Child Safe Policy

MOONEE PONDS
Baptist Church

Purpose
This policy is in place to ensure the whole Moonee Ponds Baptist Church (MPBC) community is aware of our commitment to maintaining a child safe church. It also ensures that all employees, leaders, volunteers and contractors are aware of their responsibilities and obligations around the safety of children and young people, including responding to allegations of abuse or misconduct.

Background
When Jesus said the words, 'let the children come to me and do not hinder them' (Matt 19:14) he set the benchmark for us. Moonee Ponds Baptist Church is committed to the safety of all people, especially children, young people and vulnerable people. An expression of that is a commitment to complying with Victorian Child Safe Standards, we seek to exceed these expectations. God calls his body to minister to vulnerable people, providing care and protection because of their powerlessness (Ex 22:21-23, Deut 10:17-19, Jer 22:2-4, James 1:27).

Scope
This policy:

- applies to all MPBC staff, volunteers, contractors, ministry leaders, and all members of the church community who engage with or may come into contact with children and young people through MPBC's programs, services, ministries, activities, or events.
- applies in all physical and online environments where MPBC provides activities, programs, ministries, services, or events involving children and young people, including off-site activities, camps, excursions, and activities delivered by third-party providers on behalf of the MPBC.
- should be read together with MPBC's other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes of conduct, and related safeguarding documents.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
MPBC prioritises the safety and wellbeing of all children, young people and vulnerable people who interact with our community. We will treat everyone with respect and dignity, as children of God.

We are committed to listening to everyone who comes to MPBC, including children, young people and vulnerable people, with any concerns swiftly investigated and acted upon.

Standard 1: Culturally Safe Environments
MPBC establishes a culturally safe environment in which the diverse identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued. We will:

- Promote respect for Aboriginal cultures and histories.
- Actively challenge racism and discrimination.
- Consult with Aboriginal communities where appropriate.
- Support Aboriginal children to express their cultural identity.
- Ensure our practices acknowledge the importance of self-determination and cultural connection.

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Standard 2: Leadership, Governance and Culture
Child safety is embedded in leadership, governance and everyday practice. MPBC leaders will:

- Demonstrate a commitment to child safety.
- Ensure child safety is considered in planning and decision-making.
- Allocate appropriate resources to child safe practices.
- Monitor compliance with legislation and Child Safe Standards.
- Foster an organisational culture that prioritises the wellbeing of children and young people

The whole church community shares responsibility for creating and maintaining a child safe environment.

Standard 3: Children and Young People are Empowered
Children have the right to participate in decisions affecting them and to feel safe to raise concerns. MPBC will:

- Treat children with dignity and respect.
- Listen to children's views and concerns.
- Encourage participation in activities and decision-making.
- Inform children of their rights.
- Provide age-appropriate information about safety and reporting concerns.
- Respond respectfully whenever a child raises an issue.

Standard 4: Families and Communities are Informed and Involved
Families and communities play an essential role in keeping children safe. MPBC will:

- Communicate our commitment to child safety.
- Make this policy publicly available and provide a copy on request.
- Encourage feedback from families and carers.
- Involve families in decisions where appropriate.
- Promote respectful partnerships with the community.

Standard 5: Equity is Upheld and Diverse Needs are Respected
Every child has the right to feel safe regardless of their background, identity or abilities. MPBC is committed to:

- Providing inclusive services.
- Respecting diversity.
- Supporting children with disability.
- Supporting children and young people from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Supporting LGBTQIA+ children and young people.
- Making reasonable adjustments to ensure participation.
- Preventing discrimination and exclusion.

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Standard 6: Suitable Staff and Volunteers
People working with children must be suitable, appropriately screened and supported. MPBC will:

- Conduct Working With Children Checks in line with the Safety Screening Policy
- Verify qualifications and references.
- Use child-safe recruitment practices.
- Clearly communicate behavioural expectations in line with the code of conduct
- Ensure all relevant personnel understand their child safety responsibilities.
- Pastors must engage in Baptist Union of Victoria Accreditation (BUV) Process (including attending BUV professional standards workshops) and must engage in some form of reflective practice such as supervision, coaching or mentoring.

Standard 7: Complaints and Concerns Processes
Everyone should know how to report concerns and feel confident they will be taken seriously. MPBC will:

- Maintain accessible reporting procedures.
- Encourage reporting of concerns.
- Respond promptly and fairly.
- Protect confidentiality where appropriate.
- Support children throughout reporting processes.
- Cooperate fully with statutory authorities.
- Report concerns involving child abuse or immediate risk to the appropriate authorities without delay. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - Social Services Regulator under the Reportable Conduct Scheme.
    - Child Protection under Mandatory Reporting.
    - Victoria Police under the Crimes Act, Failure to Disclose Offence.

Standard 8: Child Safety Knowledge, Skills and Awareness
All workers require the knowledge and skills to keep children safe. MPBC will ensure:

- All members of the MPBC Leadership Team and all staff and volunteers in roles that engage with children and young people complete BUV Creating Safe Spaces Training within the first year of ministry and then every four years. This training includes:
    - Information on recognising indicators of abuse.
    - Guidance on responding to disclosures.
    - Education on mandatory reporting obligations.
    - Training on professional boundaries and appropriate behaviour.
- Policies are reviewed regularly.

Standard 9: Physical and Online Environments Promote Safety
MPBC recognises that risks exist in both physical and digital environments. MPBC will:

- Identify and manage child safety risks.
- Supervise activities appropriately.
- Maintain safe facilities.
- Establish online safety expectations.
- Manage photography, video and social media appropriately.
- Promote safe communication between adults and children.
- Regularly review environmental risks.
- Follow *An Australian Baptist Response to Persons of Concern: Individual Accountability and Safety Agreements*

Standard 10: Review and Improve
Child safety is an ongoing process requiring continuous improvement. MPBC will:

- Regularly review child safety policies.
- Monitor and review incidents and complaints.
- Seek feedback from children and families.
- Evaluate effectiveness of risk controls.
- Update practices following legislative changes.
- Learn from reviews and incidents to improve safety.

Standard 11: Policies and Procedures Document Child Safety
MPBC maintains clear, accessible and current child safety documentation. These include:

- Child Safe Policy
- MPBC Codes of Conduct
- Safety Screening Policy
- Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Procedures around incident management and reporting
- Procedures around responding to abuse and neglect
- Training records

Accountability

Role	Responsibility
MPBC Leadership	• Governance of child safety • Monitoring compliance • Fostering a culture of continuous improvement. • Responding to concerns • Regularly reviewing policy and procedures to ensure compliance with relevant legislation
Lead Pastor and the Secretary of the MPBC Leadership Team	• Compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme as the 'Head of Relevant Entity'

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Role	Responsibility
Ministry and Program Leaders	• Implementing this policy • Identifying and managing risks • Escalating all concerns.
All staff and volunteers	• Complying with all aspects of this policy and associated procedures and guidelines. • Escalating all concerns.
Church Members and Regular Attendees	• Upholding a child safe culture

Definitions

Term	Definition
Child	Any person under the age of 18.
Young person	Any person under the age of 18. Whilst this term can be used interchangeably with child, it is included to support older children and teenagers to feel represented in this policy.
Vulnerable person	Any individual who is at a higher risk of harm, abuse, neglect, or exploitation due to their age, health status, disability, or personal circumstances that limit their ability to protect or care for themselves.
Volunteer	A person who has been formally appointed or accepted by the organisation to perform an approved unpaid role or position on behalf of the organisation. This does not include individuals who provide occasional or incidental assistance outside a designated volunteer role.
Ministry Leader	Any person who has responsibility for coordinating all facets of a particular ministry program of MPBC.
Program Leader	Any person who has responsibility for leading a session of a MPBC ministry program, or MPBC event, on that day.

Legislative Context

Convention of the Rights of the Child
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
Victorian Child Safe Standards
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Act 2015 Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017
Crimes Act 1958