



# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

This Child Protection Policy is a Policy of the ACC Movement that reflects the moral and ethical standards of the Movement pursuant to Article 16.1 of the United Constitution.

## 1 PURPOSE OF OUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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Australian Christian Churches (ACC) is a movement of Pentecostal Churches in voluntary cooperation. Each individual church is self-governing, but commits itself to work together with other churches in the movement for the purpose of mutual support and the spread of the gospel in Australia and the world. ACC strives for an inclusive approach that is committed to providing opportunities for all people to have caring relationships. Caring about the welfare of Children and Young people is a serious consideration and ACC is committed to protecting Children and Young people.

It is the responsibility of all at ACC, from the National and State Executives, constituent ministers to staff, pastoral care and volunteers, to understand the important responsibility they have:

- To provide for and promote the care, protection and wellbeing of Children in a way that recognises their right to grow in a safe and stable environment and the right to be protected from harm, and to maximise opportunities for Children to realise their full potential;
- To provide for and promote the provision of services that foster the health, developmental needs, spirituality, self-respect and dignity of Children including by ensuring that persons responsible for Children within the movement are appropriately performing their responsibilities;
- To promote caring attitudes and responses towards Children, so that the need for appropriate nurture, care and protection is understood, risks to a Child's wellbeing are quickly identified, and any necessary support, protection or care is promptly provided;

- To recognise 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;
- To promote and recognise the need to strengthen, preserve and promote positive relationships between the Child and the Child's parent, family members, leaders, mentors, spiritual advisors and significant others; and
- To provide for and promote a Child safe culture 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.

## **2 CHILD PROTECTION POLICY FRAMEWORK SUMMARY**

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The ACC Child Protection Policy has been adopted nationally by the ACC through its supreme governing body, the National Conference, and is binding on Credential Holders and Constituent Churches. It consists of a set of principles and procedural benchmarks that underpin the policies and procedures in relation to the protection of Children and Young people that the ACC and its Constituent Churches have in place for their Ministers, staff, volunteers and other members of a congregation.

## **3 HOW DOES THIS POLICY APPLY TO THE ACC CONSTITUENT CHURCHES?**

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It is a requirement of the ACC National and State Executives and Constituent Churches to adopt the ACC Child Protection Policy or use as a minimum standard.

## **4 WHO IS COVERED BY THE ACC CHILD PROTECTION POLICY?**

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The ACC Child Protection Policy covers all ACC people.

## 5 DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS POLICY

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Term	Definition
ACC People	ACC people includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• officers or employees of ACC or its State or National ministries,</li><li>• all ministers and staff of a Constituent Church,</li><li>• all volunteers and other members of a congregation of a Constituent Church who may or will have a Direct Role,</li><li>• any contractors (external agents) engaged by the ACC or a Constituent Church who may or will have a Direct Role.</li></ul>
Child/Children or Young Person	The ACC considers a Child or Young person to be a person under the age of eighteen years.
Child Protection Policy	The Child Protection Policy is this document that defines the principles that are implemented to ensure that Children and Young people who access a program, service or facility are protected from harm by Ministers, staff, volunteers and other members of a congregation. The ACC Child Protection Policy has been adopted by the National Conference April 2015.
Child Protection Practice Guidelines	The ACC National Executive may develop and promulgate practice and behaviour guidelines to identify, and so prevent, behaviour that may be harmful to the Children and Young people in our church communities. Such guidelines may further identify how to appropriately deal with unacceptable behaviour or practice when working with or engaging with Children and Young people.
Constituent Church	A Constituent Church includes a Registered Church, a Provisional Church and a Satellite or Extension Service as defined in the United Constitution of ACC.
Direct Role	A role that includes, or is likely to include, providing services that are directed towards a Child or Young person (whether in whole or in part), or conducting activities that may involve a Child or Young person (whether in whole or in part), and includes the supervision of persons in Direct Roles (for example, a board member of a church is in a Direct Role, irrespective of whether they actually work with Children or Young people, because of their overarching supervisory duties).
Emotional or psychological abuse	Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a Child does not receive the love, affection or attention they need for healthy emotional, psychological and social development. Such abuse may involve repeated rejection or threats to a Child. Constant criticism, teasing, ignoring, threatening, yelling, scapegoating, ridicule or continual coldness are all examples of emotional abuse. These behaviors continue to an extent that results in significant damage to the Child's physical, intellectual or emotional wellbeing or development.

Grooming	Grooming is a term used to describe what happens when a perpetrator of abuse builds a relationship with a Child, or the family unit of the Child, with a view to abusing the Child at some stage. There is no set pattern in relation to the grooming of Children. For some perpetrators, there will be a lengthy period of time before the abuse begins. The Child may be given special attention and, what starts as an apparently normal display of affection, such as cuddling, can develop into sexual touching or masturbation and then into more serious sexual behaviour. Other perpetrators may draw a Child in and abuse them relatively quickly. Some abusers do not groom Children but abuse them without forming a relationship at all. Grooming can take place in any setting where a relationship is formed, such as leisure, music, sports and religious activities, or in internet chatrooms, in social media or by SMS.
Harm	Harm, to a Child, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the Child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. Harm can be caused by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or</li> <li>• sexual abuse or exploitation;</li> <li>• a single act, omission or circumstance; or</li> <li>• a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.</li> </ul>
Member of a congregation	Member of a congregation is an individual who participates in an ACC or Constituent Church activity, program, service or facility.
Physical abuse	Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a Child to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The abuser may inflict an injury intentionally, or inadvertently as a result of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a Child. Physically abusive behavior includes (but is not limited to) shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning and kicking. It also includes giving Children harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a Child at risk of being hurt
Risk	A Child or Young person is at risk of harm if harm has not yet occurred but is likely to occur in the future, given risk factors identified in the present. A Child or Young person may be assessed as in need of protection if the level of future risk is identified as likely (probable), not just possible (may occur); the probable harm will have a significant detrimental effect on the Child if it does occur; and there is not a parent able and willing to protect the Child from future significant harm.

Sexual abuse	Sexual abuse occurs a person with a position of power involves a Child in any sexual activity. Perpetrators of sexual abuse take advantage of their power, authority or position over the Child or Young person for their own benefit. It can include making sexual comments to a Child, engaging Children to participate in sexual conversations over the internet or on social media, kissing, touching a Child's genitals or breasts, oral sex or intercourse with a Child. Encouraging a Child to view pornographic magazines, websites and videos is also sexual abuse. Engaging Children to participate in sexual conversations over the internet is also considered sexual abuse.
Sexual exploitation	Sexual exploitation occurs when Children are forced into sexual activities that are then recorded in some way and/or used to produce pornography. Such pornography can be in the form of actual photos or videos whether published on the internet or not. Exploitation can also involve Children who are forced into prostitution.

## 6 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE ACC CHILD PROTECTION POLICY?

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The ACC National Conference is responsible for the development and endorsement of the ACC Child Protection Policy. It delegates the implementation of the ACC Child Protection Policy to the ACC National and State Executives and Constituent Churches. The role of each entity in relation to the implementation and enforcement of the ACC Child Protection Policy is detailed in the table below.

Entity	Role/Responsibility
ACC National Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the ACC commitment to the ACC Child Protection Policy;</li> <li>Support review on an annual cycle as a minimum, of the ACC Child Protection Policy or at a time governed by legislation, regulations or organisational learnings that requires a change to the ACC Child Protection Policy;</li> <li>Develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of openness and continued improvement and accountability to Child protection;</li> <li>Advocate and promote Child rights, empowering and engaging Children and Young people in support of this Policy.</li> </ul>

ACC State Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the ACC Child Protection Policy is implemented and adhered to by the State Executive and Constituent Churches;</li> <li>• Ensure all ACC People understand their obligations in accordance with the ACC Child Protection Policy;</li> <li>• Ensure adequate resources are allocated to allow effective implementation;</li> <li>• Advocate and promote Child rights, empowering and engaging Children and Young people in support of this Policy;</li> <li>• Proactively share resources and experience in the development of Child safe initiatives as they are identified;</li> <li>• Develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability of Child protection.</li> </ul>
Constituent Churches and Credential Holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all ACC People within the respective Constituent Church understand, and adhere to, their obligations in accordance with the ACC Child Protection Policy;</li> <li>• Advocate and promote Child rights, empowering and engaging Children and Young people in support of this Policy;</li> <li>• Develop opportunities for regular discussion to support a culture of continuous improvement and accountability of Child protection.</li> <li>• It is acknowledged that not all Credential Holders will have sufficient influence to achieve these objectives with a Constituent Church, but it is expected, as a minimum, that a Senior Minister and/or their appointee/s will have such influence. Whilst the Senior Minister may delegate this responsibility to another person, this will not absolve the</li> <li>• Senior Minister from responsibility.</li> </ul>

## **7 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF CORRESPONDING CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICE GUIDELINES?**

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The role of developing and implementing corresponding Child Protection Practice Guidelines in accordance with the relevant State/Territory legal obligations rests with the ACC National Executives (or its delegate).

The ACC State Executives and Constituent Churches are required to adopt the approved Child Protection Practice Guidelines (or for Constituent Churches, an alternative guideline that is at least consistent with the approved Child Protection Practice Guidelines).

As Child protection is a matter affecting the national Movement, the administration and enforcement of the Child Protection Policy and the approved Child Protection Practice Guidelines shall be vested in the State Executive and Constituent Churches in consultation with the National Executive.

In accordance with article 9.7 of the ACC United Constitution, in circumstances where the National Executive considers the interests of the Movement within a State are in serious jeopardy it may intervene so as to replace the role of the State Executive in all respects for such period as it determines.

**In the statements which follow, references to “we” and “our” are references to the ACC National Executive, the ACC State Executives, Constituent Churches and Credential Holders.**

## **8 WHAT IS OUR COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?**

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Australian Christian Churches and Constituent Churches recognise that Children under the age of 18 years need special care and protection.

ACC makes the following commitments to the Children, Young people and families who access its activities, programs, services and facilities.

### **Our commitment to Children and Young people**

- We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of all Children and Young people who access any of our activities, programs, services or facilities.
- We are committed to providing Children with positive and nurturing experiences.
- We will support families and communities to promote Children’s healthy development and wellbeing.
- We will take action to ensure that Children and Young people are protected from harm by identifying and addressing risk factors as soon as practicable.
- We will take action to ensure that Children are not harmed during the time that they are involved with any of our activities, programs, services or facilities.
- We will ensure that Children have access to adequate support to promote safety and intervene early.
- We will listen 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.



### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- We are committed to supporting parents and carers to protect their Children.
- We will offer assistance that builds on a family's strengths, is sensitive to their cultural and religious beliefs and empowers them to meet the changing needs of their Children.
- We are committed to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their Children if it is consistent with the paramount concern to protect the Child from harm and promote the Child's development.
- We aim to be transparent in our decision-making with parents and carers as long as doing so does not compromise the safety of Children or Young people.
- We will seek to involve parents whenever possible and practicable in the decision-making process that impacts on them and the Children.
- We will provide opportunities for formal debriefing and/or counselling families of Children who have experienced abuse and any other family in the community who may indirectly be affected by an incident.

### **Our commitment to ACC People**

In order to fulfill our obligations to the protection of Children and Young people, the ACC National Executive, ACC State Executives and Constituent Churches make the following commitments to ACC People.

- We are committed to providing ACC People with the necessary support to enable them to fulfill their roles.
- We will put in place a management structure that supports and develops ACC People in their roles.
- We are committed to providing ACC People with regular supervision and development.
- We will work to ensure that ACC People have access to a senior person to assist in making decisions in relation to any action required to protect Children from harm.

### **Our commitment to ensuring a Child safe organization**

- We are committed to using best practice standards in the recruitment, screening and employment of ACC People.
- We will work to create an environment in which Children are safe and feel safe.
- We will work to ensure that ACC People do not harm Children and Young people who are involved with our programs, services or facilities.

## **9 WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF ACC PEOPLE IN RELATION TO PROTECTING CHILDREN?**

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The following are requirements of this Policy which are to be reflected by the approved Child Protection Practice Guidelines, codes of conduct and operational procedures developed and implemented by the ACC National Executive or Constituent Churches.

### **We expect ACC People to understand Children's rights**

Children have a right to be safe, and this Policy is aimed at ensuring the safety of Children.

### **We expect ACC People to understand and acknowledge the significance of family relationships for Children**

Children's experience of their family is foundational for their development. Families can act as supportive resources for growth and resilience in Children. Family relationships can also restrain and harm Children's social, physical, cognitive and emotional development. Families are the single most significant influence in shaping the way Children develop and perceive their sense of identity. We expect ACC People to recognise, respect and work to strengthen the capacities of parents/carers and other family members to care and protect their Children.

We expect ACC People to make available information about this Policy to Children, Young people and parents/carers. The information will be made available in developmentally appropriate language and translated to accommodate the main communities that access our services.

### **We expect ACC People to put the rights of a Child to the protection from harm ahead of any cultural and religious practices of families who come to our Churches**

No cultural or religious belief will take precedence over the right of Children to protection from harm.

### **We expect ACC People to understand and respond to the special needs of Children with developmental delays or disabilities**

We acknowledge that Children with developmental delays or disabilities have special needs. We expect ACC People to act in ways that communicate effectively with and are supportive of Children with developmental delays or disabilities. We also understand that we will need to be proactive in recognising the additional vulnerability to harm that Children with developmental delays or disabilities experience.

**We expect ACC People to be respectful of Children and Young people**

As part of our commitment to Children and Young people, we will facilitate opportunities for Children and Young people to tell us their views and feedback about the services we provide to them. We will treat Children as individuals and respect their unique abilities and vulnerabilities. We expect ACC People to express attitudes and engage in behaviour that respect and support Children and Young people.

**We expect ACC People to act on any concerns raised by Children, Young people and/or their parents/carers**

We will take seriously any concerns or issues raised by Children, Young people and/or their parents. We will investigate all complaints or allegations made against any of ACC People. We will ensure that we promptly report any suspected, alleged or reported crimes against Children, Young people or other family members to the Police in accordance with the policies and operational procedures of the ACC at a local level. We expect ACC People to follow our complaints procedure without hesitation in response to concerns raised by Children, Young people and/or their parents.

**We expect ACC People to understand the definitions, indicators and impact of harm on Children**

Experiences of harm are significant sources of trauma for Children and intensify the risk of Children and Young people developing a range of emotional, psychological, social and behavioural problems. Child physical abuse and sexual abuse is a crime. Intervention which identifies and prevents abuse from occurring is instrumental in supporting Children and families. When abuse has occurred, it is imperative that action is taken to protect Children from further experiences of abuse. Where there is a risk of harm, it is also imperative that action is taken to protect the Child from that risk eventuating. We expect ACC People to know how to define harm, be aware of its indicators and understand its consequences. The more informed we are, the more effective we will be in our efforts to protect Children from all forms of harm.

**We expect ACC People to know and follow regulations in relation to the care of Children**

There are number of regulations governing the provision of Child care. These regulations define our minimum responsibilities and obligations towards Children and families. We expect all ACC People to know and follow these regulations. It is the responsibility of the managers of our Child care services to ensure that the regulations are adhered to by all ACC People under their supervision.

**We expect ACC People to know and follow the law in relation to reporting harm**

We expect ACC People to know and follow relevant laws in their state jurisdiction as set out in a relevant State Child protection policy by making an appropriate report to the relevant government department in respect of actual harm to a Child or a risk of harm to a Child. Notwithstanding our obligations under the law, we expect ACC People to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing or safety of a Child or Young person. For the avoidance of doubt, when there is no mandatory reporting obligation at law, nevertheless we require a report to be made to the relevant government agency and/or law enforcement body.

**We expect ACC People to co-operate with police and/or other formal investigations**

In every circumstance, we expect ACC People to co-operate to the best of their ability with any formal investigation undertaken by the ACC (National or State Executives), police or other authorised body in relation to the care and protection of Children and Young people.

**We expect ACC People to use the policies and operational procedures defined at the local level whenever they have a concern that a Child may be experiencing harm**

The State Child protection policies have been designed to facilitate decision making in relation to the protection of Children and Young people. At all times, we expect ACC People to have a comprehensive understanding of the contents of this Policy and the relevant policies and abide by them whenever they have concerns about the possibility that a Child or Young person has experienced or may be at risk of experiencing harm.

**We expect ACC People to always follow any Child Protection Practice Guidelines implemented by the ACC or Constituent Church that has engaged or employed them**

Where Child Protection Practice Guidelines have been promulgated ACC and Constituent Churches ACC People will be asked to personally endorse these Guidelines and ensure that they adhere to it when they are at work and away from work. These guidelines will aim to ensure that ACC People are always safe adults who act protectively of Children and Young people.

### **We expect ACC People not to harm Children**

It is a serious breach of this Policy, and possibly the law, if any ACC People harms Children and Young people, whether they are involved in any of our services or not. Breaches of this Policy include, but are not limited to, any ACC People who:

- sexually abuse Children or Young people ;
- physically abuse Children or Young people;
- verbally abuse, denigrate or bully Children or Young people;;
- emotionally abuse Children or Young people;
- condone, encourage, or facilitate in any way, the abuse (whatever the kind) of Children or Young people;
- groom Children or Young people;
- take, reproduce and/or distribute photos or videos of Children or Young people without the consent of their parents or guardians (unless the Child or Young person is of a sufficient age and maturity to give informed consent freely and voluntarily – this should be the exception rather than the rule);
- publish any material containing images of Children or Young people who are involved in one of our activities, services or programs that can be used for the sexual gratification of others; or
- fail to take appropriate action in response to a complaint, risk, or suspicion of harm.

### **We expect ACC People not to contravene any policies, regulations or laws in relation to the safety and protection of Children and Young people**

It is a serious breach of this Policy, and possibly the law, if any ACC People contravenes any regulations or laws in relation to the safety and protection of Children whether or not they are working, volunteering or participating in a Church related activity, service or program at the time. Breaches of this Policy include, but are not limited to, ACC People who:

- sexually abuse Children or Young people;
- physically abuse Children or Young people;
- abduct Children or Young people;
- verbally abuse or bully Children or Young people;
- emotionally abuse Children or Young people;
- groom Children or Young people;
- take photos of Children or Young people without their consent or the consent of their guardians,
- publish any material containing images of Children or Young people that can be used for the sexual gratification of others;
- access, download, store or distribute any form of Child pornography;
- condone or encourage, in any way, the harm (whatever the kind) to Children or Young people;
- fail to take appropriate action in response to a complaint, risk, or suspicion of harm.

**We expect that ACC People will support Children, Young people and their families as directed by senior ACC People in the event that a Child or Young person is harmed by any of our People**

We recognise that the impact any form of harm on Children and Young people and their families is traumatic. It is even more complex when the perpetrator of the harm is within ACC. In these situations, we will provide opportunities for appropriate debriefing and/or counselling to the Children, Young people and their families who have experienced the harm and any other Child, Young person and family in the community who may indirectly be affected by the incident(s).

## **10 WHAT SUPPORT WILL WE PROVIDE ACC PEOPLE?**

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In this section the intention is that the support envisaged will be primarily delivered by the local church followed by the relevant ACC state or territory entity.

**We will ensure that ACC People receive training about this Policy**

On a regular basis, we will ensure that all ACC People are provided with training to understand and recommit to this Policy and the approved Child Protection Practice Guideline. Such training will also form part of any induction we provide to ACC People.

**We will make opportunities available to the ACC People to allow them to feel clear about what is expected of them in relation to Children's welfare and safety**

We will provide regular opportunities to clarify and confirm the procedures for staff to apply when taking action in relation to Children's welfare and safety. This will include a discussion of this Policy as a standing item for regular meetings at all levels of ACC National Executive and Constituent Churches. The National Executive will publish an annual report to all ACC People about the effectiveness of the implementation of this Policy across the ACC.

**We will ensure that ACC People are aware of the formal recruitment, screening and employment practices of the ACC in relation to individuals with specific roles in working or volunteering with Children and families**

All ACC People will be informed during their recruitment that their employment or volunteer will be subject to clearance under the Working with Children Check system and a national Criminal Records Check (or equivalent checks under other state legislation). It is a serious breach of this Policy if an individual, who has convictions that would make him/her ineligible to be granted a Working with Children Check (or equivalent) clearance, gains employment or is allowed to volunteer with Children or Young people who access our services. It is also a serious breach of this Policy, if an individual continues in his/her employment or volunteer role with us 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. 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 the Constituent Church will deal appropriately with this by removing the person from employment or volunteering service.

**We will provide ACC People with guidance in relation to their role with Children, Young people and families**

We recognise that caring for and working with Children, Young people and their families can be complex and challenging. As such, we will provide guidance for ACC People in relation to their specific roles with Children, Young people and families.

**We will provide opportunities for ACC People to receive debriefing in the event that it is required**

We recognise that responding to Children and Young people who are at risk of or have experienced harm can be stressful. It is even more complex when the perpetrator of the harm is another staff member or volunteer of the ACC or Constituent Churches. In these situations, we will provide opportunities for formal debriefing and/or counselling to ACC People as required.