

# Church of Christ

Loving God, living life, reaching out for Jesus

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## FORSTER TUNCURRY CHURCH OF CHRIST (FTCOC) MANDATORY REPORTING POLICY

### CONTENTS

<b>1. FTCOC VISION AND VALUES .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. DEFINITIONS.....</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Child protection reporting obligations .....	2
Reasonable belief .....	2
Sexual harassment .....	2
<b>3. CREATING A SAFE COMMUNITY AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4. WHEN IS A CHILD IN NEED OF PROTECTION? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5. MANDATORY REPORTING OBLIGATIONS – CHILD ABUSE.....</b>	<b>3</b>
5.1    Abuse of a Child Outside of the Church.....	3
5.2    Abuse of a Child by a FTCOC Employee, Volunteer or Community Member.....	3
<b>6. MANDATORY REPORTING PROCESS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Step 1. Incident Summary.....	3
Step 2. Withdraw Staff / Leader .....	4
Step 3. Notify DCJ .....	4
Step 4. Time Sensitivity.....	4
Step 5. Contact Insurer .....	4
Step 6. Investigation .....	5
Step 7. Pastoral Care.....	5
Step 8. Publication and Distribution .....	6
Step 9. Review of Policy .....	6
<b>7. APPROVAL AND REVIEW .....</b>	<b>6</b>

### 1. FTCOC VISION AND VALUES

**VISION**      Loving God, Living Life—Reaching Out For Jesus.

**MISSION** Reaching this community through the practice of the faith and principles of the New Testament Church in a relevant way.

**WE VALUE** Being a Healthy and Missional Church that has Passionate Spirituality, Functional Systems and Godly Relationships.

## 2. TERMS

### Please see Glossary of Terms for Definitions

Child protection reporting obligations

Reasonable belief

Sexual harassment

## 3. CREATING A SAFE COMMUNITY AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Church must develop strategies to create a safe learning and working environment within the Church. To do this:

1. Staff, volunteers and where possible, church members, must become familiar with these strategies.
2. All allegations of abuse must be taken seriously.
3. The strategies developed by the Church must be monitored continuously and reviewed regularly.
4. The Church must provide professional development to meet the needs of the staff in implementing this Policy.
5. The Pastor must promote this Policy within the Church, with particular regard to the professional development needs of staff; and monitor the strategies.
6. Staff must model and promote appropriate behaviour, be aware of the legislative requirements and reporting processes relating to mandatory reporting; and ensure that claims of abuse are speedily and constructively reported and addressed according to this Policy and the strategies developed under it.

## 4. WHEN IS A CHILD IN NEED OF PROTECTION?

A child or vulnerable person is in need of protection if any of the following grounds exist:

- a. the child has been abandoned by his or her parents;
- b. the child's parents are dead or incapacitated and there is no other suitable person willing and able to care for the child;
- c. the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type;
- d. the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of sexual abuse and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type;
- e. the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, emotional or psychological harm of such a kind that the child's emotional or intellectual development is, or is likely to be, significantly damaged

and the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect, the child from harm of that type;

- f. the child's physical development or health has been, or is likely to be, significantly harmed and the child's parents have not provided, arranged or allowed the provision of, or are unlikely to provide, arrange or allow the provision of, basic care or effective medical, surgical or other remedial care;
- g. the child or vulnerable person has suffered, or is likely to suffer, bullying, image-based abuse or similar harm of such a kind that the vulnerable person's emotional or intellectual development is, or is likely to be, significantly damaged;
- h. the vulnerable person has suffered, or is likely to suffer financial abuse or similar harm of such a kind that the vulnerable person's financial position is, or is likely to be, significantly damaged;
- i. the child or vulnerable person has suffered, or is likely to suffer spiritual abuse or similar harm of such a kind that the vulnerable person's emotional or intellectual development is, or is likely to be, significantly damaged.

## 5. MANDATORY REPORTING OBLIGATIONS – CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse, especially sexual abuse of a child must be reported, where a reasonable belief is held that the child concerned has been abused, is being or is likely to be abused. A responsible adult can come to a reasonable belief through:

- Disclosure by a child about abuse to him or herself.
- Disclosure by another child or an adult about abuse to a child, or
- Direct observation of the abuse or evidence of it by the reporting adult.

### 5.1 Abuse of a Child Outside of the Church

If a child attending FTCOC discloses abuse against them or to another child by a person outside of the FTCOC community, then the procedures outlined below must be followed. All such disclosures should be written up on a FTCOC Incident / Injury Form (see Appendix A) and the Pastor informed. However, it is the duty of the person to whom the disclosure was made to report the matter to either the Police or Child Protection Services, following the Reporting Procedure, in liaison with the Pastor. The church leadership may also decide to make a report.

In this context, no further investigation by the church is required. However, all reasonable steps to protect the child from harm should be taken.

### 5.2 Abuse of a Child by a FTCOC Employee, Volunteer or Community Member

In the case of an allegation being made against a staff member, volunteer, community member, leader or contractor at FTCOC, the Pastor will follow the Reporting Procedure in the Appendix and notify both the Elders and either the Police (if the matter is deemed severe or criminal) or the Department of Community Justice (DCJ) and follow all government mandatory reporting requirements.

## 6. MANDATORY REPORTING PROCESS

### Step 1. Incident Summary

Ensure that the details of the allegation are recorded on a FTCOC Incident/Injury Reporting Form, and the Pastor is informed. If the victim or mandatory reporter are not willing or able to fill out the form, the Pastor (or other leader) may take notes and fill out the form at a later time. The Pastor will share the allegation with the Elders. A copy of this Form must be kept by the Pastor. The complainant may keep the original. This is an essential record of the event.

Pastor to report the matter to the Police, if serious. Any person who believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse should telephone 000. Penalties may be incurred by those named as 'mandatory reporters' if they fail to notify the Child Protection agency if they have reasonable grounds for a belief (not proof) that a child or young person is in need of protection, because they have suffered, or are likely to suffer significant harm, particularly physical or sexual abuse.

If a child is concerned about their own safety or the safety of another person, the child may speak to the Pastor. The Pastor will meet with the complainant, and hear the story, taking notes and seeking clarification, ensuring that the complainant feels listened to, understood and protected. (Some complaints may be able to be dealt with at this time, where there is misunderstanding, a lack of evidence of any abuse or no reportable act has been committed).

## **Step 2. Withdraw Staff / Leader**

Pastor to withdraw the accused person from active duty, which could entail standing down (with pay, where applicable), re-assignment to other duties that do not have direct contact with children, or to work under increased supervision while the matter is being investigated.

## **Step 3. Notify DCJ**

Notify the DCJ in accordance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme guidelines, that is, within three (3) working days. The following information required when making a formal report to either the Police or DCJ:

- The child's name, age (date of birth is preferable) and address.
- The name, age and address of any known siblings.
- Your reasons (observations or disclosures) for believing that the child is at risk of abuse or actually being abused or neglected.
- Your assessment of the immediate danger to the child.
- Current whereabouts of the child or vulnerable person (if not in the home).
- Your description of injuries or 'sign' behaviours you have observed.
- Any other information you may have of relevance to the investigation.
- Information link for all States/Territories <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>.

## **Step 4. Time Sensitivity**

The investigation process should be completed within 30 days of notification, and the report of the investigation, including findings and actions taken (or decision not to act) will be sent to the DCP. In some cases, it may be appropriate to bring in an investigator from outside the church, to avoid conflicts of interest. If the case has been reported to authorities, investigations by FTCOC should only be conducted when the authorities have approved this investigation.

## **Step 5. Contact Insurer**

When a report is made, the Elders will contact the insurer.

## Step 6. Investigation

This section of the Policy applies unless an investigation is being carried out by the Police, Community Services, the Ombudsman or some other state or federal authority.

The Pastor must investigate all reports of abuse, in a way which affords procedural fairness to the person who is the subject of the allegation ("the subject"). This means that, before completing an investigation of an allegation of abuse, the Pastor must inform the subject of the substance of the allegation against them and provide them with a reasonable opportunity to put their case forward (if required by the subject, with the assistance of a support person of the subject's choice). Normally, the Pastor is to decide the timing and the particular form this will take, ensuring the investigation is not compromised.

It also means that the Pastor must:

1. Act fairly and without bias;
2. Conduct an investigation without undue delay;
3. Ensure the case is not investigated or determined by someone with a conflict of interest;
4. Ensure the outcome is supported by evidence;
5. Take steps to maintain confidentiality for the sake of all parties involved in the investigation.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Pastor may:

1. If the breach is minor, resulting from a misunderstanding of how certain words or behaviour were understood, require from the subject:
  - a. an apology;
  - b. and/or a commitment not to repeat the offence
2. If it is more serious, require from the subject:
  - a. an undertaking to attend counselling and/or training;
  - b. and/or a written apology;
  - c. and/or a commitment not to offend again.
3. In the most serious case:
  - a. where the subject is a member of staff, suspend or terminate their employment;
  - b. must advise the victim and the subject in writing of the result of the investigation and the action taken.
  - c. If the victim of the abuse is unhappy with the conduct or result of investigation, they may take their complaint to any relevant authority depending on the circumstances.

## Step 7. Pastoral Care

The Church must:

1. Where an underage young person is the victim of the alleged abuse, the Pastor must as soon as possible advise the young person's parents or caregivers of the nature of the allegations and of the proposed investigation (unless directed otherwise by law enforcement.)
2. Make available counsellors to provide counselling and other support as required to those who have been subjected to any form of abuse and, where relevant, their families;

3. Refer people to external agencies able to provide care and support for victims of the particular type of abuse involved;
4. Provide counselling and other support as required to children and staff who have been subjected to allegations of abuse and, where relevant, their families.

## Step 8. Publication and Distribution

This Policy must be promoted to the Church community and maintained in the following ways:

1. A summary of the policy will be published in the Church's team member handbook.
2. There will be a full review of the policy one per year at a staff development day.
3. This Policy must also be given to all new staff who must, as part of their contract of employment, agree to its terms.
4. This Policy must be given to all members of the Elders.

## Step 9. Review of Policy

The Pastor is to ensure that this policy is regularly monitored and revised in the light of legislative or best practice changes.

In any event, the Elders are to review this policy every three years.

## 7. APPROVAL AND REVIEW

Approval and Review	Details
Ownership and Accountability	Bret Clarke, Rhonda Gibson, Chris Goodridge, Breff Gorman, Jenny Medland, Peter Smith
Approval Responsibilities	Elders
Next Review Date	September 2028

Approval and Review	Details
Approval Date	13 October 2025
Amendment History	

# **INCIDENT REPORT FORM**



## **SECTION A – THE DETAILS**

Date of Incident:

Date of Report:

Written By:

Person(s) Involved:

Personnel Informed:

- Senior Ministry Leader    Ministry Co-ordinator    Pastoral Care Leader
- Pastoral Care Leader    Safe Church Concerns Person / Safeguarding Officer
- Other (specify)

## **SECTION B – THE INCIDENT**

Details of Incident:

Action Taken:

Outcomes (if known):

## SECTION C – FOLLOW UP / ANALYSIS

Follow Up Comments:

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Type of Incident:  On-going  One-off

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Have appropriate steps been taken?  Yes  No

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*If no to either of the above, what needs to be done?*

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Photos of incident/accident supplied:  Yes  No

### INCIDENT/ACCIDENT REPORTED TO:

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF REPORTER:

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_