraging and supporting a Child’s ability to express and enjoy their culture; and
 - ii. acknowledging and appreciating the strengths of Aboriginal culture and understanding its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal Children;
- c. ensuring racism, along with all forms of discrimination and abuse within the organisation are identified, confronted and not tolerated;
- d. ministry in transparent and accountable teams;
- e. upholding National Privacy Principles; and
- f. providing opportunities for pastoral care and/or referring to professional counselling services for families of Children who have experienced abuse and any other family in the community who may indirectly be affected by an incident.

In relation to Children, it is **recommended** that ACC People support healthy development and wellbeing through:

- a. understanding and upholding the rights of Children according to their age and stage of development;
- b. providing regular opportunities for workers to clarify and confirm the procedures to apply when taking action in relation to Children’s welfare and safety; and
- c. good practice in accessing local resources when Children are experiencing distress or crisis.

GUIDELINE 3 – Promoting support networks

As an outworking of the Policy statements:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *recognising the family as the primary means of providing for the nurture, care and protection of Children and to accord high priority to supporting and assisting the family to carry out its responsibilities to Children,*

It is **recommended** that ACC Constituent Churches:

- a. provide practical pastoral care. For example, providing information and support in practical parenting, marriage enrichment, caring for those with additional needs or in times of crisis;
- b. assist church attendees to recognise and access their support networks within the church and also in the local community; and
- c. actively support and facilitate participation and inclusion by Aboriginal Children and their families.

GUIDELINE 4 – Promoting empowerment and participation

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *empowering Children by engaging with Children and caregivers in relation to decisions that impact them, including inviting feedback as part of our services.*

ACC Church workers (paid and volunteer) **shall**:

- a. listen to the views of, and respond appropriately to, concerns of all people; and
- b. encourage all church attendees to speak to their local church Safer Churches Officer if they are concerned about harmful behaviours or harmful situations.

In relation to Children, ACC People **shall**:

- c. actively promote the empowerment and participation of all people at their church in the protection of Children, including:
 - i. providing opportunities for Children to tell us their views, express their culture in ways that uphold the ACC Statement of Faith, Policies and Position Papers, and give feedback about the services we provide to them;
 - ii. making information about the Child Protection Policy available to Children in an age appropriate way, and Parents/Carers;
 - iii. ensuring that Children and Parents/Carers have access to adequate and age-appropriate information about child safety and how to protect themselves;
 - iv. ensuring that Children have access to adequate support to promote safety and intervene early in concerns that they raise; and

- v. listening to Children and appropriately address any concerns that they raise with us, in the least intrusive way possible, that is consistent with the paramount concern to protect the Child from harm and promote the Child's development.

GUIDELINE 5 – Appointment of workers (paid and volunteer)

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping.*

National and State Executives **shall:**

- a. screen and endorse all Credential holder's using a formal accountable/transparent process, including:
 - i. compliance with state and territory legislation with regard to Working with Children/Vulnerable Persons Checks;
 - ii. referee checking (at least three independent referees); and
 - iii. self-declarations.
- b. store securely and permanently all CH application documentation;
- c. require that all Credential holder's submit periodic self-declarations to ensure fitness for ministry; and
- d. **not** issue an ACC credential if a person has been charged with or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance. It is illegal in all states and territories for a person who does not, or cannot, hold a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) to engage in any child related work.

ACC Constituent Churches **shall:**

- a. screen, appoint, and induct all workers (paid and volunteer) using a formal accountable/transparent process, including:
 - i. compliance with state and territory legislation with regard to Working with Children/Vulnerable Persons Checks;
 - ii. self-declarations;
 - iii. referee checking (at least two referees);
 - iv. police background checking if required for the role;
 - v. ensuring anyone referred to as a Pastor has an ACC Credential.
- b. provide adequate and role-relevant induction training as required by Health and Safety legislation;
- c. require that all Credential holder's submit periodic self-declarations to ensure fitness for ministry;

- d. store securely and permanently all successful applicant worker appointment documentation; and
- e. **not** allow an individual to work or continue his/her work if he/she has been charged or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance. It is illegal in all states and territories for a person who does not, or cannot, hold a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) to engage in any child-related work. The church board will need to complete a full risk assessment to ascertain the current risks, and then implement a risk mitigation strategy to protect Children. This risk assessment must include seeking advice from the ACC Safer Churches Helpline and the church insurance company. ACC People who have been charged or convicted of a crime that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance have an ongoing obligation to inform the Constituent Church of this matter; and
- f. it is **recommended** that ACC Churches conduct annual ministry role reviews for workers. This process should be made clear to applicants at the time of appointment, as part of the induction process. This provides an opportunity for workers to say they will or will not be available next year/time, which is important for the health of committed teams.

GUIDELINE 6 – Safer Churches training

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping*

ACC Credential holders **shall** complete ACC Safer Churches training every three years at a minimum in order for Credentials to be renewed.

This training develops the Credential holder's awareness of their responsibilities under the ACC Child Protection Policy and ACC Safer Churches Guidelines. ACC Safer Churches training includes understanding the concepts of child protection including knowledge of indicators of Child at risk of harm (e.g., abuse and neglect), and reporting procedures for when there are risk of harm concerns about a Child.

ACC Constituent Churches **shall** provide people who have a Direct Role (as defined in SC001) with adequate training in the concepts of Child Protection at a minimum of every 3 years. Additionally, in states where specific legislation applies, such as Reportable Conduct and/or Child Safe Standards, awareness raising and ongoing training in the specific requirements of those laws shall occur.

This shall include indicators of Child risk of harm (abuse and neglect), and the reporting procedures for when they have risk of harm concerns about a Child who is involved in the church.

It is **recommended** that ACC Constituent Churches provide all workers with adequate, appropriate, and ongoing training in Safer Churches related policy, procedures and practices.

GUIDELINE 7 – Supervision of workers (paid and volunteer)

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Ensuring that persons who have a Direct Role with Children within the movement are appropriately selected, screened, trained, supervised and performing their responsibilities, including ongoing education and equipping,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall**:

- a. ensure all workers (paid and volunteer) have been provided with a Code of Conduct appropriate for their role and have agreed to uphold the requirements of it;
- b. adequately and appropriately supervise all workers;
- c. provide adequate support for workers in line with Health and Safety legislation; and
- d. make adequate provision for developing workers.

GUIDELINE 8 – Responding to concerns

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Child-focused responses to all child safety concerns so that risks to a Child's wellbeing are quickly identified, and any necessary support, protection or care is promptly provided including child-focused responses to allegations of risk of harm or harm in line with Safer Churches Guideline 8*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall** know and follow their state and territory legislation.

Response processes **shall** be child focused and uphold the rights of Children in line with Child Safe Standards.

Children

It is **recommended** that Constituent Churches appoint a Safer Churches Person/Team, whose roles include: receiving reports, assisting in the process of reporting child protection concerns, and keeping accurate records permanently and securely in accordance with privacy legislation.

ACC People **shall** report concerns when:

- a. a Child discloses they have been, or are at risk of being harmed;
- b. someone else (regardless of age) discloses that they know of a Child who has been/is at risk of being harmed; or
- c. there are concerns that the Child may have been or is at risk of being harmed based on their physical appearance or behaviour.

ACC People **shall**

- a. put the rights of a Child to the protection from harm ahead of any cultural and religious practices of families in their ministry programs;

- b. follow reporting procedures without hesitation in response to concerns no matter who is involved; and
- c. co-operate with police and/or other formal investigation procedure.

ACC People are not required, as an initial response, to establish or investigate if harm has occurred, but rather report reasonable suspicions or concerns of harm, including the grounds for concerns, to the Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team (or equivalent) .

In making Child Protection Mandatory Reports in states and territories where this legislation is in place, it is essential that you follow the process mandated for reporting¹.

If a Local Church Safer Churches Person is not available, and the harm is currently occurring, or there are reasons to believe that a Child is at risk, a report should be made immediately to the police and appropriate authorities.

Process for reporting:

- a. Report to the Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team (**note SA reporting to CARL*).

Report concerns to the appointed Local Safer Churches Person/Team, except when a disclosure occurs at a program or event where the Local Safer Churches Person/Team is not available. **If a Child's immediate safety is at risk immediately phone the police and organise appropriate support for the Child/ren.** This can be done with the help of the most senior on-site leader, who will also need to assist with managing the immediate situation.

If the allegation involves the Local Safer Churches Person, then this should be reported to the most senior person available, who will take the role of the Safer Churches person in this instance.

- b. Complete applicable form/s and/or online reporting.

The Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team will keep permanent and secure records for the Constituent Church, upholding privacy principles.

- c. Take the appropriate action with your Local Church Safer Churches Person including:
 - i. police/government child protection agency reporting;
 - ii. contact the **National Safer Churches Helpline (1800 070 511)** for advice and assistance and/or to ensure ACC is aware of all child-related matters of concern; and
 - iii. initiate the correct complaints handling processes if the allegations are about ACC workers/Credential holders.
- d. Provide ongoing support, pastoral care and risk management processes.

It is the role of the Local Church Board to implement pastoral care and support for all parties involved, including the Child and family, as much as is practical. There may also

¹In South Australia individuals who have a reasonable concern must report directly to CARL (Child Abuse Report Line on 13 14 78).

be Local Church risk management action plans that need to be implemented, e.g., stepping aside a leader/Credential holder who has been accused of harming a Child whilst the investigation occurs.

Adults

ACC Church leaders **shall** report to police and/or government agencies all concerns involving adults as required by their state or territory legislation.

It is **recommended** that ACC Church leaders follow good pastoral practice in relation to concerns of harm or risk of harm in adults.

GUIDELINE 9 – Responding to conflict

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *Child safety and wellbeing in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and the right to be protected from harm by having a zero-tolerance stance for all forms of child abuse and maltreatment,*

ACC Constituent Churches **shall**

- a. consider the pastoral, legal, and insurance implications of the conflict or allegation, and respond with transparency and accountability;
- b. refer to the State Executive for implementation of the ACC Grievance Procedure for Credential holders when responding to allegations of misconduct and/or abuse by ACC Credential holders; and
- c. work through an appropriate process that affords natural justice to all parties when responding to allegations of misconduct and/or harm by those who are not ACC Credential holders. Your ACC State Safer Churches Officer can provide assistance working through such a process if required.

GUIDELINE 10 – Safe environments

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *providing for and promoting a child safe culture in both physical and online settings that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer or access an ACC program, service or managed facility,*

10.1 Safe online and digital practices

ACC People **shall** be mindful of the position of trust they hold by:

- a. actively being safe in all online and digital interactions, including maintaining transparency and accountability in the use of electronic communications with Children as far as is practical, that is as a team, not as individuals and that it is informational not personal;

- b. upholding all legislation regarding the age of persons able to hold a social media account;
- c. **not** transmitting, downloading or storing any communication that is:
 - i. discriminatory or harassing;
 - ii. derogatory;
 - iii. obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic;
 - iv. defamatory;
 - v. threatening;
 - vi. for any purpose that is illegal or contrary to the Code of Conduct relevant to their position;
- d. reporting any communication to their Local Church Safer Churches Person/Team that breaches the requirements outlined above; and
- e. **not** sending any electronic communication that attempts to hide their identity or represent the sender as someone else.

It is **recommended** that communications with Children under 16 occur with the full knowledge of the Parent/s or Carer/s of the Child.

It is **recommended** that photos or videos of Children under 16 not be shared without the consent of the Parent/s or Carer/s of the Child.

10.2 Compliance with Work, Health and Safety legislation

It is **recommended** that each ACC Church:

- 10.2.1 elect a **Health & Safety Team**, including at least one Board member, to oversee implementation of WHS compliance;
- 10.2.2 Implement all necessary Health and Safety policies and procedures (e.g., privacy policy, evacuation procedures);
- 10.2.3 keep Health and Safety on the agenda at every Local Church Board and team meetings;
- 10.2.4 notify incidents such as serious events and dangerous incidents within a prescribed period to the Health & Safety Team;
- 10.2.5 address health and safety concerns within a timely manner of the concern being communicated to the Health & Safety Team;
- 10.2.6 use incident report documentation to report serious incidents to your insurer and your ACC State Safer Churches Officer;
- 10.2.7 ensure all workers know and follow the Church's reporting and grievance procedures; and
- 10.2.8 have the Health & Safety Team undertake a safe environment audit of all church facilities regularly and frequently.

10.3 Program approval

It is **recommended** that all Children's programs be approved by the appropriate leadership prior to

commencing and are regularly reviewed.

10.4 Managing event and/or program risks

It is **recommended** that ministry coordinators manage individual program risk according to risk management good practice, including annual risk management as part of the annual program approval process.

10.5 Safe physical environments

It is **recommended** for the safe running of programs and events that the following matters are considered:

FIRST AID including:

10.5.1 at least one on-site leader should have current first aid training; and

10.5.2 a suitable, up-to-date and accessible first aid kit is to be available at all times and in all locations.

TRANSPORTATION including:

- a. never be alone in a car with a Child unless they are related to you;
- b. at no time should there be more passengers in a car than the number of seat belts that are in working order and available for use;
- c. all cars will be registered, in good working order and driven by licensed drivers abiding by any licence restrictions (e.g., provisional licence passenger conditions); and
- d. if a Child is travelling in a vehicle driven by a worker, prior written consent should, wherever possible, be given by a Parent/Carer, except in the case of emergencies.

FOOD SAFETY including:

- a. prepare a food preparation and storage practices guide;
- b. display food preparation and storage practices guide in the kitchen or food preparation area; and
- c. checking with relevant council to ensure compliance with local requirements in relation to food handling.

SUPERVISION NUMBERS including:

- a. ACC People should ensure that adequate numbers of leaders are present to supervise the program;
- b. precise numbers of leaders will depend greatly on the size of the group, their age, and the level of physical and/or emotional risk inherent to the activity. Programs involving younger children and those with an additional need, or that are offsite, or of higher risk require more supervision due to the increased level of risk involved;
- c. when considering supervision numbers, risk assessment should include how supervision

would be affected by an accident or emergency. Adjustment to required leader numbers should then be made to reduce any reasonably foreseeable risk.

It is **recommended** that ACC People running Children's programs:

- a. make the distinction between those adults who are part of the team, and who are junior leaders (under 18 years). Junior leaders should not be counted in the supervision ratios;
- b. use additional adult helpers for supervision purposes if needed, even if not directly providing program activities to help ensure the safety of the Children;
- c. do not allow leaders or helpers to be alone, one-on-one, with a Child unrelated to them. Where possible, have both male and female leaders to provide support for both boys and girls; and
- d. in relation to camps or overnight settings, it is not advisable that leaders sleep in the same room as Children. Leaders should be sleeping in a designated leaders' space (cabin) nearby.

MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-RISK ACTIVITIES including:

- a. for high-risk and off-site activities: e.g., water sports, swimming excursions, white water rafting/caving/bungy jumping, inflatable sumo suit wrestling, gladiator games, horse-riding, high ropes activities, roller blading/skating, skateboarding or activities involving live animals, an employee/leader with appropriate (certified) training for the event should be running the activity;
- b. active supervision is required at all times. Supervisors must not be involved in any additional activities that will distract from their role as a supervisor;
- c. all participants involved in high-risk activities should have a signed liability release from each Parent/Guardian. However, it is important to note that a liability release form does not actually indemnify against an accident. Individual leaders may be protected where all due care has been taken, but a church may still be deemed liable, where duty of care failures are proven; and
- d. contact the church's insurance broker/company for advice before running high-risk activities as some high-risk injuries may be excluded from the church's liability cover.

GUIDELINE 11 – Responding to incidents

As an outworking of the Policy statement:

ACC People commit to, according to their role or position (as described in section 5 of the Policy):

- *providing for and promoting a child safe culture in both physical and online settings that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer or access an ACC program, service or managed facility*

ACC people **shall**

- a. respond to incidents appropriately and promptly, and take adequate follow-up action;

- b. use appropriate report forms for all injuries or accidents; and
- c. report incidents of a serious nature to their local church insurer.