



**NORTHRIDGE**  
VINEYARD | CHURCH

# *“Caring for our Kids”*

## Guidelines for Church Services

Northridge welcomes feedback on this Policy, particularly on the effectiveness of our approach to child safety. Please contact the Church Office with any comments:  
[office@northridge.org.au](mailto:office@northridge.org.au) 6 Chilvers Road Thornleigh 2120 02 8407 9941 (Office Hours Tuesday-Friday 10am-4pm)

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## Thank you!

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### 1. **Jesus loves our young people**

We are so pleased you have agreed to volunteer at church services. ***This policy applies to employees, service leaders, members of worship teams and members of sound/audio visual teams.*** This ministry is a significant part of the life of Northridge. Thank you!

This is kingdom work carrying important responsibilities for the wellbeing of those in our care. We must provide an environment safe from any form of harm.

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### 2. **The Northridge commitment**

“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.”  
Isaiah 61:3

Northridge is committed to its Leaders introducing children to Jesus Christ in a safe, secure and loving environment as oaks of righteousness honouring His name. This Child Protection Policy reflects our desire and dedication to act in accordance with the Child Safe Standards accepted by the NSW Government as recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, including to:

- promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children during their participation in activities involving children organised by Northridge, including Kids Church, Youth, worship, special events and conferences;
- assist employees, volunteers and others to recognise child abuse; and
- report child abuse and other misconduct to the NSW Police or other authorities in accordance with our legal obligations, or where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting a child is at risk of significant harm.

## Terminology

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### 3. **Key terminology used in this booklet**

<b>Activity Environment:</b>	The environment (including any room or other space) used for a Service.
<b>adult:</b>	A person aged 18 or over.
<b>Authorised Person:</b>	A person authorised in writing (including a text) by a parent of a child to collect the child from the Activity Environment or otherwise care for the child for a short period (including a person nominated by a parent on a sign-in form to collect their child at the end of a Service).
<b>child:</b>	A person under the age of 18.
<b>child abuse:</b>	An act or omission endangering the physical, emotional or spiritual health or development of a child, as more fully explained in clause 21 of this booklet.

<b>Coordinator:</b>	In respect of a Service, each person appointed to be a service leader of the Service.
<b>employee:</b>	A person employed by Northridge.
<b>First Aid Officer:</b>	A person appointed to provide first aid at a Service.
<b>guardian:</b>	A person with legal authority and obligation to care for a child.
<b>Leader:</b>	For a Service, all employees present at the Service, together with the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Service leaders,</li> <li>● members of the worship team, and</li> <li>● members of the sound/audio visual team</li> </ul> for the Service.
<b>Parent:</b>	Includes a parent, guardian or any other carer who has responsibility for a child.
<b>Service:</b>	A church service provided by Northridge open to both adults and children (including the set-up period before and the pack-up period after the Service).
<b>Session:</b>	The period during which a Service occurs.
<b>young person:</b>	A person in the age brackets covered by students attending School Years 6-12 inclusive, including a person aged 18 or over who is a participant (as distinct from a Leader) in Youth Ministry Activities.
<b>Youth Ministry:</b>	A Ministry primarily organised for and attended by young people.
<b>WWC number:</b>	A NSW Working with Children Check number issued by Service NSW on behalf of the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian.

## Pre-requisites

### 4. Pre-requisites to be a Leader

#### 4.1 The need to protect children

Sadly, many children have been abused physically, sexually and emotionally by trusted members of their communities, including people in churches. As a result, both the government and Northridge have requirements to be complied with before anyone can participate in activities involving children.

#### 4.2 Legal requirements

Volunteer Leaders assisting at Services are obliged to obtain a WWC clearance. Northridge is then obliged to verify your WWC clearance with the Office of the Children’s Guardian.

#### 4.3 Additional Northridge requirements



It is a Northridge policy that all volunteer Leaders assisting at Services must complete the Northridge online training for Services by answering all questions correctly in an online test. Also, you must successfully complete refresher training every 3 years.

#### 4.4 **Non-compliance**

While we hope and expect this will not occur, we will need to have a discussion with you about your ongoing participation as a volunteer Leader in Services if you were to consistently either refuse or fail to comply with the Code of Conduct or other guidelines in this booklet.

## Guidelines

### 5. **Codes of Conduct**

Northridge has a general Code of Conduct which establishes standards by which all employees and volunteers of Northridge are expected to conduct themselves. A copy of that Code of Conduct can be found on the General Resources page of the Northridge website <https://northridge.org.au/general-resources/>. Accordingly, all Leaders are expected to comply with that general Code of Conduct.

All Leaders are expected also to comply with the following Child Protection Code of Conduct.

Northridge has adopted this Child Protection Code of Conduct to protect:

- Children attending Services; and
- You as a leader from situations where your integrity or actions might be questioned.

#### **Child Protection Code of Conduct**

In addition to any other Northridge policy or code of conduct applying to them, Leaders must, in the exercise of their ministry:

##### **DO's**

- Always comply with Northridge's policies, including about:
  - reporting concerns or complaints of child abuse
  - communicating with children
  - identifying and mitigating risks to children's safety and wellbeing, and
  - record keeping and information sharing
- Always behave respectfully, courteously and ethically towards children, their families and other staff
- Always listen and respond to views and concerns of children, particularly if you detect they are not feeling safe or well
- Always promote the safety, wellbeing and human rights of children
- Always adhere to appropriate personal and professional boundaries
- Always consider and respect the diverse backgrounds and needs of children
- Always create an environment encouraging participation from children and their families which is welcoming, culturally safe and inclusive
- Always, whenever possible, involve children in making decisions about activities, policies and processes concerning them.

##### **DON'Ts**



- Never engage in child abuse.
- Never groom a child or otherwise cultivate relationships to initiate or conceal child abuse.
- Never be alone with a child away from the presence of other adults during a Service.
- Never have children to their home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present, and never meet one on one with a child outside of Services, except with the written permission of a parent (which may be provided digitally).
- Never touch a child inappropriately<sup>1</sup>.
- Never provide intimate care to a child (eg toileting or changing clothes).
- Never discipline a child physically.
- Never make available to a child:
  - a substance or product whose supply to, or use by, children is prohibited by law, such as illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco products and gambling products; or
  - without the express approval of a Senior Pastor, a publication, film or computer game classified by the Office of Film and Literature Classification as being other than 'unrestricted' in the case of publications or 'G' in the case of films or computer games.
- Never develop special relationships with particular children that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any form of secretive contact with a child (including physical or electronic contact).

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## 6. The four Golden Rules

There are four Golden Rules applicable to all the guidelines for Services:

### The Golden Rules

#### Use common sense

Leaders must always take reasonable care to ensure the safety and welfare of children in their care.

#### Two or more

There must always be at least two Leaders aged 18 or over present for all Services.

#### Never alone

A Leader must not be alone with a child during a Service, and should make sure, as far as possible, that another Leader is not left alone with a child.

#### Stranger danger

Leaders should be on the alert for people wandering around – a person unknown to the Leaders or not part of the Service should not be allowed access to the Activity Environment and should be reported to the Coordinator immediately.

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<sup>1</sup> See clause 15



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## 7. **Leader ratio**

If a child arrives at a Service and you are the only adult Leader present, you must ask the person who has brought the child to remain with the child until another adult Leader arrives.

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## 8. **Physical safety of children**

You must:

- be alert to possible physical danger to children such as unsafe furniture, broken glass or liquid on floors which could cause a slip hazard, and take appropriate remedial action; and
- **NEVER** administer medications to a child unless in your role as a First Aid Officer in a first aid setting, and
- become familiar with emergency evacuation procedures and the location of fire extinguishers and first aid kits.

**If an incident occurs at a Service resulting in illness or injury to any person (or which created an unsafe environment which could have resulted in significant illness or injury) then you must report this to the Coordinator immediately. The Coordinator will decide whether first aid or reporting to a parent is required and may require you to complete a written report on the incident on a form they will provide you.**

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## 9. **Appropriateness of activities**

You must consider thoughtfully what messages children may learn from how Services are organised or conducted. Games or other activities which could emphasise gender, physical, intellectual or ethnic differences must be assessed for their appropriateness.

To minimise the possibility of children being harmed, you must carefully consider the appropriateness of games or other activities requiring children to act alone or in pairs independent of Leaders.

You must review in their entirety DVDs, videos, computer games, graphics, photographs or lyrics you intend to show children. In assessing whether something is appropriate, you must be governed by the age of the youngest child present. Censorship ratings must be kept to ‘G’ or ‘unrestricted’ unless specific permission is granted by a Senior Pastor.

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## 10. **Alcohol, tobacco and drugs**

The serving, consumption or use of alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs at Services is prohibited unless expressly permitted by a Senior Pastor for community events or fundraisers. Normally the Coordinator will confiscate alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs found in the possession of a child on church grounds and then discuss the issue with the parents of the child as soon as possible.

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## 11. **Praying with primary school age and below children**

Leaders at Services must ensure children of primary school age and below are accompanied by one of their parents when receiving prayer in a Service.

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## 12. **Praying with young people**

### 12.1 **Pre-conditions to praying**



A Leader must:

- not pray with a young person unless the young person invites the Leader to pray with them or demonstrates they would like a Leader to pray with them by walking to the front of a meeting during a prayer or worship time,
- where appropriate, inform a young person before any discussion between them takes place that it may not be possible for the Leader to keep confidential prayer requests or disclosures made by the young person if the Leader becomes concerned for the young person’s safety,
- ensure there are always a minimum two people present when praying with a young person, with at least one person of the same gender as the young person. One of the two people must be a Leader and preferably the other person also is a Leader. However, if the Leader considers it appropriate, the other person can be a mature young person but in those circumstances the Leader must be the same gender as the young person being prayed for,
- not pray one-on-one with a young person unless expressly permitted by the Coordinator of the Activity in which the prayer ministry is occurring,
- before they start praying, ask the young person to describe their prayer request. Listen carefully and do not ask leading questions or more questions than necessary, and
- if a young person discloses abuse or information that gives a Leader cause to be concerned for their (or another child’s) safety or welfare, follow the procedures in the section at the end of this Policy entitled “Recognising and reporting child abuse”.

Coordinators and Senior Pastors must monitor whether people praying with children and young people (particularly in Services) are following the requirements of this clause 12. If not, then the Coordinator or Senior Pastor is expected to intervene appropriately to ensure these requirements are followed.

Senior Pastors must give regular public instructions during Services about how to pray with people during Services including, when appropriate, the requirements of this clause 12.1.

## **12.2 Conduct when praying**

When praying:

- verbal permission must be obtained from a young person before anyone lays a hand on the young person,
- if laying a hand on a young person:
  - only one hand may be placed on the young person,
  - a hand may be placed only on the shoulder, arm, or upper back,
  - if praying for healing, seek permission to place a hand on the infirmed area (and do not place a hand on the infirmed area if to do so would constitute inappropriate touch with reference to clause 14.3), and
  - in all cases hands must remain as still as possible (no stroking or patting),
- the person praying must:
  - keep their eyes open as much as possible,
  - seek permission before ‘praying in tongues’ audibly, and
  - ‘check in’ with the young person at regular intervals and ensure they are comfortable with the process,
- if a young person falls to the floor in prayer (or appears about to fall to the floor):



- if possible, provide a seat for them before they fall,
- make sure they are appropriately covered (e.g. if a young person's clothing has moved during their fall, cover them to ensure they are not exposed), and
- appropriately clear the space around them and give them room, and
- **DO NOT** share with the young person any word or picture (negative or positive) which predicts or describes future events. Instead, consider sharing it with the Coordinator or a Pastor.

### **12.3 When to stop praying**

Some young people may be unfamiliar with prayer ministry or the work of the Holy Spirit. The Leader should explain what is happening and what they are doing, regularly checking the young person feels safe and comfortable. If a young person says they do not feel safe or comfortable (or they appear not to be feeling safe or comfortable), stop praying immediately.

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## **13. Unaccompanied children**

Each Coordinator of a Service and any Senior Pastor present must look out for children who are not accompanied by a parent or an Authorised Person\*. **NOTE: an Authorised Person could be a sibling of the child aged over 18.** If:

- (a) unaccompanied children under age 13 are present, a Coordinator or Senior Pastor must contact a parent of the child and ask them to either collect the child, come and stay with them for the duration of the Service or nominate an adult present at the Service who they consent to act as the child's Authorised Person (to be confirmed by a text). Two adult Leaders must stay with the child until a parent or Authorised Person arrives, and
- (b) unaccompanied children aged 13 or older are present and a Coordinator or Senior Pastor believes they are not acting responsibly (for example by staying outside the confines of the Service), then the Coordinator or Senior Pastor must treat them as a child referred to in clause 13 (a).

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## **14. Children taking part in worship teams**

If a child volunteers to assist in a worship team, then a Senior Pastor must ensure that:

- (a) two adult Leaders are part of the worship team (including during set-up, practise and pack-up), and
- (b) the Leaders taking part in the worship team are aware they are responsible for the care of the child while the worship is taking place and during set-up, practise and pack-up.

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## **15. Physical contact**

While touching a child without their consent is acceptable in cases of physical danger or a medical emergency, generally children have the right to refuse being touched. Generally, physical contact should be initiated by the child or occur with their permission. Following are guidelines on appropriate and inappropriate physical contact.

### **Appropriate and inappropriate physical contact**

**Appropriate** physical contact for all age groups up to and including school year 5 includes:

- Hand-holding to reassure or guide





- Offering open side hugs (placing one arm around a child’s shoulders) to welcome or comfort a child
- Short periods of carrying to comfort a distressed child
- Sitting beside a child to read a book
- Appropriate touch to administer first aid or assist with personal hygiene eg blowing noses.

**Appropriate** physical contact for the age brackets covered by students attending School Years 6-12 inclusive includes:

- Offering open side hugs (placing one arm around a child’s shoulders) to welcome or comfort a child
- Light touching on a child’s arms or back

**Inappropriate** physical contact for all age groups includes:

- Kissing or coaxing a child to kiss a Leader
- Encouraging a child to sit on a Leader’s lap
- Tickling
- Hitting or shaking
- Forceful grabbing or picking up
- Touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimsuit
- Touching that may be offensive given a child’s cultural background.

## Recognising and reporting child abuse<sup>2</sup>

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### 16. Recognising child abuse

#### 16.1 Core meaning of child abuse

**child abuse** means an act or omission endangering the physical, emotional or spiritual health or development of a child including the following conduct in relation to a child:

- bullying
- emotional abuse
- grooming
- harassment
- neglect
- physical abuse (including domestic violence)
- sexual abuse, or
- spiritual abuse

**NOTE these terms have been listed alphabetically which is not intended to reflect any order of importance or severity. All are important. However, the concepts of sexual abuse and physical abuse are the most common forms of abuse giving rise to meeting the threshold of child abuse reportable to the authorities. Having said that, Leaders must report to a Pastor under clause 17 below any form of suspected child abuse.**

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<sup>2</sup> If you are personally emotionally affected in any way by reading this information and would like support, we encourage you to contact one of the pastoral team at Northridge or call Lifeline on 13 11 14.



Further explanation of these terms and indicators of this type of activity are set out in clause 16.2. If a Leader is in doubt about any of this terminology, they should seek further clarification from the Child Protection Officer, a Coordinator or a Senior Pastor.

## 16.2 Expanded explanation of child abuse

Set out below is an explanation of each of the terms used in clause 16.1 and potential indicators of each type of child abuse:

**BULLYING** means behaviour directed to a person which:

- is repeated
- is unreasonable (being behaviour a reasonable person, considering the circumstances, would see as unreasonable, including victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening behaviour), and
- creates a risk to their health or safety.

Potential indicators of **bullying** include one or more of the following:

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics or jewellery
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviours such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE** means acts or omissions causing, or which could cause, emotional harm or lead to serious behavioural or cognitive disorders. It includes one or more of:

- subjecting a person to excessive and repeated personal criticism
- ridiculing a person, including using insulting or derogatory terms to refer to them
- threatening or intimidating behaviour that leaves a person feeling frightened
- ignoring a person openly and pointedly,
- behaving in a hostile manner or in a way that could reasonably result in another person feeling isolated or rejected, and
- isolating a person from normal social experiences and opportunities to develop friendships

Potential indicators of **emotional abuse** include one or more of the following:

- Feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- Extremely low self-esteem
- Compliant, passive, withdrawn, tearful
- Inability to value others
- Serious difficulties with peer or other relations
- Extreme attention seeking behaviour

**GROOMING** means the preparatory stage of sexual abuse, often undertaken to gain the trust or compliance of a child and to establish secrecy and silence to avoid disclosure. It includes one or more of:



- building the child’s trust by using presents, special attention, treats, spending time together and playing games with non-sexual physical contact
- favouritism: The offender treats the child as an adult; treating them differently and making them feel like a unique friend, making the child feel more special than others
- gaining the trust of the child’s parents or carer/s: Careful to be ‘seen’ as a close, caring and reliable relative or friend of the family
- isolating the child from family and friends to ensure secrecy and lessen chances of disclosure or belief
- intimidation and secrecy: The offender may use coercion e.g., threatening looks and body language, glares, stalking and rules of secrecy
- ‘testing the waters’ or boundary violation: ‘Innocent’ touching, gradually developing into ‘accidental’ sexual contact
- shaping the child’s perceptions: The child is often confused as to what is acceptable and can take on self-blame for the situation, as their viewpoint can become distorted

Potential indicators of **grooming** include one or more of the following:

- Belief of an important and special relationship with the person harming them
- Confusion over the nature of their relationship
- Internalises the abuse as their fault, feeling responsibility for any harm experienced and fearing they will be blamed, punished, or not believed
- Fears they will be separated from their family or home if they speak out
- Believes disclosure will cause harm to someone or something they love and care for, such as family members or pets.

**HARRASSMENT** means unwelcome conduct, whether or not intended, in relation to another person where the person feels with good reason in all the circumstances offended, belittled or threatened. This behaviour may consist of a single incident or several incidents over time. It includes one or more of:

- making unwelcome physical contact with a person
- making gestures or using language that could reasonably give offence including continual or unwarranted shouting
- making unjustified or unnecessary comments about a person’s capacities or attributes
- putting on open display pictures, posters, graffiti, or written materials that could reasonably give offence
- making unwelcome communication with a person in any form (eg phone calls, email, texts, social media),
- posting offensive or unauthorised material on computers (including in emails, websites, blogs or social networking sites), and
- stalking a person

Potential indicators of **harassment** include one or more of the following:

- Symptoms of depression or anxiety
- Anger, fear, frustration, irritability, embarrassment, shame, self-consciousness, low self-esteem, guilt, confusion, self-blame and a tendency to isolate
- Stomach ailments, headaches, insomnia, lethargy, nausea
- Constant nervousness
- Poor appetite, over eating, weight loss, weight gain



**NEGLECT** means the failure to provide the necessities of life where a child’s health and development are placed at risk of harm. It includes being deprived of one or more of:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- hygiene
- education
- supervision and safety
- attachment to and affection from adults, and
- medical care.

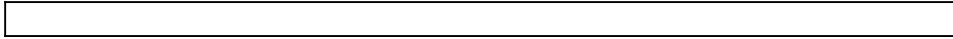
Potential indicators of **neglect** include one or more of the following:

- Poor standards in hygiene leading to social isolation
- Medical conditions not being treated adequately or appropriately
- Scavenging or stealing food
- Extended stays at school, public areas, other homes
- Statements from a child that no one is home to care for them
- Being focussed on basic survival
- Extreme longing for adult affection
- A flat and superficial way of relating, lacking a sense of genuine interaction
- Anxiety about being abandoned by others
- Difficulty trusting adults
- Self-comforting behaviours, e.g. rocking, sucking
- Carer presents with bizarre/irrational behaviour or seems indifferent to child’s needs

**PHYSICAL ABUSE** means any intentional or reckless act, use of force or threat to use force causing injury to, or involving unwelcome physical contact with, another person. This may take the form of one or more of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving, or grabbing. It includes exposing a person to domestic or family violence (either as a witness or as a person on whom it is perpetrated), being violent, and abusive and intimidatory behaviour perpetrated by one person against another in a personal, intimate relationship. It does not include discipline by a parent which is reasonable in the circumstances. (However, physical force to a child’s neck or head (unless trivial or negligible in all the circumstances) or which otherwise causes harm for more than a short period is NOT reasonable).

Potential indicators of **physical abuse** include one or more of the following:

- Bruises on face neck or head
- Other bruises or marks which may show the shape of the object which caused it
- Lacerations and welts
- Head injuries where the infant may be drowsy or vomiting or have glassy eyes, fixed pupils or pooling of blood in the eyes suggesting the possibility of having been shaken
- Adult bite marks and scratches
- Bone fractures, especially in children under three (3) years of age
- Dislocations, sprains, swelling
- Burns marks and scalds
- Multiple injuries or bruises
- Child or parent’s explanation inconsistent with injury
- Abdominal pain (may be caused by internal organ damage)
- Ingestion of poisonous substances, alcohol or drugs
- General indicators of female genital mutilation



**SEXUAL ABUSE** of a child means the use of a child by another person (including a child) for their own sexual stimulation or gratification or that of others. It includes one or more of:

- making sexual advances to a child using any form of communication
- exposing oneself indecently to a child
- having or attempting to have vaginal or anal intercourse with a child
- penetrating or attempting to penetrate a child’s vagina or anus with an object or any bodily part
- kissing, touching, holding or fondling or attempting to kiss, touch, hold or fondle a child in a sexual manner
- staring at or secretly watching a child for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification
- making any gesture or action of a sexual nature in a child’s presence
- making sexual references or innuendo in a child’s presence using any form of communication
- discussing or inquiring about personal matters of a sexual nature with a child
- possessing, creating or exposing children to child exploitation material of a sexual nature
- exposing a child to any form of sexually explicit or suggestive material including clothing with sexually explicit images or messages
- giving goods, money, attention or affection in exchange for:
  - sexual activities with a child, or
  - images of a child for sexual gratification of themselves or others, and
- encouraging, or forcing or attempting to encourage or force a child:
  - to sexually touch or fondle another person
  - to perform oral sex
  - either to masturbate self or others, or to watch others masturbate, or
  - to engage in or watch any other sexual activity.

Potential indicators of **sexual abuse** include one or more of the following:

- Direct or indirect disclosure
- Describing sexual acts
- Overtly sexual themes in artwork, play or writing
- Persistent running away from home
- Anorexia or overeating
- Going to bed fully clothed
- Regression in developmental achievements
- Child being in contact with a known offender
- Unexplained accumulation of money and gifts
- Bleeding from vagina, external genitalia or anus
- Injuries such as tears or bruising to the genitals or anus
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen and thighs
- Developmentally inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Persistent habit disorders, e.g. Sucking, biting, rocking
- Self-destructive behaviours, e.g. Suicide attempts, substance abuse, deliberate self-harm.

**SPIRITUAL ABUSE** means the mistreatment of a person by actions or threats when justified by appeal to God, faith or religion. It includes one or more of:

- using a position of spiritual authority to dominate or manipulate another person or group
- using a position of spiritual authority to seek inappropriate deference from others
- isolating a person from friends and family members, and



- using biblical or religious terminology to justify abuse.

Potential indicators of **spiritual abuse** include one or more of the following:

- Highly compliant, fear-based obedience
- Going along with activities despite obvious discomfort or doubt
- Fear of expressing ideas and beliefs freely
- Excessively idolising leaders
- Disclosure that a person is being prevented from practising their faith or religion
- Disclosure that a person is being forced to act against their spiritual or religious beliefs
- Disclosure that a person is being accused of being too religious or not religious enough
- Disclosure that a person's understanding of religious practices or beliefs is being ridiculed.

**IMPORTANT: If a Leader has concerns that any conduct described in this clause 16 has occurred, they should refer to clause 17. Clause 17 sets out obligations on Leaders to report suspected child abuse to the Northridge leadership team and obligations on the Northridge leadership team to report suspected child abuse to authorities.**

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## **17. Procedures for reporting child abuse**

In some instances, Pastors or Leaders may have a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse to one or more authorities.

**NOTE:** This Part J covers two distinct types of reporting being:

- Internal reporting: The obligations of Leaders to report suspected child abuse internally ie to those within the Northridge leadership structure who should be informed when a Leader suspects child abuse;
- External reporting: The obligations of Pastors or Leaders to report suspected child abuse to one or more authorities.

This Part J allows for external reporting to be done by a designated person within the leadership of Northridge, who should report back to the Leader who made the original report. Despite this, there may be circumstances where a Leader should separately consider whether they should make a report directly.

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## **18. Internal reporting**

### **18.1** Obligation of Leader to report

**If:**

- a Leader observes what they believe or suspect to be child abuse or indicators of child abuse,
- another person tells a Leader they suspect or know a child is being subjected to child abuse,
- a child tells a Leader they, or another child, is being subjected to child abuse, or
- a Leader suspects on reasonable grounds that a child is at risk of significant harm,



then the Leader must:

- **GIVE** this information as soon as practicable to the Child Protection Officer, the Kids Church Pastor, the Youth Pastor or a Senior Pastor. **IMPORTANT: If the alleged perpetrator of the alleged child abuse is a Pastor, the Leader must not give the information to that Pastor but instead give it to another Pastor not related by marriage or otherwise to the alleged perpetrator.**

**IMPORTANT**

**IF A CHILD TELLS A LEADER THEY, OR ANOTHER CHILD, HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO CHILD ABUSE, THE LEADER MUST:**

- Listen to their story carefully
- Comfort them with words if they are distressed
- Let them know they did the right thing and they have the right to both feel, and be, safe
- Let them know the Leader is concerned about what they have told the Leader and the Leader will be getting advice as soon as possible about how best to help them.
- **NOT** promise to keep the information secret
- **NOT** ask more questions than are necessary to understand what has occurred
- **NOT** ask leading questions ie questions which suggest an answer
- **NOT** touch the child inappropriately
- **NOT** suggest the child will need to prove what has been disclosed
- **NOT** promise the abuse will stop, and
- **NOT** notify parents (this issue will be dealt with by the Northridge leadership)

- **NOT GIVE** the information to anyone else (ie keep the information **CONFIDENTIAL**)
- **PREPARE** a written report of the information in conjunction with a Pastor within 24 hours from when the Leader receives it on a *Risk of Harm Report* the Pastor will provide to the Leader.

**AFTER** the Leader has given a report under this clause to a Pastor or the Child Protection Officer, they must not have further interaction with a child:

- the subject of, or
- who disclosed

the alleged child abuse unless it is expressly approved by the Child Protection Officer or a Senior Pastor. This is because it is important for the protection of all parties for the procedure following receipt of this type of information to be co-ordinated by the Northridge leadership in a way that does not prejudice any further inquiry by authorities.

## **18.2 Obligation to comply with Northridge Child Safety Complaint Handling Policy**

If the alleged perpetrator of the alleged child abuse the subject of information provided under clause 26 is a Leader, then the information is to be taken to have been information given under Clause 2 of the Northridge Child Safety Complaint Handling Policy. The Northridge leadership team must ensure all procedures set out in that Policy for dealing with that information are followed.



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## **19. External Reporting**

### **19.1 Reporting Regime**

Once a Pastor or Leader becomes aware of a complaint relating to child abuse, active steps must be taken to consider obligations to do one or more of the following:

- **Emergencies:** report emergencies (where a person is at immediate risk) to the Police,
- **Mandatory Reports:** make mandatory reports to DCJ. [See section 27 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998],
- **Child Abuse Offences:** report child abuse offences to the NSW Police. [See section 316A of the Crimes Act 1900], and
- **Reportable Conduct:** notify the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian of reportable conduct. [See Part 4 of the Children’s Guardian Act 2019]

### **19.2 Who should report on behalf of Northridge?**

All Pastors and Leaders are required to notify the Kid’s Church Pastor, the Youth Pastor, the Child Protection Officer, or a Senior Pastor of any information or complaints relating to child abuse.

The policy position of Northridge is that reports to authorities should be made by a Senior Pastor.

However, if a Senior Pastor is not available at the time a report should be made (or it is not appropriate for a Senior Pastor to make a report because the complaint relates to the Senior Pastor), then the Child Protection Officer or another Pastor should make the report (in consultation with a Board Member).

### **19.3 Emergencies**

Where there is an immediate danger to a child, a Leader must:

- contact the Police immediately on 000 or 131 444 and report the information;
- follow any instructions given by the Police;
- address any immediate safety needs of others present; and
- organise support for the person who has disclosed the complaint or information.

If the Leader who becomes aware of this danger is not a Pastor, they should first confirm with a Pastor that the Police should be contacted. If a Pastor is not immediately available to give this confirmation, the Leader should form their own judgement and act accordingly.

The Leader making a report to the Police should complete and provide to a Senior Pastor promptly an Incident Report Form (see Appendix 9) relating to the incident which should include the incident number provided by the police. Obligation to comply with Northridge Child Safety Complaint Handling Policy





#### **19.4 Mandatory Reports<sup>[1]</sup>**

Leaders and Pastors<sup>[2]</sup> of Northridge are subject to a duty to make a mandatory report where, in the course of their role, they develop reasonable grounds to suspect that a Child (under the age of 16 years) is at risk of significant harm.

A Child (under the age of 16 years) is at risk of significant harm if a concern exists at that time for their safety, welfare or well-being because of the presence, to a significant extent, of any one or more of the following circumstances:

- their basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or are at risk of not being met;
- their parents or other caregivers have not arranged or are unable or unwilling to arrange for them to receive necessary medical care;
- they are at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated;
- they are living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, they are at risk of serious physical or psychological harm;
- their parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards them that they have suffered or are at risk of suffering serious psychological harm.
- other circumstances described in section 23 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, such as attendance at school or the welfare of a child relating to a pre-natal report having been made.

##### **(a) Obligation to make a Mandatory Report to DCJ**

The policy position of Northridge is that any Mandatory Report to DCJ should be made by a Senior Pastor in the first instance, in consultation with the Child Protection Officer. This should be done by calling the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 or via an e-report at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au>.

If a Senior Pastor cannot be contacted in a reasonable time in the circumstances requiring involvement of a Senior Pastor under this clause, then the reference to a Senior Pastor is to be replaced with ‘Pastor’.

If there is any doubt whether a concern would be considered a risk of significant harm, then the Senior Pastor should complete the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG) at <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>. If the MRG responds with an instruction: ‘Immediate Report to the Child Protection Helpline’, the Senior Pastor must proceed to make the Risk of Significant Harm Report to DCJ as soon as possible.

Following this, the Senior Pastor and Child Protection Officer must:

- promptly notify the Board of any report made to DCJ (and the Board must as soon as practicable decide whether the circumstances should be notified to the insurers),
- discuss with a Senior Pastor what approach should be taken in relation to the child’s parents, and
- decide whether the Leader who reported the possible child abuse should have any contact with a child who disclosed the possible child abuse or the child who is the subject of the possible child abuse, and give directions to the Leader in this respect.



All Risk of Harm Reports and copies of all reports made to DCJ or the Police must be provided to the Child Protection Officer and filed permanently ie never destroyed.

**(b) Notify the relevant Leader or Pastor**

The Senior Pastor or Child Protection Officer must notify the Leader or Pastor that disclosed the relevant information whether or not a mandatory report has been made.

If a Leader or Pastor is not satisfied in circumstances where a mandatory report has not been made, then they should separately make a mandatory report following the steps in (a) above.

**(c) Reports for a Child aged between 16 and under 18 years**

Under s 24 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) an individual **may** make a voluntary report to DCJ for the same concerns about a Child aged between 16 and under 18 years. For this reason, the Senior Pastor and Child Protection Officer should consider whether, despite the age of the Child, a report should be made.

**19.5 Child Abuse Offences**

Any adult staff member, volunteer or attendee at Northridge may have obligations to report information regarding child abuse offences to Police.

At the same time as considering whether a mandatory report should be made, the Leader or Pastor should consider whether there is an obligation to report to Police. The requirement to report to Police includes both recent incidents and allegations of historic abuse.

In NSW failing to report a child abuse offence to Police without a ‘reasonable excuse’ may be considered a concealing child abuse offence which is punishable by up to five years imprisonment (see section 316A of the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)). ‘Reasonable excuses’ include, but are not limited to, that a police report or mandatory report has already been made in relation to the matter or that the person who was the alleged victim of abuse was over the age of 18 at the time of making the disclosure and does not want it reported to Police.

Where a matter has been reported to DCJ as a mandatory report then it is not required to be reported to Police.

**19.6 Reportable Conduct**

There may also be an obligation to notify reportable conduct to the Children’s Guardian. Refer to the Northridge Child Safety Complaint Handling Policy for more information about handling reportable conduct matters.

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**[1] This material draws on resources prepared by Baptist Churches of NSW/ACT.**

**[2] Section 27 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)* defines a mandatory reporter to include a person in religious ministry, or a person providing religion-based activities to children. Northridge has received legal advice that the categories of persons named in this definition are Mandatory Reporters in the context of Northridge’s Activities. If the alleged perpetrator of the alleged child abuse the subject of information provided under clause 26 is a Leader, then the information is to be taken to have been information given under**

Clause 2 of the Northridge Child Safety Complaint Handling Policy. The Northridge leadership team must ensure all procedures set out in that Policy for dealing with that information are followed.