

3. SAFE ACTIVITIES AND PARISH RELATIONSHIPS

Risk Assessment and Management

The Diocese's commitment to the safety of children requires a parish/agency to undertake risk assessments of activities and services provided. As part of the overall risk management strategy, assessing any potential risks is critical in minimising harm to a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

For this purpose, a risk is anything, including the behaviour of others that can cause harm or loss to children or the vulnerable.

In assessing any activity or service provision within the Diocese it is important to consider how harm might occur, why and when it could occur. Once the level of risk is determined, the risks can be prioritised and options that effectively control the situation can be considered for implementation.

A few important things to consider are:

1. **What could possibly happen?** Think about anything that could possibly go wrong. This could include things like people hurting themselves, a fire, lack of supervision, negative media coverage of an event.
2. **How likely is it to happen?** For each risk that you've identified think about how likely it is for it to happen. Consider everything, from the far fetched to the common, the everyday to the rare.
3. **How serious would the harm be?** If it did happen, how serious could the harm be? Consider the consequence for the organisation, children, employees, volunteers etc. if harm did occur.

Risk assessments must be conducted on all activities and services provided within the Diocese that involve children. It's important to have a plan of action for each risk identified. What would you do in response if the identified risk happened? When the harm is serious, and the problem could arise often, you have a risk that needs immediate attention.

These assessments are to be kept on file and reviewed annually or when an adverse incident occurs or the circumstances change significantly.

The risk of harm to children and/or the vulnerable can be reduced by:

- ensuring that activities support the interest of those involved;
- providing constant supervision by reliable and trained adults;
- knowing where participants are at all times; and
- implementing appropriate risk mitigation strategies within the environment to keep participants safe.

Parents/guardians should also complete a registration/consent form for children attending activities/groups giving basic details including contact details, special needs and medical needs. See *Appendix 20 – Form: Registration – Parental Consent*

For further advice on completing a risk assessment contact the Safeguarding Office (02 6621 444).

Resources:

- *Appendix 20 – Form: Registration – Parental Consent*
- *Appendix 21 – Guide to completing a risk assessment for activities involving children*
- *Appendix 22 – Guidance document: Risk assessment and mitigation strategies for safe environments*
- *Appendix 23 – Template: Risk assessment for parish activities involving children*
- *Appendix 24 – Template: Mitigation strategies for parish activities involving children*

Self-Assessment Tool

An important responsibility for our parishes and agencies is to give priority to matters relating to the safety and wellbeing of children and other vulnerable groups (including young people and adults). One of the primary challenges is to bring about a cultural transformation that places the safety of children and vulnerable people at the centre of everything we do.

To assist with embedding this culture, a *self-assessment* and *continuous improvement action plan* has been developed to assist parishes within the Diocese to continuously improve their safeguarding procedures. It is intended to support parishes in reviewing the safeguarding measures they currently have in place and to identify further improvements that need to take place to ensure compliance with the 10 Child Safe Standards. It further aims to:

- build and strengthen a culture of Safeguarding children and vulnerable people within the parish community;
- support and assist parishes within the Diocese to understand, implement and comply with the Child Safe Standards;
- support and assist parishes within the Diocese to understand, implement and comply with legislative requirements, reporting obligations and the Diocese of Lismore's policy and guidance documents;
- identify potential risk of harm to children in the parish and strive for continuous improvement strategies to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults.

This tool can be found *in Appendix 25 – Self Assessment and Continuous Improvement Action Plan*. It is intended to be completed annually and has been developed using the 10 Child Safe Standards provided by the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.

For further support and guidance using the *Self Assessment and Continuous Improvement Action Plan*, please contact the Safeguarding Office.

Professional Boundaries

We all have boundaries. These are the rules that govern how we interact in our relationships with others, indicating what we find to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. They are legal, ethical and organisational frameworks that protect both workers and children/ young people/vulnerable adults from physical and emotional harm, and help to maintain a safe working environment.

Workers must act professionally and appropriately when dealing with children and others with whom they come into contact with as part of their engagement the Diocese of Lismore, and maintain an awareness of potential risks and issues. This includes maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with children, young people and vulnerable adults. This obligation

extends to relationships workers have with children, young people and vulnerable adults, outside of work.

Maintaining professional boundaries requires an awareness of your own values and beliefs, distinct from those of the children, young people and vulnerable that you are working with. A single serious 'crossing of professional boundaries' by a worker, or repeated less serious breaches of professional conduct or exercise of poor judgment in the following areas, may constitute misconduct, sexual misconduct (reportable conduct) and/or breach of relevant Diocesan policies.

The Diocesan *Code of Conduct* and *Child Protection policy* extends on *professional boundaries* and forms part of the workers employment with the Diocese. Such policies must be read in conjunction with this handbook.

Resources:

- *Appendix 25 – Self Assessment and Continuous Improvement Action Plan*
- *Appendix 26 - Fact Sheet: Behaviours to encourage and avoid*

Supervision – Two Adult Rule

General safe practice in all activities, recommends the application of the *Two Adult Rule* which serves to keep children and the vulnerable, as well as the adults supporting them, safe. Wherever practical no fewer than two adults should be present at all times during any parish/agency sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or the vulnerable. It is best that these two adults are not directly related. This approach is an important safeguarding measure because it:

- significantly reduces the risk of an incident of abuse occurring;
- protects the adults against false allegations;
- reduces the possibility of a claim of negligence;
- may encourage other people to volunteer if they know there will be assistance on a regular basis;
- provides help if there is an accident or emergency; and
- sends a clear statement from the Diocese that children and vulnerable adults are important and valued.

In some smaller parishes, due to capacity, this rule may be difficult to enforce. In such circumstances, it is important to communicate with your parish priest/administrator, supervisor, or Safeguarding Office to discuss alternate strategies. These may include;

- invite a parent or other parishioner to join the activity to act as a second supervising adult;
- engage the child/ren or vulnerable in open spaces or leave building doors open;
- put glass windows in the doors;
- communicate with parish priest/administrator to detail the activity prior to it starting, request calling-in throughout the activity (at least once) and calling-in again after activity to ensure your time is accounted for;
- take notes after the activity to document the events such as time, call-ins, witnesses etc. This will help provide confidence and reassurance that good practice in safeguarding is in place.

Note: These are just some examples of protective strategies to consider if the Two Adult Rule is not possible. You should discuss with your parish priest/administrator, supervisor, or Safeguarding Office if you're unsure or worried.

Transport of children/young people

Diocese of Lismore workers should not transport children or young people in their vehicles without written consent from their parent or guardian. In the even that a child or young person needs to be transported for safety reasons the *Two Adult Rule* applies. All people travelling in a vehicle must wear seat belts, the driver should be appropriately licensed and the vehicles registered, insured and safe to drive.

Physical Contact

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between Diocesan workers and children or vulnerable adults. In some circumstances physical contact with children or vulnerable adults may be required. These may include, management of an injury, to assist with toileting etc. Where practical, an adult should provide an explanation to the child or vulnerable adult as to what the physical contact will be and why it will occur.

Consideration should be given regarding whether it is necessary to seek permission from the child or vulnerable adults parents/carers in relation to the physical contact (depending on the nature of the contact).

Change Rooms/Toilets

Children should be afforded privacy when using toilets and change rooms. Responsible practice requires that adequate and appropriate supervision be given to children in these circumstances. Where an adult needs to assist a child, the principles set out about regarding physical contact apply. Supervising adults should work to maintain the privacy of the individuals, such as announcing entry to the room.

Photography/Video Recording

Parishes/agencies host a range of activities including liturgical, pastoral and formational activities. It is not uncommon for parents and other family members to take photographs of these occasions. It is important, however, to be aware there are some people who may attend these activities who may take inappropriate photographs or footage of children.

It is key for parishes/agencies to highlight the need for respectful and safe photography practices, and make it clear to all in attendance that taking a photograph can be construed as obtaining personal information and therefore should be treated as any other item of personal and confidential information. Attendees are to be encouraged to use sensitivity when taking photographs and to confirm with the parents of children other than their own that they are comfortable to have their child included in photographs taken by someone other than their own family members. A similar courtesy should also be extended to adults who may be included in the photographs.

In a parish context, the responsibility for this notification lies with the parish priest, but may be delegated, for example to the coordinator of the activity. A suggested script is found in *Appendix 27 Script for Use of Photography / Videos*.

Where appropriate, parishes/agencies may restrict photography on its premises by setting conditions of entry. Where such restrictions are used they should be clear, tailored, publicised and capable of enforcement. For example, there may be a general parish policy in regard to

sacraments that says 'No photography or recording is permitted during sacraments without the express permission of the parish priest or administrator' may be promulgated. When restriction is notified, failure to comply may result in exclusion from parish premises or activities.

To capture parish events and activities, parishes may also wish children to be filmed or photographed from time-to-time. It is important to follow the *Diocesan Film and Photography Guidelines* outlined in *Appendix 29*, and obtain necessary consent to film and/or photograph children or young people. The *Consent to film and photograph form* can be found in *Appendix 28*, and within the Diocesan Social Networking Policy.

Questions to consider:

- What is the reason for this photography?
- Do you have permission to take and use images of children?
- Have you asked the child or young person how they may feel about the use of their image?
- Have you provided enough information about the image so the parent/carer can give informed consent?
- How will others interpret the image?
- Does the use of the image exploit the person in any way?
- Will you put the person at risk if you photograph them?
- Who will see promotional material containing the image?

Remember: The interests and welfare of children and vulnerable adults taking part in events is paramount. Parents, carers, children and vulnerable adults have the right to decide whether children's and/or vulnerable adult's images are to be taken and how those images may be used.

Refusal of consent should not in any way limit children's participation in activities.

Resources:

- *Appendix 27 – Script for use of photographic / filming*
- *Appendix 28 – Form: Consent to film and photograph*
- *Appendix 29 – Diocesan Film and Photography Guidelines*

Risks of sharing images online

Your parish/agency needs to make clear to all in attendance the guidelines on the use of images, as sharing photographs and images of children or vulnerable adults on social media or other online platforms carries potential risks. For example:

- may become vulnerable to grooming if a photograph is shared alongside information that makes them identifiable. This includes: personal details, a tag with location information, visual details such as a school uniform;
- inappropriate images may be shared online;
- images may be copied, downloaded, screenshotted or shared by anyone;
- images of children or vulnerable adults may be adapted and used inappropriately;
- photos or video recordings may appear in internet search results;
- each photo or video, and any comments on them, become a part of a child or vulnerable adult's public image. This may affect them through life – for example, it may affect how they see themselves, or how they are viewed when applying for a job.

Social Media

'Social media' is the term commonly given to web-based tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, and interests online. There are many types of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, SnapChat. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

The underpinning principle for use of social media by workers is Christ-centred love for others and respect for human dignity, both on-line and off-line, in both private and professional life.

Users of parish/agency networks also have a duty of care to maintain network security and are required to adhere to accepted policies and procedures for the professional use of electronic mail (Email) and the internet. This includes, but is not limited to:

- duty of care;
- ethical and appropriate use;
- the need to maintain privacy, confidentiality and the rights of individuals and copyright owners;
- adherence to considered and appropriate records management practices;
- appropriate use of systems, accounts, and passwords.

When using social media, workers are bound by the *Code of Conduct policy* and other relevant policies such as the Diocese of Lismore *Social networking policy* and *Acceptable use of electronic communication systems (including email) and devices policy*.

Resources:

- *Appendix 30 – Fact Sheet: Use of technology and social media to communicate with children*

Smoking, Alcohol Consumption and the Use of Drugs

Tobacco or illicit drugs must not be provided to a child under any circumstances. Alcohol may only be provided to a child in the context of administering sacramental wine during Holy Communion with the authorisation of the child's parent or guardian.

Those running activities for children must not use, provide or permit the use of alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs. Where it is reasonably suspected that a worker is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs (including medication) which may impair their judgement or impact on their performance, or is consuming alcohol or using drugs during a Church activity, this must be reported to the supervisor/group leader who will act to make the situation safe in the first instance and then address the issue. This will include completing a *concern/complaints form (Appendix 13)* and informing the parish priest who will follow the process of reporting. Similarly, where it is reasonably suspected that a child has attended an activity under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or it is reasonably suspected that a child is using drugs or alcohol during a Church activity, the child needs to be managed to ensure their safety and the safety of everyone in attendance, and consideration should be given to reporting the incident to the appropriate authority.

If a worker requires medication, this should be safely secured and not accessible by children and young people.

Resources:

- *Appendix 31 – Fact Sheet – Use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs*