

OUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



*This Child Protection Policy, **'Breaking the Silence'**, applies to all persons holding a **position of authority** within the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales. Those in a **position of authority** include all ministers, home missionaries, deaconesses, licentiates, elders, paid employees, church workers whether paid or volunteers and all those working with **children** and **young people**. This document is a summary only. As a guideline it should not be solely relied upon for advice.*

A copy of the full policy document is available at any time. Please ask the Minister or an Elder.

We commit ourselves to respect other people's minds, emotions and bodies. We have established **Breaking the Silence** as the public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of **the church** to address issues of abuse within **the church**.

» We acknowledge and accept the trust granted to us by those who are taking part in church activities, their families, and the wider community. We therefore commit ourselves to striving to ensure that all our actions are morally upright.

» We acknowledge that, as a church, our responses to **victims** in the past have varied greatly. We express regret and sorrow for the hurt caused whenever the response appeared to deny or minimise the pain that **victims** have experienced.

» We are committed to establishing a process that strives for truth and confidentiality. We will ensure as far as possible that a compassionate response is the first priority in all **allegations**, even at a time when it is not yet certain that the **allegations** are accurate, through offering assistance, protection and care without passing judgement or prejudicing the rights of the **alleged offender**. We acknowledge that concealing the truth is contrary to the character of God, unjust to **victims** and a disservice to **offenders**.

» We understand and value the need for support to all parties involved in an **allegation**, including the **aggrieved person** and the **alleged offender**, and we actively seek to provide this support.

» We acknowledge the personal and public difficulties that a **false, misconceived, malicious or vexatious allegation** can cause for the person accused. We will take whatever steps are possible to address these difficulties.

» We are willing to know the full extent of the problem of abuse and the causes of such behaviour within **the church**. We will strive to be aware of our legal responsibilities and obligations in relation to prevention, reporting and processing requirements and seek to meet them at all times.

» We acknowledge that we have had to make changes in the way that we relate to **children** and **young people** and others, as a result, some good things have been lost, however we will bear this loss to ensure as far as possible that the vulnerable are safe.

» We will ensure as far as possible that all people in **positions of authority within the church** and/or working with **children** and **young people** are aware of the appropriate standard of conduct and boundaries. We require those who work on behalf of **the church** to indicate their agreement with this policy statement and work towards providing an environment that prevents abuse.

» We believe that churches ought to be places of safety and refuge for **children, young people** and others, where they should be and feel safe from any threat when on church property or involved in activities operated by **the church**, or accessing services provided by **the church**. We believe that **the church** should be a place where people can disclose abuse and have it dealt with effectively.

» We will establish a prevention strategy that includes screening, sound recruitment and selection procedures, clear boundaries, risk identification and management, education, support, supervision and training.

» We acknowledge that the age of consent for sexual activity is determined by legislation. However, we are mindful that this must be read in the light of our moral and spiritual responsibility. All people in a position of authority within the church, be it real or perceived, paid or unpaid, have a moral and spiritual responsibility towards those over whom they have authority. In this situation it is never appropriate to take part in sexual activity of any kind, regardless of the person's age. We affirm that sexual behaviour belongs in a marriage relationship only and that in this context it is a good gift of God.

» All **allegations** will be notified to the appropriate external authorities, overseen by the **Conduct Protocol Unit**, investigated thoroughly and determined as described in **Breaking the Silence**.

» Irrespective of any other action that may be taken by authorities outside **the church**, **the church** reserves the right to exercise its powers according to the **Code of Discipline** and **Breaking the Silence** wherever this action is deemed necessary.

*Note: **Breaking the Silence** is not limited to **child abuse**. As a church we are concerned for all people, regardless of age, who may be abused. **Breaking the Silence** covers: **child abuse, risk of significant harm, reportable conduct, sexual misconduct**, and/or conduct that breaches the **Breaking the Silence** Code of Conduct. It does not extend to other forms of abuse and does not cover any other forms of grievance or personal injury.*

*** Any breach of this Policy for any reason should be reported to:**

Name: JOHN PICKERING (Session Clerk) Contact number: 0407 244 221