



Donnybrook Community Church

Safe Church Policy

Introduction

At Donnybrook Community Church (DCC), we believe that every person—whether child, young person, or adult—has the right to feel safe, valued, and respected. We acknowledge our commitment to provide a trustworthy environment, reflecting our Christian faith and care for those who attend or serve within our congregation.

This policy aligns with our Church Constitution’s governance processes and membership expectations. Should any conflict arise, the Church Constitution takes precedence.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults in all DCC programs and activities.
2. Equip staff and volunteers to identify, prevent, and respond to any form of abuse or misconduct.
3. Ensure we meet Victorian legal requirements, including “failure to disclose” and “failure to protect” obligations under the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic).
4. Uphold our commitment to be a caring, Christ-centered community that values inclusion and safety.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All church staff (including pastors and administrative employees).
- All volunteers (e.g., ministry leaders, youth leaders, helpers).
- Any person acting on behalf of DCC in programs or events, whether on-site or off-site.

Key Definitions

- **Child:** Anyone under 18 years old.
- **Vulnerable Adult:** Anyone over 18 who may be at a greater risk of harm due to factors such as disability, health, social isolation, or past trauma.
- **Abuse:** Any harmful act (physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, or financial) that causes or threatens harm to another person. Neglect, grooming, and bullying are also considered forms of abuse.
- **Failure to Disclose:** An adult who becomes aware of a sexual offense against a child under 16 but does not report it to police may be committing an offense.
- **Failure to Protect:** A person in a position of authority who knows there is a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and does not act to reduce or remove that risk may be committing an offense.

- **Safe Church Team:** Designated individuals responsible for overseeing this policy and receiving reports or concerns.
- **Leadership Team:** The elected or appointed group responsible for managing church governance and decision-making.

Legal Framework

Donnybrook Community Church abides by:

- **Child Safe Standards (Victoria).**
- **Crimes Act 1958 (Vic),** covering offenses like grooming, failure to disclose, failure to protect.
- **Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic),** for mandatory reporting.
- **Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic),** requiring certain checks.
- **National Council of Churches in Australia Safe Church Program.**
- **Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV) Safe Church Guidelines.**

We strive to go beyond the minimum legal requirements, seeking to create a safe and nurturing environment in all ministries.

Safe Church Commitments

Upholding Safety

- We place the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults first.
- We require all staff and volunteers to comply with relevant screening checks.

Caring, Inclusive Environment

- We value all people equally, regardless of culture, ability, or background.
- We adjust our programs and resources so everyone can participate meaningfully.

Legal Obligations

- We understand and comply with mandatory reporting, failure to disclose, and failure to protect laws.
- Anyone who becomes aware of suspected abuse must notify the Safe Church Team or relevant authorities.

Leadership Accountability

- Our Leadership Team oversees safe church implementation, approves key policies, and ensures compliance with our Constitution and the law.
- Pastors, ministry leaders, and volunteers are expected to model Christ-like behaviour and abide by our Code of Conduct.

Procedures and Responsibilities

Screening and Recruitment

- **Attendance/Commitment:** Volunteers in children's or vulnerable-person ministries are usually expected to have a period of regular church involvement before taking on a role.
- **Working With Children Checks (WWCC):** Required for all volunteers and staff who work with children or youth.
- **Police Checks:** Required for certain roles (such as those involving direct pastoral care, high responsibility, or financial oversight).
- **References and Interviews:** Prospective volunteers or staff provide references and may be interviewed to ensure suitability.
- **Exclusion of Offenders:** Individuals convicted of sexual offenses against children/vulnerable adults cannot serve in roles involving direct contact with those groups.

Training and Code of Conduct

- **Safe Church Training:** Mandatory for all leaders (pastors, staff, volunteers) within the first year of ministry, with refreshers every four years.
- **Code of Conduct:** Outlines expected standards and boundaries; all leaders must sign it before serving.

Supervision and Support

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Ministry leaders meet with volunteers to provide feedback, support, and accountability.
- **Annual Reviews:** Leadership or ministry leads may hold an annual review to confirm a volunteer's ongoing suitability.
- **Safe Environment Measures:** DCC conducts risk assessments for activities, ensuring adequate adult-to-child ratios, first-aid readiness, and a safe physical environment.

Reporting Concerns and Disclosures

Safe Church Concern Form

- Anyone—staff, volunteer, or participant—who observes or suspects concerning behaviour, abuse, or misconduct can submit a Safe Church Concern Form.
- The form is available (or on the church website) and from the Safe Church Coordinator.

Mandatory Reporting / Failure to Disclose

- If you know or reasonably believe a child under 16 has been sexually abused, you must report it to the police unless a legal exemption applies.

Failure to Protect

- If you are in a leadership or authority role and become aware of a serious risk of child sexual abuse, you must take reasonable steps to reduce or remove that risk.

How to Report

- Listen calmly and reassure the person disclosing abuse.
- Document basic details (who, what, when, where).
- Notify the Safe Church Team or Leadership Team as soon as possible.
- Contact the relevant external authorities (e.g., Police, Child Protection) if there's an immediate risk or suspected criminal behaviour.

Confidentiality

- Keep the matter private, only telling those who need to know (e.g., Safe Church Team, authorities).

Responding to Allegations within the Church

- **Temporary Stand-Down:** If a serious allegation is made about a person in leadership or volunteer position, that person will step aside until the matter is investigated.
- **Investigation and Disciplinary Action:** The Leadership Team may initiate a fair investigation. In serious cases, we consult the BUV Professional Standards Consultant.
- **Support:** We offer pastoral care to anyone affected—both the person who reports abuse and the one accused, while following due process and legal requirements.

Inclusivity and Pastoral Care

- **Cultural Responsiveness:** We welcome people from all cultural backgrounds, using interpreters or translated materials where possible.
- **Disability Access:** We adapt activities to ensure those with physical or mental disabilities can participate fully.
- **Community and Grace:** We aim to restore relationships and promote healing, reflecting the love of Christ in all matters of discipline or conflict.

Administration and Record-Keeping

- **Secure Storage:** All screening documents, incident reports, or related records are kept securely and confidentially.
- **Restricted Access:** Only those who need to see sensitive information (e.g., Safe Church Coordinator, Leadership Team) may access it.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** We regularly review our documentation processes to keep them in line with legal standards and good practice.

Policy Review and Updates

- **Regular Review:** This policy is reviewed every two years (or earlier if required by law changes).

- **Approval:** Any updates to this policy are approved by the Leadership Team and, where necessary, by the broader Church membership in line with established governance processes.
- **Consistency with the Constitution:** This policy does not override our Church Constitution. Should any conflict arise, the Constitution takes precedence.

Contact Information

- **Safe Church Coordinator:** Suzi Kirkham / admin@donnybrookcommunitychurch.org / 0407 282 513
- **Senior Pastor:** Kathryn Jensen / kathryn.jensen@donnybrookcommunitychurch.org / 0438 370 363

If you have questions about this policy, or need to report a concern, please reach out to either contact above. If there is immediate danger or a crime is alleged, contact **Victoria Police** on 000.

Related Documents

Donnybrook Community Church Code of Conduct

Donnybrook Community Church Incident Reporting Form Template

Donnybrook Community Church Quick Guide to “Failure to Disclose” & “Failure to Protect”

Policy Review

This Policy/Procedure will be reviewed biennially or as required to ensure it remains effective and aligned with best practices.

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Revision History:

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V1.0	Sept 2022	First version	Leadership team

V2.0	05/08/2025	Major revision of all safe church documentation to align with BUV recommendations	Leadership team