

CARE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT HBC

Hills Bible Church is committed to ministering to and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people and will endeavour to provide a safe and supportive environment for children and young people by the following safeguarding measures, applying to all staff, including ministry leaders, volunteers, or anyone working on behalf of HBC with children or in-service positions at HBC. Recruitment processes for leaders, teachers and support people will include proper screening, selection, interviews, Working with Children Checks, Child Safety training, induction, supervision, and reviews. In addition, HBC complies by the Victorian Government legislated Mandatory Reporting to Child Protection in Victoria.

From 17 February 2020, people in religious ministry are legally bound as mandatory reporters, joining police officers, registered medical practitioners, nurses, midwives, registered teachers, including kindergarten teachers, school principals, out of home care workers, registered psychologists and youth justice workers.

The following HBC policies gives some practical guide to our care of children processes. This is particularly useful for parents of children and young people involved in children's ministry activities and who attend regular worship services.

See also: Appendix 2 External Disclosure Decision Tree

See also: HBC Safe Church Policy - Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy

CHILDREN'S CARE, SAFETY & SUPERVISION at HBC

It is the desire of our Church that children are cared for and always kept safe. We would expect all adults at Church to care for and look out for children. There may be times other adults may need to inform children's parents or carers if their children are not complying with our church policy or are in harm's way.

A Safe Environment

Where minors are cared for in church programs (as distinct from the direct supervision and care provided by their own parents), church leadership is required to ensure that children (that is, those who are under 18 years of age) are supervised by appropriately selected persons and that the physical environment is safe and free from foreseeable or anticipated danger and that there are plans in place in the event of an emergency or other critical incident.

We will provide opportunity for children and young people to have a say in the programs and the activities in which they are to participate, by fostering and valuing their ideas, and encouraging participation in all areas of the life of the church, as far as is sensible and practical. Being involved in decision-making creates empowerment and builds respect and trust.

We will obtain information relating to the children and young person's health and family situation, to ensure that we are able to care for the physical and emotional needs of the children and young people.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity is an intentional practice to recognise specific vulnerabilities, needs, perspectives, contributions, and sensitivities such as those experienced by people with disabilities, people from 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CALD) backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Inclusivity projects their rights and recognises what cultural safety and physical safety considerations need to be put in place within each church's standards and practices.

Inclusivity assists churches to become culturally aware and to question how accessible and adaptive our services, ministries, programs, and policies are for those from CALD backgrounds, for people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, for people with disabilities and for other people with diverse needs.

All leaders are expected to abide by the *HBC Leadership Code of Conduct* and anyone who may come into contact with children or vulnerable people are expected to abide by *HBC Safe Church Policy – Code of Conduct and Child Protection* to provide a safe place and exercise a duty of care using forms, checklists and templates made available through the Hills Bible Church Safe Church process.

All elders and ministry leaders will ensure that the following areas are incorporated into establishing and maintaining a safe physical environment in their area of responsibility:

- Screening and Child Safe protocols
- First Aid protocols
- Risk assessment and hazard identification protocols
- Transport protocols
- Critical incident, emergency response and reporting protocols
- Privacy and Confidentiality protocols
- Food Safety, Health, and Hygiene protocols
- Pastoral Care protocols
- COVID-19 protocols
- Induction, Training, Mentoring and Review

Leadership Responsibilities

- All Volunteers, including Children Ministry Leaders, 18 years and over:
 - are required to have a current Working with Children Check before entering ministry activities (*see 15. Volunteer Screening and Background Checks*)
 - are required to obtain Safe Church Training and keep this up to date every 3 years (*see 16. Ministry Training and Safe Church Training*)
 - must not be left alone anywhere with a child, except for immediate family members.
 - must treat all allegations of child abuse and child-related misconduct seriously and must report any conduct or misconduct that may involve physical injury or sexual abuse, or any other incident that they consider harmful for a child.
 - are required to report to the HBC Safe Church Person/s if they have a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection, formed in the course of carrying out their duties
- The HBC Safe Church Team will advise the Pastor/s and Elders in any required implementation of HBC's Mandatory Reporting responsibilities and in the reception of all enquiries and complaints and concerns about abuse and misconduct.

Safety For General Events Where Children May Be Present

- For every event where children are present a written risk assessment must be conducted and kept on file.
- This should include an assessment of the risks caused by the physical environment (water hazards, equipment, furniture, fire, cables, etc.), the program (entry to, egress from, equipment, etc.) and other people (staff, parents, others). Every effort must be made to foresee each risk and minimize the likelihood of risk becoming a critical incident.

- At each event there should be enough trained adults present to allow supervision of a group to continue while children are accompanied to a toilet or any other place away from a main group setting. An alternative to this would be to call the parents to change nappies, accompany children to toilet, etc. The expectation is that there will be sufficient adults and/or responsible supervision to provide protection for the children and other staff at each event.
- The national-quality-framework recommends from 1 January 2016 the minimum number of educators required to educate and care for children are:
 - children from birth to 24 months of age a ratio of 1 educator for 4 children (regulation 123)
 - children aged over 24 months but less than 36 months a ratio of 1 educator to 4 children (regulation 357)
 - children preschool age or under who are aged 36 months 1 educator to 11 children (regulation 123)
 - children over preschool age a ratio of 1 educator to 15 children (regulation 355)
- A lower number of children per supervising adult should be used where there are water sports/activities or where the children are very young (recommended ratio 1:4 for 2-year-olds, and 1:5 for 2 to 3-year-olds).
- Children must always be accounted for.
- It is the responsibility of the leadership team to ensure mechanisms are in place to keep a track on the movement of children using systems that track registration (sign in/sign out). Irrespective of how this is done, leadership must ensure that department leaders are aware of how many children are in a program/at an event, the names of each, parent/guardian contact details for each as well as any specific risks (e.g., dietary, allergies, etc.).
- It is also important to document who the leaders were at an event and ensure that leaders are signed in as part of a program.

Online Safety

- In line with Principle 8 of the National Child Safe Standards, when communicating with children in any capacity all communication must be approved and conducted in line with [HBC Safe Church Policy – Code of Conduct & Child Protection](#). Care must be taken when using online environments to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and to minimise the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
- Parents must be informed of the modes of communication that will be used with their child and informed consent must be given.
- All communication must be transparent and documented.
- Privacy and confidentiality must be upheld. Children's details or photos should never be uploaded, published, or electronically sent without parental consent.
- Leaders communicating with children must have the appropriate background checks and training as per Hills Bible Church's screening processes.

Ordinary Operations

- It is a standard operating expectation that, in all circumstances, hygiene will be of utmost importance. Staff should be trained in matters as diverse as dietary requirements (allergies, etc.), food handling (if food is a part of events) and providing first aid.

- A first aid officer will be nominated at all events.

Responding to Incidents

An Incident Response Plan is an outline of the important steps to follow to ensure a well- coordinated reaction to a critical incident. This will help avoid a panicked response, or worse, no response at all.

- Be prepared

You need to be prepared for possible incidents that may occur within your ministry or church. Ways to be prepared are to ensure Risk Management plans are in place for events and activities, First Aid kits are available, and people are properly trained in their use, evacuation procedures are in place, and contact details for participants are current.

- Know how to respond

Ensure that people know what the first steps are to undertake when an incident happens. Will activities need to be moved or cancelled while you are responding? Ensuring you have an Incident Response Plan that covers both major incidents and minor incidents is important.

- Review

Once the incident is over it is important to review what occurred, what could be done differently, and how the incident can be prevented from happening again. You can learn from mistakes as well as successes.

Critical Incident Response

- A critical incident is an unplanned event, often called an 'accident' or an event otherwise unpleasant and unfortunate, called an 'incident'. Should a critical incident occur, then children should expect that their supervisors will prevent further injury or damage and will make the situation as safe as it can be, pending the arrival, if necessary, of further care providers, parents, or other authorities, as may be required.
- Supervising adults should make every effort to:
 - Prevent further injury or damage
 - Care for injured persons
 - Call for assistance, if required
 - Cooperate with authorities
 - Communicate with parents and church leaders
- Document the timeline of the incident to assist any investigation. This can be done as soon as you are able to after the other steps have been taken. It should be done within 24 hours if possible. ([See Appendix for Incident Report Forms](#))

Supervision of Children During and Outside Sunday Worship Services

- During Children's Ministry Service times, children are expected to be under the direct supervision of Children Ministry Leaders or their parents/carers.
- During the Worship Service, all children must be under the direct supervision of their parents or carers. Primary-aged children must sit with their own family and be supervised to and from the toilets. Coloured pens, coloured markers or similar must not be used by children in the Chapel. Pencils should be used to draw or colour-in in this room.
- At times outside the services, primary-aged children can play in the fellowship area upstairs, but not beyond the toilets near the lift. All parents and carers need to be actively and visibly aware of their children's whereabouts and activities. Children must keep back from the glass balustrades.
- A cry room is available for nursing mothers and families with young children.

Out of Bounds Church Service Areas for Unsupervised Children

- Lifts
- Second floor and upper zones of the building
- Kitchen
- Entry stairways and ground floor zones
- High planter box areas above the stairs
- Rooms with the doors closed, including Sunday School rooms
- Emergency exit doors and stairs on both levels
- Outside
- The only entry/exit doors to be used by the church are the main western double doors or the western double door if the lift is being used.

Food and Beverages

- The hot water dispenser at Hills Bible Church must not be used by primary-aged children. An adult is required to operate this if a child needs hot water.
- Children will be given a small snack for morning tea at the end of their Sunday School class. This may be chips, biscuits, fruit, or something similar. Please ensure you have included accurate information about ANY food allergies on your child's Sunday School registration form.
- Children will not be given drinks during Sunday School time. They may bring along a NAMED WATER BOTTLE if the weather is warm.
- If a child wishes to have a snack from the adult's table (during Morning Tea), they will need to come with their parent/guardian to request one. Parents need to be aware of what their children are eating and have them refrain from the adults' table if they have an allergy. Food is made by volunteers in home kitchens and there is no guarantee there would not be nuts or traces of nuts or other allergens in the food. Parents are advised to take every necessary precaution.
- Food and drink must be consumed in designated areas assigned by Children's Ministry leaders, not throughout the wider fellowship area or Chapel.
- Within the Hills Bible Church Chapel, excluding communion, no food or drink (except water) is to be consumed.

Children's Activity Guidelines

- Children are expected to:
 - politely interact and show respect to everyone. They are encouraged to show special care for older and more vulnerable people.
 - not run inside and keep noise to a reasonable level.
 - not touch or operate the main entry door key over-ride switches.