



Form 6 Our Parish Safeguarding Children Policy and Procedures

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Parish	<input type="text"/>		

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1. Valuing our young parishioners and vulnerable adults

Children have a very important place in our parish. We celebrate their faith at Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation; they are the life and focus of our parish schools; their energies and initiatives play a vital role in many of our parish activities. We are always eager to encourage their active participation in parish life. Towards this end, we are committed to doing everything we can to create a safe and welcoming environment for our young parishioners, where their welfare is paramount. It is our parish policy to ensure that our children will be protected and supported in all activities.

We realise that valuing young people means valuing volunteers as well: insisting on safe practices, eliminating the necessity for people to take risks and providing them with support will make for a healthier and safer gathering. This parish policy, addressed to parish clergy, lay employees and volunteers, covers all Church-related activities and circumstances involving people under the age of eighteen.

Activities involving our parish schools are governed by each school's child protection policy, ratified by the Board of Management and the Catholic Education Office.

It is important that, from the outset, we make and emphasise the following confidentiality statement in accordance with the guidelines of the civil authorities:

Where safeguarding children concerns arise, information must be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the best interest of the child. Sharing information in this regard is not a breach of confidentiality. It is best practice that parents and children are told if personal information is being shared, unless doing so could put the child at further risk.

2. Our parish safeguarding officers

Some adults in our parish have undertaken child protection training and have been appointed into the role of Parish Safeguarding Officers. They can be contacted through the parish office or via the posters in the church porch. The Parish Safeguarding Officers have been selected because they have good listening skills and sufficient knowledge about safeguarding children issues. They are familiar with parish activities and are available to our volunteers and parishioners to help us create an ever more child-friendly and child-safe environment in our parishes.

The role of Parish Safeguarding Officers is as follows:

They will be required to:

- be a source of support, advice and information on all matters of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in the parish
- be the first point of contact for children, vulnerable adults and other members of the parish community regarding suspicions of abuse and other safeguarding concerns
- respond to all safeguarding concerns in line with the Archdiocese's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure manuals, reporting these concerns to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator and/or other authorities, as needed
- keep the parish priest informed of all concerns, responses and activities relating to safeguarding children and other members of the parish community
- raise the profile of safeguarding in the parish, ensuring that it remains a high priority, and report on any issues or concerns with the implementation of the safeguarding policy and procedures
- assist with proactive measures with parishes to safeguard children
- ensure that all statutory requirements are met within parishes in respect to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

The names of the Parish Safeguarding Officers can be found on the Safeguarding Children notice in the church porch.

3. Good practice for working with children

Our parish is fully committed to the guidelines outlined in **Developing safe practices - Form 7** and all relevant Church policies on child protection. The **Code of behaviour for all Church personnel working with children - Form 5** must be adhered to by all Church personnel.

4. Recruiting and supporting our parish volunteers

When recruiting or selecting parish volunteers, we will ensure that the **Declaration - Form 2** is completed by all staff and volunteers who work with children in Church-related activities.

Training will be provided, not only for new recruits but for all volunteers, in order to maintain standards and good practice. Our Parish Safeguarding Officers will play a role in facilitating this support.

If a grievance or disciplinary issue arises, we will follow the procedures listed in the **Guidance on dealing with non-compliance with the Safeguarding Policy - Form 9**.

5. Developing safe practices for involvement in parish activities

A guidance document is available for Church personnel on what to do to keep children safe before, during and after their involvement in Church-related activities. The document is included as **Form 7** and covers the following areas:

- parental and child consent
- risk assessment
- vetting for events/activities
- supervision
- knowing the children and the personnel
- ensuring other individuals do not get the opportunity to harm children
- health and safety
- use of IT equipment
- records of attendance
- incident reports.

The form used to obtain consent from parents or guardians prior to children participating in an activity or event is included as **Parental Consent - Form 10**. This form includes the code of behaviour for children taking part in Church activities.

6. Responding to safeguarding children concerns

When concerns are raised about the welfare of any child taking part in parish-related activities, whether suspected or disclosed, these will be brought to the attention of a Parish Safeguarding Officer or directly to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator who will report to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. These concerns can be in five different categories: neglect, emotional, family violence, physical and sexual abuse. All parish clergy, staff and volunteers will be given copies of this guidance document - **Form 4**.

If members of our parish disclose concerns to parish staff or volunteers, it is our aim that they will feel comfortable about voicing the matter in a safe, supportive, understanding and sensitive environment. The following point is very important: we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality under any circumstances to a person who wishes to speak to us about a situation of abuse or suspected abuse.

We will ensure that the procedure on **Form 4** is followed in responding to concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse, and will use the **Child concern referral - Form 3**.

All Church personnel are expected to deal with concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures of abuse by bringing the information to a Parish Safeguarding Officer, who will refer the matter to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator. (This does not apply to situations involving the Sacramental Seal, which is inviolable.)

7. Responding to complaints against parish personnel

Any concerns or grievances about how this parish provides for child safety, supervision and protection will be taken very seriously by our parish and dealt with appropriately. It is paramount that precedence is given to the care of children above all other factors. Advice will be sought to ensure fair procedures. All efforts will be made to deal with these matters with justice for all and within an appropriate timescale.

Complaints made, or a concern raised, about a member of Church personnel will be brought to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator who will report the matter to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Any individual may report directly to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, out of office hours and, in the case of an emergency, a report to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator is to be provided. The Safeguarding Project Coordinator will also report the matter to the appropriate diocesan Church authority.

Further information on the handling of complaints is available from our Parish Safeguarding Representative.

8. Parish record keeping

Application forms, declaration forms, and all other documentation associated with recruitment and selection will be stored securely. Access will be restricted to the Parish Priest, and/or the Parish Representatives, and/or the Safeguarding Officer.

Each parish will be responsible for storing an accurate record of each activity involving children in a confidential way. This will include: parental consent, program/activity details, attendance, incident records, necessary medical details etc.

Written confidential records of all complaints will be safely and confidentially kept.

9. Audits

We will carry out an annual self-audit of our safeguarding children policy and procedures. This is an important method of ensuring that a process of continuous improvement takes place, and of demonstrating accountability and transparency.

The self-audit will be carried out in accordance with the checklist on **Form 11**.