

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.

Keeping Children Safe



COPTIC ORTHODOX
DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

**Diocese Child Safe Policies
2024**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions recognizes and promotes the inherent dignity of children and young people. Therefore, we strive to provide an environment where all children are safe from harm, nurtured, respected, cared for, and spiritually sustained. We commit to the safety and wellbeing of the entire community and especially children and other vulnerable members of our community.

The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that we are all created in the image of God and that to live as a Christian we are commanded to love God and to love others. Jesus Christ has also extolled us to protect, listen to and learn from children. Therefore, we have a particular obligation to ensure the safety of our children; keep them safe from harm, exploitation, and abuse. This is also known as our 'duty of care.'

We also recognize that this is a collective responsibility. Protecting children is everyone's business and responsibility. Therefore, whenever the policy states 'we' it is referring to every entity and individual connected to the Church and all who engage in and with the Church community. Ensuring the safety and spiritual growth of our children and other vulnerable members of our congregation are the responsibility of every member of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the preeminent task of its leadership.

In addition to our religious conviction, values and obligation, the Coptic Orthodox Diocese is mandated by the Australian federal and state governments to enact a transparent and comprehensive child safety framework and ensure compliance with its measures as a faith community working with children. The child safety framework also outlines how the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and affiliated regions will embed a culture of child safety and prioritize the safety and wellbeing of children.

2. PURPOSE

This policy sets out the commitment and approach of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne (including all Affiliated Regions) to child safety. The purpose of this policy and accompanying procedures is to:

- a. facilitate the prevention of child abuse or harm to children occurring within the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne & Affiliated Regions,
- b. ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for preventing abuse or detecting and reporting abuse,
- c. create an organisational culture of child safety,
- d. underpin an open and transparent culture that upholds the safety of children and young people and ensures actions which are responded to appropriately,
- e. provide guidance on action that should be taken where abuse of children and young people within or outside of the organisation is suspected,
- f. provide a clear statement of zero tolerance of abuse,

- g. provide assurance that all suspected abuse of children and young people will be reported and fully investigated.

3. COMMITMENT TO CHLD SAFETY

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children. We affirm the right of all children to feel and be safe from harm wherever they may be. Ensuring the safety and spiritual growth of our children and other vulnerable members of our congregation is the responsibility of every member, volunteer, servant and staff of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the preeminent task of its leadership.

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese has **zero tolerance** of harm or abuse against children, and we will do all in our power to safeguard against abuse. No one is exempt due to perceived status or position. We commit to fully and fairly investigating any allegations of abuse, mistreatment and misconduct by clergy, volunteers, servants, board members and employees of the Diocese and reporting these instances to appropriate authorities and bodies when required.

The Church also affirms its commitment to uphold the law, which includes the requirement to report abuse to the appropriate authorities. This means that we commit to responding to disclosures of abuse or harm in a timely and compassionate manner. Laws against secrecy in confession have been enacted in the jurisdictions of Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia and the ACT, no longer exempting priests from reporting abuse if disclosed during confession/sacrament of penance. New Zealand and Fiji???

We are also committed to communicating to children their rights to feel safe and that they will be supported and listened to when they do not feel safe or have experienced any incident or risk of harm or abuse. We will consider and listen to the voices of children to help us prevent harm and abuse. We also will support children in the difficult times when they need to talk about or disclose harm or abuse.

We also strive to empower children and make them aware of their responsibilities to themselves and to others and to teach them to take Christ's teachings to heart.

We particularly acknowledge the needs of the potentially most vulnerable children of indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, refugees and those with disability.

We affirm the right of all children to feel and be safe from harm wherever they may be, but especially when they are within any of the Church's physical premises and when attending any of the Church's services, events, trips, excursions, camps, programs or are with any other related entities or activities of the Church. In addition to physical spaces, this child safety policy also applies to the activities, relationships and communications online and electronically.

We also commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children. We will cooperatively engage with and listen to the views of parents and carers about their children and our child-safety

practices, policies and procedures. We will commit to listening to all concerns voiced members of the Diocese. We commit to providing pastoral care to anyone who has suffered abuse or mistreatment as well as pastoral accountability and support to anyone in our community who has been alleged or known to have committed abuse or harm to children.

Likewise, we will support church staff, volunteers, board members, servants and clergy to enable them to fulfil their roles and obligations to ensuring child safety. We will clarify and confirm our child safety policies and procedures and support them when they report concerns.

The Coptic Orthodox community is a minority community and CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) within the Australian context. We acknowledge that there are cultural differences in child-rearing practices, but those differences should not compromise a child's safety and wellbeing.

We also acknowledge that there are a number of children and families with refugee background in our community as well as children with disabilities which require sensitive consideration. Because children and families with refugee backgrounds have experienced trauma, dislocation, loss and major life changes with their settlement, this can significantly affect their wellbeing and parenting capacity. These families and children require additional support, and our community is committed to assisting them and helping ensure that a child's safety and wellbeing is not compromised as a result.

This framework is an acknowledgement of our religious calling and our responsibility to safeguard children and young people and promote their welfare and wellbeing. Our Child Safety Policy reflects our statutory responsibilities, government guidance and reflects best practices.

4. SCOPE

This policy applies to all clergy, staff (paid and unpaid), volunteers, (including board of Deacons, leaders, superintendents, deacons, catering and maintenance volunteers, Interns, trainees, members, and contractors) that involve, result in, or relate to contact with children and young people.

Specific guidance is provided through the accompanying Child Safety Procedures document that provides clear processes for the practical application of this policy.

5. PRINCIPLES

Our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children is drawn from the teachings of Jesus Christ and inherent to the Gospel teachings of love, justice, and the dignity of all. We are commanded and called by God to love, protect and guide the innocent and the vulnerable. Jesus Christ himself extolled us to protect, listen to and learn from children.

Our Christian religion and Jesus' teaching reveal to us that children have inherent rights and children should be valued. This also means that adults and leaders have responsibility in our community to the safety and wellbeing of our children.

Adults working with children within our community should be guided by Christ's example – they should be patient, caring, and respectful towards them and ever vigilant that harm should not come to them.

The damage to children from abuse or harm can have lifelong adverse consequences, therefore we have a strategy and attitude of prevention, knowing that prevention is the best child protection strategy. Our aim is to always be preventative rather than reactive.

We also are guided by 'best interest principles' which means that we will strive to act on the best interests of the child. This means – reporting instances of abuse or risk of abuse to Child Protection, making the child's ongoing safety and wellbeing the primary focus of decision-making, protecting and promoting the cultural and spiritual identity of a child, and assisting a child and the child's family to access appropriate services in order to reduce the long-term effects of abuse or neglect.

We recognise that families are primarily responsible for the upbringing of their children and for making the decisions affecting their children. We will do all we can to support families to bring up their children according to Christ's teachings, including acting upon any concerns regarding abuse of children in their family environments.

We also want to empower and enable our children to participate in decisions that affect them and teach them how to be safeguard their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. We commit to respecting and believing children who raise concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

The Diocese also operates on the principal of transparency and accountability. This means that we will communicate openly and honestly with children and families and to involve and inform them of our child safety policies and approach.

We also commit to support and educate our staff, clergy and servants on matters of child safety and child abuse. We encourage them to come forward with concerns and questions.

6. DUTY OF CARE

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne has a duty of care to all our children and vulnerable people. All those working with children in our Diocese have a duty to support and protect children and young people whenever they are in our care.

Adult leaders – including volunteers, servants, staff, board members and clergy who work with children – have power (due to their age, maturity and life experience) over children and other vulnerable members of our community. This authority must be harnessed positively. Abuse is power misused.

A vulnerable person is defined as a child under 18 or an individual who is 18 years and over who is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability or any other reason (such as health status, age, previous experience of abuse, social isolation or other temporary or permanent hardship.)

The duty of care is breached if:

A person does something that a reasonable person in the same position would not do in a similar situation,

Fails to do something that a reasonable person would do in the similar circumstance,
Acts or fails to act in a way that causes harm to a child or young person to whom they have a duty of care.

The Diocese leadership, (currently the Diocese Management Committee) has the ultimate responsibility when it comes to implementing child safety policies. Therefore, our leaders commit to modelling our child safety practices and commit to their implementation.

We also have an ethical and legal duty to report instances of harm or abuse or the risk of harm or abuse to the appropriate authorities to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Diocese leadership, board members, clergy, staff, volunteers and servants have both individual and shared responsibility for child safety. This means that we will all strive to fulfil our responsibilities when it comes to the safety and protection of children and young people and work to raise awareness of child safety issues in our community.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

The Diocese leadership is responsible for the prevention of child abuse and ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures and a Child Protection Code of Conduct are in place. Individual parish leadership, the head clergy member and parish board, are also responsible.

Head of Entity - Diocese Management Committee

The Head of Entity for the purpose of this policy is the Chair of the Diocese Management Committee (Vicar General Father Daniel Ghabrial) as there is currently no Bishop for the Diocese.

The Chair and the Diocese Management Committee is responsible for:

Ensuring that all clergy, board members, staff, volunteers, servants and contractors are aware of relevant laws, Diocese policies and procedures and the Diocese's Code of Conduct.

Ensuring that timely, fair and independent investigations are conducted into reports of child abuse and reporting according to regulatory frameworks.

Ensuring all relevant adults within the Diocese community are aware of their obligation to report suspected abuse of child in accordance with these policies and procedures.

Educate clergy, board members, staff, volunteers and servants about the prevention and detection of child abuse.

Providing support for clergy, staff, volunteers, servants and contractors in undertaking their child protection responsibilities.

Diocese Child Safety Investigations Committee

The Child Safety Investigations Committee (Chair is Father Abanoub Attalla) is responsible for ensuring that all allegations and investigations procedures and documents are kept securely and confidentially, including ensuring that all original

evidence and documentation are stored securely in their original condition. They must also ensure the chain of custody regarding evidence. They are also responsible for overseeing investigations of breaches of the Diocese Code of Conduct and potential breaches of jurisdictional Reportable Conduct Schemes where they apply.

Child Safety Officer

All Parishes within the Diocese of Melbourne will appoint a Child Safety Officer. The Parish Child Safety Officer will:

Provide Authoritative Advice

- Act as a source of support, advice, and expertise to staff on matters of child safety.
- Liaise with Parish leaders to maintain the visibility of child safety.
- Keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of concerns and referrals.
- Assist parish members in reporting by keeping oversight of all such matters.

Raise Awareness

- Ensure the Diocese policies are known and used appropriately.
- Lead the development of the Parish child safety culture, including being a child safety champion and providing coordination in communicating, implementing, monitoring, enhancing and reporting on strategies to embed a culture of child safety.
- Be alert to any specific needs of children, in particular those with additional vulnerabilities and assist other parish members in providing such supports.
- Encourage among all parish members a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings in any measures to protect them.

Train

- Participate in both basic and more advanced training to build capability for the Child Safety Officer role.
- Ensure relevant parish members have access to and understand the Diocese of Melbourne child safety policy and procedures, especially new staff, clergy or volunteers.
- Make sure that mandatory and other skill/knowledge development occurs as planned for all relevant Parish members and keep records of training.

Clergy, Staff and Volunteers

The child safety policy applies to all those who work or volunteer or operate on behalf of the Diocese. Further, the entire Coptic Orthodox Diocese community is responsible for upholding the commitments and principles outlined in this child safety policy. We recognise that the creating a child safe environment is a collective responsibility of the entire community and that requires collaboration and proactive approaches to child safety and wellbeing. Our child safety policies and commitments apply to *all* members of our community as it relates to activities of the Diocese.

That means that all clergy, board members, staff, volunteers or servants of the Diocese must ensure that they:

- Always promote child safety and familiarise themselves and adhere to the Diocese's policy and procedures, relevant laws, the Code of Conduct in relation to child protection, and comply with all requirements.
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.
- Assess the risk of child abuse within their area of control and minimise any risk to the extent possible.
- Facilitate the reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities.
- Report any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk according to the Diocesan Child Safety Procedures.

8. CLERGY, STAFF, & VOLUNTEER INTAKE & SCREENING

Suitability to work with children and other vulnerable people will be part of all screening processes. The Diocese requires that all clergy, staff and volunteers hold a valid Police Record Check and Working with Children Check before being engaged in any role that requires contact with children. An International Police Check is required for all prospective team members who have resided overseas for 12 consecutive months in the past 10 years. This check must be finalised prior to the candidate commencing in a Diocese role.

Additionally, other screening methods and schemes will be used in accordance with the specific role, such as NDIS Screening Checks and reference checks.

9. TRAINING

Enhancing the skills and knowledge of team members working with children and other vulnerable people is part of enabling safe environments. The Diocese will ensure that all clergy, staff and volunteers undertake foundational child safety training, to ensure understanding of organisational requirements and currency of external obligations.

The Diocese will provide as part of its Child Safety Learning and Development Program a range of opportunities to this end. Amongst these opportunities will be:

- Induction training for all clergy, staff and volunteers which describes the Diocese of Melbourne child safety commitments as part of the revised Policy and Procedure implementation.
- Foundation child safety training which provides greater understanding of child abuse and creating safe environments for children.

Further training and development will be provided to Child Safety Officers and clergy.

All training will be detailed in the Child Safety Training Plan.

10. CODE OF CONDUCT

The Diocese's Code of Conduct is intended to promote the safety and well-being of children within our community by providing clear guidelines for adults working with or around children. It outlines the standards by which anyone within the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions should relate, interact and behave with children.

Prevention is the best strategy for protecting children. By defining what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour of adults working with children, the Code of Conduct serves to protect children and young people, reduce any opportunities for abuse or harm to occur, and signals that child safety is a priority within our community.

The Code of Conduct is a key part of our Child Safety Policy framework. Anyone working with or around children on a regular basis within the Diocese is required to read, understand and sign that they will adhere to these standards.

The Code of Conduct also provides a reference point for discussion when there may be confusion, uncertainty or grey areas concerning appropriate behaviour with children.

An allegation regarding a breach of the Code of Conduct should be reported to the Parish Child Safety Officer for investigation. Any allegation that falls within a Reportable Conduct Scheme within any of the jurisdictions under the Diocese will also be reported to the relevant scheme. Any allegation that is criminal in nature will be reported to the police. The subject of an investigation will be suspended from their paid or volunteer position until the matter is fully investigated. Anyone found to be

This code of conduct applies to all adult members of and visitors to the Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Melbourne

- Priests and other members of the clergy
- Deacons in all their ranks
- Church Board members and others in various lay leadership positions within the Diocese
- Sunday school teachers and drivers
- Regular church servants and volunteers
- Scout, choir, sporting and activity leaders
- Paid employees, contractors and anyone working on behalf of the Diocese.

in violation of the Code of Conduct will be reviewed and potentially removed from their paid or volunteer position within the Church.

This code of conduct applies to all adult members of and visitors to the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne. Those who must read, agree and sign the code of conduct are:

The Bishop (currently the Diocese Management Committee) is responsible for endorsing the Code of Conduct and for ensuring all relevant individuals to which the Code of Conduct applies are aware of the Codes of Conduct and for implementing the standards of conduct as set out within these codes. The senior priest of each parish is responsible for ensuring that all employees have signed the Code of Conduct and for appointing a Child Safety Officer in their parish.

11. UNDERSTANDING AND MITIGATING RISK

Creating a child-safe organisation begins with a clear understanding of the potential risks to children and young people within the Diocese and its work. That is, what could go wrong and what you can do to reduce or remove these risks.

The Diocese risk management strategy includes the following steps:

- a. Identify the risks – A risk is anything that has the potential to cause harm to children and young people or enables that harm to occur.
- b. Assess and evaluate the risks – Determine the likelihood of each risk occurring and the severity of the consequences for children and young people should that risk occur.
- c. Manage and treat the risks in a timely manner – Develop an action plan to eliminate or reduce the risks to the safety of children and young people that have been identified and ensure that the actions are completed in a timely manner.
- d. Review and improve our approaches – Regularly review and reiterate our approaches to building and demonstrating a child safe culture.
- e. Reporting risks and mitigation strategies – Diocese collects risk information at the organisational and programmatic level and reports this throughout the organisation to inform prevention and risk mitigation priorities and strategies, including relevant training.
- f. Risk identification and management is a shared organisational responsibility. Staff, students/interns, volunteers, and contractors are expected to share any risks to the safety of children with line management.

A risk assessment based on the tool provided by the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People will be conducted annually with the Risk Register and Risk Mitigation and Improvement Plan updated accordingly.

12. PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH CHILDREN

Children interact with the Diocese through its Parishes in a number of ways including through group and individual contact. For group activities, there should always be at least two adults present and if

possible, male and female. However, there will be times when children will participate in rituals such as the sacrament of repentance and confession, mentoring or seeking spiritual guidance and support, which may involve 1:1 interaction with clergy or volunteers. It is important to ensure that these activities are conducted in open environments where other adults are present, albeit where the discussion can be kept private, however the child is aware that there is another adult close by and that the other adult is made aware that this activity is taking place.

There will also be times where physical contact may be appropriate and necessary. Some examples include, assisting a child with an activity on a camp such as ensuring that a harness is secure or supporting them into a canoe; preventing a child from physical danger such as pulling them from oncoming traffic or shielding them from a fire or a projectile. Children may also require comforting due to emotional distress and in many instances may ask for a hug. Always endeavour to ensure (as much as practicable in circumstances where a child is in imminent danger) that there is at least one other adult present and within observable distance whenever making physical contact with children.

13. CONSENT & PERMISSION FORMS

It is important to obtain explicit consent from children to participate in children's activities. The consent and knowledge of parents and guardians of the children participating in Diocese and parish sponsored activities is also required. Permission from children and their guardians is also required for taking, publishing (including online) photos, videos or recordings of any kind. Parents and guardians also need to be informed of any incidents relating to child safety as concerns their child. The Diocese's parental consent guidelines, incident reports and template permissions forms are included as attachments in the Child Safety Procedures.

14. REVIEW

This is a living document and will be reviewed at least annually. This Child Safety Policy may also be reviewed and revised in instances where there is a change of legislation, government or legal guidance, and changes in government policy or procedures. It will also be reviewed in light of any allegations or instances of harm to children or as a result of any other significant change or event.

15. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Melbourne and Affiliated Regions encompasses parishes and affiliated organisations in the following Australian states – Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia and the following countries – New

Zealand and Fiji. This policy reflects the following legislations that seeks to protect children, namely:

Australian National Framework

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children "Protecting Children is Everyone's Business" 2009 – 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia)

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

State Legislation

(VICTORIA)

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.)

Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 (Vic.)

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.)

Working With Children Act 2005 (Vic.)

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter Act)

Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic.)

Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012 (Vic.)

Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017 (Vic.)

Children Legislation Amendment Act (2019)

(AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY)

Ombudsman Act 1989 (ACT)

Crimes Act 1990 (ACT)

Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)

Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 (ACT)

Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT)

Children and Young People Act (ACT Childcare Services) Standards 2009 (No. 1)

Children and Young People (Employment) Standards 2011 (No. 1)

Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 (ACT)

Family Violence Act 2016 (ACT)

(SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 (SA)

Family and Community Services Act 1972 (SA)

Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)

Domestic Violence Act 1994 (SA)

Child Protection Review (Powers and Immunities) Act 2002 (SA)

Children's Protection (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act 2005 (SA)

Child Sex Offenders Registration Act 2006 (SA)

Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016 (SA)

Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016 (SA)

Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)

*(TASMANIA)**Criminal Code Act 1924 (Tas.)**The Police Offences Act 1935 (Tas.)**Youth Justice Act 1997 (Tas.)**Education Act 1994 (Tas.)**Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (Tas.)**Child Care Act 2001 (Tas.)**Child Protection (International Measures) Act 2003 (Tas.)**Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas.)**Children, Young Persons and their Families Amendment Act 2009 (Tas.)**Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013(Tas.)**Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016 (Tas.)**Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2019 (Tas.)**Criminal Code and Related Legislation Amendment (Child Abuse) Act 2019**(WESTERN AUSTRALIA)**Criminal Code Compilation Act 1913 (WA)**Family Court Act 1997 (WA)**Restraining Orders Act 1997 (WA)**Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)**Community Protection (Offender Reporting and Registration) Act 2004 (WA)**Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA)**Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA)**Child Care Services Act 2007 (WA)**Children and Community Services Amendment Act 2021 (WA)**Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2022 (WA)**(NEW ZEALAND)**Crimes Act 1961**Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989**New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990**Human Rights Act 1993**Children's Commissioner Act 2003**Care of Children Act 2004**Children's Act 2014**(FIJI)**Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ratified 1993**Family Law Act 2003**Child Protection Baseline Report. 2008**National Coordination Committee on Children 2008**Marriage Act (Amendment) Decree 2009Crimes Decree 2009**Human Rights Commission Decree No. 11 of 2009*

*Domestic Violence Decree 2009,
Child Welfare Decree 2010*

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