



EASTLEIGH COMMUNITY CHURCH CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

Eastleigh Community Church is a community-based organisation that helps children aged four and up to develop community and fellowship skills. Eastleigh Community Church operates in metropolitan Victoria.

Eastleigh Community Church Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Eastleigh Community Church acknowledges the Boon Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate. We acknowledge and respect their contributions, experience, and knowledge as First Nations people. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy was approved by the Leadership Team on 15 May 2022. It demonstrates the strong commitment of leadership, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

All children who come to Eastleigh Community Church have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and have fun while enjoying and learning.

PURPOSE

This policy was written to demonstrate the strong commitment of the leadership, staff, and volunteers to child safety. It provides an outline of the policies and practices we have developed to keep everyone safe from any harm including abuse.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, leaders, children, and other individuals involved in our organisation. This policy applies to all activities conducted by Eastleigh Community Church.

Address: 216 East Boundary Road Bentleigh East Victoria 3165
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DEFINITIONS

Leaders means Ministerial team and Leadership Team

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including because of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising because of a series of acts or events over a period.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to Eastleigh Community Church related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with Eastleigh Community Church
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at Eastleigh Community Church
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

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ROLE OF THE LEADERSHIP

The Leadership team has the role of making sure Eastleigh Community Church prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety.

The Leadership team will champion and model a child safe culture at Eastleigh Community Church. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern. The Leadership team will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone at Eastleigh Community Church has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The Leadership team will make sure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The Leadership team will conduct an annual review of how effectively Eastleigh Community Church is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with Eastleigh Community Church will be sought as part of this review.

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COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Eastleigh Community Church believes that churches ought to be places of safety and refuge for children, young people, and others. They should be and feel safe from any threat when on church property or involved in activities operated by the church.

We acknowledge the responsibility we have towards those who are taking part in church activities and the wider community. We therefore commit ourselves to striving to ensure that all our actions are morally upright. All people in a position of authority within the church have a moral and spiritual responsibility towards those they lead and serve.

We want children to be safe, happy, and empowered. We support and respect all children as well as our staff and volunteers. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority and we have a zero tolerance to child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and friendly environment where children feel secure and have fun.

We want children to develop new friends through Eastleigh Community Church and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and act if this occurs.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO SAFETY AND PARTICIPATION

We encourage children to express their views. We listen to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them. We actively encourage all children in our church community to 'have a say' about things that are important to them. We teach children about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We listen to and act on any concerns children, or their parents, raise with us.

Eastleigh Community Church supports children's participation in the following ways:

- regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs, or staffing. Children's views are collected by staff, provided to leaders, and considered in the decision-making process.
- information provided to children and families about Eastleigh Community Church operations, staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children.

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FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Eastleigh Community Church recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families, and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

At the annual general meeting each year, all community members are invited to share their thoughts on the direction of Eastleigh Community Church for the next year.

Eastleigh Community Church provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website

CREATING CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Eastleigh Community Church is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included.

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation, and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and act when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff and leadership members – we are committed to having representatives of all cultures and backgrounds
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

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CODE OF CONDUCT

Eastleigh Community Church has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, volunteers, and the Leadership must always comply with the Code of Conduct. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

RECRUITING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Eastleigh Community Church seeks to attract and retain the best staff and volunteers. We require Working with Children Checks and police checks for relevant positions and interview and conduct referee checks on all staff. Our commitment to Child Safety is included in all documentation. We provide support and supervision, so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. Members of the Management Committee must hold a valid Working with Children Check and a national Police Check is required.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in our church understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

COMPLAINTS AND REPORTING

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

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CHILD SAFETY PERSON

Jonathon Miller and Brendon Taylor have been appointed as Child Safety Persons with the specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents, or children.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff, and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

Our church takes our legal responsibility seriously including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.

RECORD KEEPING

Eastleigh Community Church is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by Eastleigh Community Church for at least 45 years.

INFORMATION SHARING

Eastleigh Community Church may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Eastleigh Community Church will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

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RISK MANAGEMENT

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Eastleigh Community Church.

In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years and we undertake to seek views, comments and suggestions from children, parents, carers, staff and volunteers.

SUPPORTING LEGISLATION

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)

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