

Complaint Handling Policy

Introduction

Ringwood Church of Christ respects the unique skills, characteristics, abilities, culture, sexuality and identity of every child and adult. We aim to ensure our Church is a safe place for all people. When a complaint is made against any person not respecting a child or adult during one of our programs, services or while using our facilities, we will implement this Complaint Handling Policy.

Scope

This Policy applies to all people who conduct work for, or are connected to, Ringwood Church of Christ in a paid or unpaid capacity. This includes Elders, staff, volunteers, interns, trainees, contractors, members and visitors.

Deviation Clause

This Policy might not fit all situations and circumstances so deviation from this Policy may occur as is appropriate by the Director of Ministries and/or Safety Officer.

Who can make a complaint?

Any person of any age who feels that there is a valid reason for a complaint to be made that has occurred to them or someone else, while participating in one of our programs or services or using our facilities for any reason, can make a complaint.

All complaints will be taken seriously and followed up as a priority.

What might be a valid reason for a complaint to be made?

- a) Racism
- b) Physical or sexual abuse
- c) Misconduct or inappropriate behaviour
- d) Unreasonable exclusion
- e) Verbal abuse or derogatory language
- f) Bullying

Who to make the complaint to

When an incident is experienced, occurs or is first witnessed, the first person to notify is the program leader. Some incidents are best dealt with at the time they occur, such as racism, verbal abuse, bullying etc. Anyone can make a complaint to the Director of Ministries. Alternatively, contact the Church Office to speak with one of our ministry team or staff members, or contact the Safety Officer. If the complaint is about the program leader or is a recurring concern, then complaints can be directed to the Director of Ministries or the Safety Officer.

Any complaints can be made to:

Director of Ministries, Safety Officer - safety.officer@ringwoodchurch.org.au, or via the Church Office, office@ringwoodchurch.org.au or phone 9870 8169 or text 0408 248 119.

The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will proceed through the following *Process for Responding to Allegations* procedure. As part of this process, support will be provided to the person making the complaint and the alleged perpetrator if associated with Ringwood Church of Christ.

Process for responding to allegations

All complaints will be handled with strict confidentiality. Where appropriate, the anonymity of the person raising the complaint will be maintained, however, this will not always be possible.

The person receiving the complaint will ensure the person making the complaint or anyone else affected is in a safe place and they will be attentive to their needs.

In the event of racism, abusive language, bullying behaviour etc. the program leader will speak directly with the alleged perpetrator with the aim to explain that their behaviour is hurtful and inappropriate and to rectify the situation if possible. An incident report will be written at the first available opportunity by the program leader and submitted to the Administration Manager for review and subsequently kept securely online.

Depending on the nature of a concern or complaint, the Church will follow the guidance for action according to process a), b) or c) listed below. If alternative action is deemed necessary, the program leader will involve the area Ministry Leader or the Director of Ministries for further action which may involve referring to the *Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure* (currently in draft form), the *Corrective Action and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures* (currently in draft form) or the *CCVT Child Safety Reporting Procedure Victoria Policy*.

If in doubt of what to do in any of these instances, the Church will contact Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania (CCVT)'s Safe Places and Professional Standards Consultant, via safeplaces@churchesofchrist.org.au or 9488 8800.

a) Responding to alleged abuse in children or youth:

The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will proceed through the following *Process for Responding to Allegations*. This may require reporting to the Police or the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and/or the Church reporting to the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will not investigate if abuse has occurred, they are only responsible to report their reasonable concerns of abuse and why they have those concerns. The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will not discuss their concerns with the child/youth, the child/youth's family, the alleged perpetrator (if known) or the media. The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will inform Elders that a reported allegation of abuse has been made and what steps have been taken.

In Victoria, Ministers of religion are mandated to report physical injury or sexual abuse of children if they have belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection.

b) Responding to alleged abuse in adults:

The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will follow the *Process for Responding to Allegations* which may require reporting alleged abuse to the Police or DFFH if there are signs that indicate a vulnerable adult is experiencing abuse or neglect, or if abuse has been disclosed or witnessed. The Director of Ministries will be informed (if not already aware) and they will inform Elders that a reported allegation of abuse has been made and what steps have been taken.

c) Responding to alleged misconduct or grievances:

The Director of Ministries or Safety Officer will refer to the *Process for Responding to Allegations*. The Safety Officer will advise the Director of Ministries (if not already aware) who may take further action in accordance with the Process for responding to misconduct or grievances (currently not written). If staff are involved the Director of Ministries may refer to the Corrective Action and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures (currently in draft form), and/or the Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure (currently in draft form), and/or the Ringwood Church of Christ Constitution.

If the Safety Officer has a complaint provided to them that they feel may be a conflict of interest with the Director of Ministries or Elders, or has any questions/concerns about the conduct of any ministers or leaders in CCVT-affiliated communities, concerns about the safety of people within CCVT-affiliated ministries, or they wish to report misconduct, they can contact:

Professional Standards Consultant (CCVT)

Email: professionalstandards@churchesofchrist.org.au

Phone: 03 9488 8800

Mailing address: PO Box 5302, South Melbourne VIC 3205

Support and Assistance

All steps will be taken to attend to the safety of the person making the complaint.

If it is a child under 18 years of age, the parents will be called, unless the parents are the alleged perpetrator(s). A pastoral care person (staff or volunteer) within the Ringwood Church of Christ community will be called upon, by the Director of Ministries, Safety Officer or Ministry Leader, to provide support, comfort and to meet the needs of the complainant throughout the Complaint Handling process. Further appropriate external assistance will be sought or referred to, such as from the *Support Resources* document Appendix A, should this be deemed necessary by the Director of Ministries or Safety Officer.

Breaches of Code of Conduct

All behaviour that is contrary to the *Code of Conduct* will be investigated by the Director of Ministries. All complaints will be taken seriously and acted on promptly with the safety and wellbeing of any potential victim(s) or accused being a priority.

Disciplinary actions

Where a complaint is found to be a breach of expected standards of behaviour by a staff member, the *Corrective Action and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures* (currently in draft form) and/or the *Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure* (currently in draft form) and/or the *Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy* will be followed.

For non-staff, where a complaint is found to be a breach of expected standards of behaviour, the area Ministry Leader and the Director of Ministries will meet with the volunteer using a similar approach found in the *Process for responding to misconduct or grievances (not yet written)*, *Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure* and/or the *Ringwood Church of Christ Constitution*, with disciplinary actions dependant on the level of severity of the complaint.

Child safety risks managed

Risk Assessments are completed before any program so as to avoid potentially unsafe situations. During the Complaint Handling process, the Risk Assessment for the program under which the incident occurred will be referred to so that any further risks to child safety are managed.

A review of complaints made in a 12-month period will be reviewed by Facilities, Asset and Risk Management Committee via quarterly reports provided by the Office administration and steps taken to adjust unsafe or harmful practices within Ringwood Church of Christ.

Information Sharing

Ringwood Church of Christ will be transparent in its communication and will keep people involved in our programs informed, appropriate to the circumstances with regard to confidentiality.

Implementation of learnings

Once a complaint has been made and actioned according to the process outlined above. A debrief and Risk Assessment analysis will take place to see where changes might be made in order for the same incident to be prevented in the future. Actions and outcomes will be communicated to appropriate parties.

Supporting documents - Related organisational policies and procedures

Code of Conduct

Ringwood Church of Christ Constitution

Process for Responding to Allegations

Process for Responding to Misconduct or Grievances. (not yet written)

Dispute Resolution Policy and Procedure (draft form)

Corrective Action and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures (draft form)

CCVT Child Safety Reporting Procedure Victoria Policy

Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy

Support Resources document – Appendix A

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Appendix A - Support Resources

LGBTQIA+ Youth – www.minus18.org.au – An Australian charity improving the lives of LGBTQIA+ youth

Child Abuse Prevention Service – 1800 688 009 or www.childabuseprevention.com.au – Information, referral and ongoing support to those affected by child abuse, concerned about the welfare of a child, or needing family or parenting support.

Kids Help Line – 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au – A counselling service specifically for young people ages between 5 and 25 years old.

eSafety Commissioner – 1800 880 176 or www.esafety.gov.au – The Office of the eSafety Commissioner is Australia’s leader in online safety, providing esafety information, education resources and complaints handling.

Seniors Rights Victoria – 1300 368 821 (Free, confidential helpline for concerns regarding a senior person)

1800RESPECT - 1800 737 732 or www.1800respect.org.au – A National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service

Beyondblue – 1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au – Support for depression, anxiety and related disorders, as well as online resources and information.

Counselling Online (alcohol and drug concerns) – www.counsellingonline.org.au – Counselling Online is a 24/7 online service where a professional counsellor can be contacted about an alcohol or drug related concern, using text-interaction.

Note: Further resources are found in the Safe Church Awareness Workshop booklet