Safe Ministry Incident Management Process

Developed by www.safeministrytraining.com.au in consultation Ansvar Risk and Insurance

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Purpose

The purpose of this process is to assist Bellbowrie Community Church to meet its obligations for reporting behaviours of concern against vulnerable people in church communities by ensuring an appropriate incident response is followed. It outlines responsibilities, principles and processes to follow.

It forms an important part of our organisation's commitment to creating a culture of safety and protection of vulnerable people, and forms part of our Safe Ministry Policy.

This process should be followed by the Safe Ministry Contacts when they receive a report or concern relating to the safety or mistreatment of a person within the Bellbowrie Community Church programs.

Responding to concerns on a case by case basis allows Safe Ministry Contacts the ability to ensure their course of action is suitable for the incident, without having to work through fixed steps which may be unnecessary, and allows them to develop particular steps more suitable for the persons and concern raised.

This document should be made easily accessible to children, vulnerable people, staff, volunteers and families.

Principles

When incidents are reported, our response will be guided by the following key principles:

- All incidents will be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly,
- Our response will protect the confidentiality, dignity, health and well-being of all individuals involved (including any individuals suspected of behaving inappropriately), and
- Special consideration must be given to protecting the interests of children (if they are in any way involved), and we recognise that this may require expert involvement to assist the incident response.
- We will promote a culture where all leaders, volunteers and participants are encouraged to raise concerns and report incidents as they happen. We will make this process accessible to everyone and ensure we meet our reporting obligations (senior staff, regulators, law, insurance) are met on every occasion.

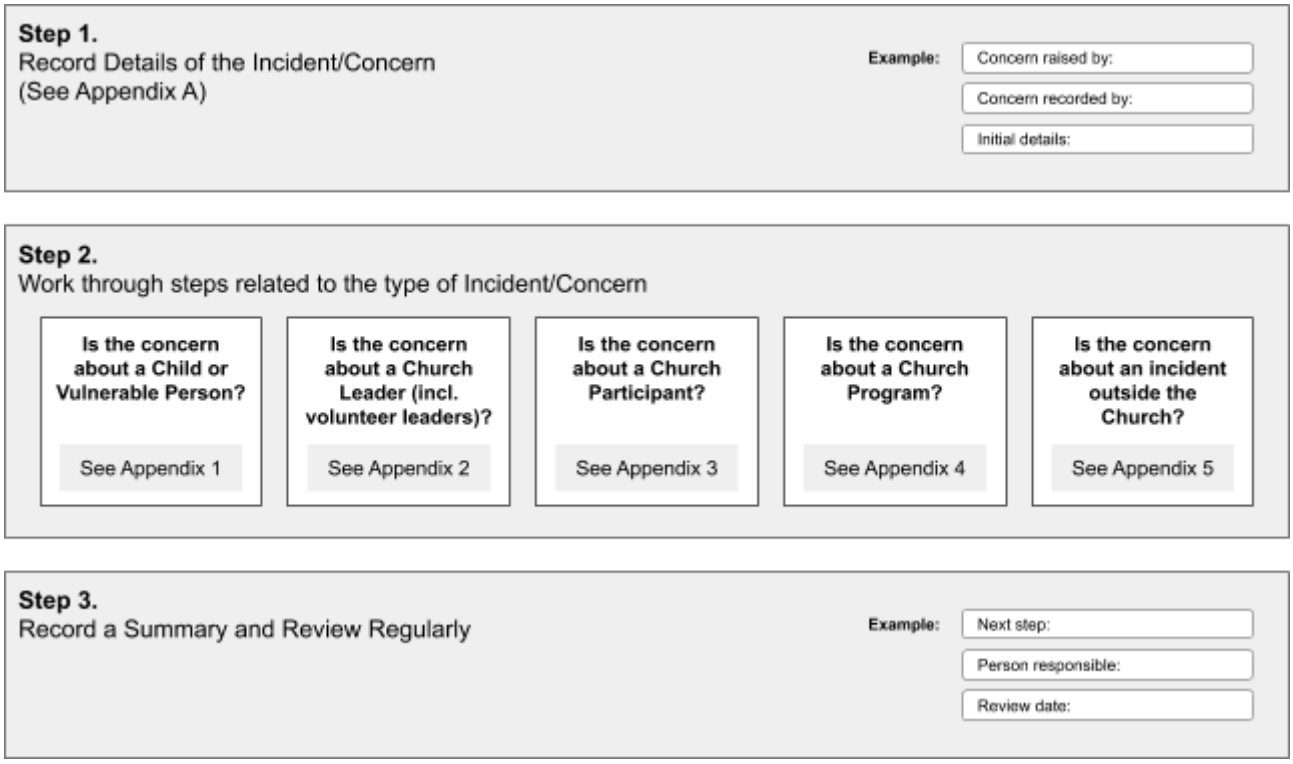
At each point in the process, the Safe Ministry Contact(s) will need to;

1. Agree on a reasonable course of action based on the information at hand and apply the principles on a case by case basis,
2. Ensure the incident and outcomes are thoroughly documented and saved as a record of their decisions and any actions they have determined to take which includes clearly outlining roles and responsibilities and follow up.

A summary of incidents and responses should be regularly reviewed by the executive committee to implement risk management strategies which focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and vulnerable people.

Process

Overview



Step 1. Record Details of the Concern

The Incident Management Process should be initiated when a Safe Ministry Contact(s) receives a concern or a report of an incident. See Appendix A for a list of significant elements to include when recording an incident/concern

Step 2. Work through steps related to the type of Concern

Share the Incident/Concern details with the other Safe Ministry Contacts, then (together) work through each type of concern, only skipping if all Safe Ministry Contacts unanimously agree it can be skipped.
If the type of concern is applicable, record the next steps that need to be taken, and take those steps.

1. **Is the concern about a Child or Vulnerable Person? (see Appendix 1)**
   - Are there reasonable grounds?
   - Are there external agencies who need to be contacted?
   - What are the next steps?
2. **Is the concern about a Church Leader (incl. volunteer leaders)? (see Appendix 2)**
   - Are there reasonable grounds?
   - Are there external agencies who need to be contacted?
   - How should this be investigated?
   - Should the Leader be suspended?
   - What are the next steps?

3. **Is the concern about a Church Participant? (see Appendix 3)**
    - Are there reasonable grounds?
    - Are there external agencies who need to be contacted?
    - How should this be investigated?
    - Should any actions be taken towards the Participant?
    - What are the next steps?
4. **Is the concern about a Church Program? (see Appendix 4)**
    - Are there reasonable grounds?
    - How should this be investigated?
    - Should any actions be taken regarding the Program?
    - What are the next steps?
5. **Is the concern about an incident outside the Church? (see Appendix 5)**
    - Are there reasonable grounds?
    - What actions should be taken regarding the concern?

Step 3. Record a Summary and Review Regularly

After the concern has been appropriately managed and responded to, the Safe Ministry Supervisors should ensure the summary details are included in the next executive review, and that any ongoing actions or commitments are properly in progress.

Appendix A.

Recording the Concern

When someone raises a concern or reporting an incident, it's important to record as much detail as possible. The details of those reporting abuse should be kept private and confidential, only made known to those in leadership and to individuals and organisations who are legally required to know those details.

Some significant elements to record include;

1. **Safe Ministry Contact Name**
   Who received the report
2. **Date Concern Received**
3. **Name of person who raised the incident/concern**
4. **Initial Details of the concern, including the date**
   Record as much of the concern as you can remember. If possible, ask the reporter to email their concern.
5. **Further Details of the concern**
   It might be important to ask further questions of the person raising the concern. (However, if the person reporting is the alleged victim, it might be important to seek external advice before asking further questions.)
   a. When exactly did the incident occur? Time of day, etc.
   b. Who else was there?
   c. What happened before? After?
   d. Where were you when it happened? Were there things you couldn't see?
   e. Have you seen something similar before? Since?
   f. Has anything else happened in relation to this incident since this event?

Appendix 1.

Is the Concern about a Child or Vulnerable Person?

Note: This step should only be used when there is a concern about a particular (named/identifiable) child.

If the concern is not about a particular child, but rather about a program involving children or a leader of children, please skip this step.

If there are concerns raised about a Child or Vulnerable Person;

1. **Determine if there are reasonable grounds to suspect a particular child or vulnerable person was/is at significant risk of being harmed.**
   Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that the details of a concern could be nonsensical; or the claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.
   To help answer this question you could use the NSW Government Online Mandatory Reporter Guide decision tree (or other similar tools).
   If you do use the MRG tool, include the record of the selections and the results and recommendations here.
2. **Determine what, if any, external agencies or organisations might need to be contacted.**
   These steps might include:
   a. Making a official Report to the Dept. of Family Services (This might be actioned through helping the reporter contact or by another person)
   b. Contacting the Police to inquire if they need to be informed
   c. Making a Police Report
   d. Contacting your Insurance provider
   e. Contacting an Elder Abuse Hotline or National Aged Care Advocacy Line on 1800 700 600
   f. Contacting the National Disability, Abuse & Neglect Hotline 1800 880 052
   g. Contacting the State Ombudsman to inquire if there needs to be a formal notification.
   h. Contacting any pastoral care persons to provide support to the child and carers.

   Include the name of the person responsible for taking those steps.

3. **Record and make plans regarding any further steps, processes or guidelines any of the above agencies recommend taking.**
   Include the name of the person responsible for taking each of these steps..

Appendix 2.

Is the Concerns about a Church Leader (incl. volunteer leaders)?

A 'Leader' could be a staff member, board member, program leader, volunteer, or even a helper within our organisation. If the concern/incident relates to the behaviour of a Leader then the organisation may bear the responsibility for the leader's actions.

Note:

- If multiple leaders have been implicated in the concern, the Safe Ministry Contacts should go through this process for each leader individually.
- If no specific leader is able to be identified, it may be appropriate to treat the issue as a 'Program Concern' which relates to the general behaviour of leaders within the program.

If there are concerns raised about a Church Leader;

1. **Determine if there are there reasonable grounds to suspect a leader has behaved inappropriately.**
   Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that claims made about leaders could be accurate, but not describe inappropriate behaviour; or the claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.
2. **Determine if outside agencies should be contacted about the suspected behaviour of the leader**
   It may be suitable to contact the Police if the suspected behaviour could be considered illegal. Other possible agencies could be the organisations Insurance provider, denominational support teams, or organisation partners. (Leader's other employers?)
   Record who will contact which agency and any details or recommendations coming out of that contact. This may be done with or through the person who originally made the report.
3. **Determine what steps should be taken to investigate the suspected behaviour**
   The appropriate method of investigation will depend on the circumstances and the severity of the suspected behaviour and on the suspected leader's role in the organisation.
   a. If the suspected incident occurred outside the responsibility of the organisation, and in which the suspected leader was not acting (or could not be reasonably thought to be acting) as a representative of the organisation, it may not be appropriate for the organisation to conduct an investigation.
   b. If the suspected behaviour is severe misconduct or the position of the leader is at a high level within the organisation, it may be appropriate to arrange an Independent Investigator to investigate the suspected behaviour with a level of transparency and separation from the organisation. The Independent Investigator should provide a report and recommendations to the board for their review and action.

c. Otherwise, it may be appropriate to appoint a person within the organisation to investigate the suspected behaviour.
d. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to temporarily remove the suspected Leader from various responsibilities during the investigation (see step 4 below).
e. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide pastoral care.

Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.

Record any resulting decisions or recommendations provided by an investigator (if applicable).

4. **Determine if the suspected leader should be temporarily suspended from some or all of their responsibilities**

   There may be reasons to consider removing the suspected leader from their duties or responsibilities, and to what extent.

   a. It may be appropriate to remove the leader from all responsibilities if the severity of the suspected behaviour is such that it warrants concerns about the ongoing safety of other persons in the organisation.
   b. It may be appropriate to remove the leader from responsibilities where they would be brought into any or substantial contact with the suspected victim.
   c. It may be appropriate to not remove the leader, but to reduce their responsibilities for a time to ensure they are aware of the appropriate behaviour of a leader in their role.
   d. It may not be necessary to take any actions related to the suspected leader.

5. **Record the decision and what, if any, steps needs to be taken, and who is responsible for taking those steps.**

   They may include;

   a. Communicating with the suspected leader
   b. Communicating with the suspected leader's supervisor
   c. Communicating with the organisation's board or senior leaders
   d. Communicating with the suspected victim

Appendix 3.

Is the Concern about a Church Participant?

A 'participant' is someone who attends a program or event run by our organisation.

Note:

- Only follow this step if there is a concern raised about the behaviour or conduct of a particular person which occurred in the context of an organisation program. If the concern is regarding someone's behaviour outside the context of an organisational program, please use Process E "Respond to concerns about incidents outside the organisation".
- If multiple participants have been implicated in the concern, the Safe Ministry Contacts should go through this process for each participant individually.
- If no specific participant is able to be identified, it may be more appropriate to treat the issue as a 'Program Concern' which relates to the general behaviour of leaders within the program.

If there are concerns raised about a Participant;

1. **Determine if there are there reasonable grounds to suspect the participant has behaved inappropriately.**
   Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that claims made about a Participant could be accurate, but not describe inappropriate behaviour; or the claims could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.
2. **Determine if the suspected behaviour is of such a nature that any State, Federal or other organisation might need to be notified**
   It may be suitable to contact the Police if the suspected behaviour could be considered illegal. Other possible agencies could be the organisations Insurance provider, denominational support teams, or organisation partners. (Participant's other employers?)
   Record who will contact which agency and any details or recommendations coming out of that contact. This may be done with or through the person who originally made the report.
3. **Determine what steps should be taken to investigate the concerns**
   It may be appropriate to investigate the suspicion further. Depending on the nature of the incident or the relationships between the parties it may be appropriate to appoint an independent investigator. The Independent Investigator should provide a report and recommendations to the board for their review and action.
   Otherwise (if appropriate) decide who, within the organisation, will investigate and record their report.
4. **Determine what, if any, steps should be taken regarding the suspected incident and participant**
   Depending on the suspected or potential severity of the incident, there may be a range of options to consider taking in response to the concern.
   a. It may be appropriate to appoint someone to speak with the suspected Participant about standards of behaviour expected for organisation Participants.

b. It may be appropriate to set out some particular standards of behaviour for this Participant to ensure future behaviours are appropriate.
c. It may be appropriate to request the participant does not attend various programs for a time, or until various criteria a met.
d. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.

5. **Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.**

   Record any resulting decisions or recommendations provided by an investigator (if applicable).

Appendix 4.

Is the Concern about a Church Program?

A 'Program' is an event, group, or session which is run by the organisation staff or organisation volunteers. It includes its spaces, environments and culture. It may also include any online environments used for the Program by Leaders or Participants .

If a concern is raised about Leadership in general, or the general behaviour of Participants, it might be suitable to use these following steps to respond.

If there are concerns raised about a Program;

1. **Determine if there are there reasonable grounds to suspect a Program is unsafe.**
   Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that claims made about a Program could be accurate, but not describe inappropriate culture or an unsafe environment; or the concerns could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.
2. **Determine what steps will be taken to investigate the concerns**
   Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result.
   Record any resulting decisions or recommendations.
3. **Determine what, if any, steps should be taken regarding the Program concerns**
   Depending on the severity of the concerns about the Program and the result and recommendations of any investigation, there may be a variety of steps to consider taking.
   a. It may be appropriate to gather some or all of the Program Leaders to re-establish appropriate culture standards and acceptable behaviours
   b. It may be appropriate to gather some or all of the Program Participants to increase awareness of organisational Policies and appropriate behaviours.
   c. It may be appropriate to conduct a Program Risk assessment
   d. It may be appropriate to recommend updated systems or processes to be used within the Program by the Leaders.
   e. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.
4. **Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result**.

Appendix 5.

Is the Concern about an Incident outside the Church?

If the concern relates to an incident which occurred outside the context of a church Program, and the person of concern was not acting as a representative of the church, the concern is most likely outside the direct responsibility of the church.

However, as responsible members of our communities, there may be appropriate steps to take in response to external concerns. Many of these steps should have already been captured in section A if the concern was about a child or vulnerable person, by contacting various agencies.

If there are concerns raised about an external incident;

1. **Determine if there are there reasonable grounds to suspect the concern is valid.**
   Record any notes or reasons for your determination. It's possible that concerns raised about a external incident could be such that no reasonable person would consider them worthy of further review.
2. **Determine what, if any, steps should be taken about this concern.**
   Depending on the severity of the concern, it may be appropriate to one or several of the following;
   a. Contact CrimeStoppers, the Police or other emergency services
   b. Contact Family and Community Services
   c. If there is a concern about a person who is in a position of influence in another organisation, it may be appropriate to help the reporter raise their concern through the appropriate channels in that organisation.
   d. It may be appropriate to inform the pastoral team so they can provide appropriate pastoral care.
3. **Record what steps should be taken, including who will action those steps and what will be expected as a result**.