



CHILD PROTECTION: SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY

POLICY OVERVIEW

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to make an unequivocal statement on the Diocese's commitment to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and to ensure that all personnel understand and fulfil their legal and ethical obligations.

Scope

This policy applies to all personnel working within the Diocese of Wagga Wagga under the governance of its Bishop as Head of Agency in relation to Child Protection.

Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Church Documents

The Diocese is totally committed to the care and protection of children and recognises the principles and its obligations under child protection legislation, associated regulations and Church-related documents

Principles

The Diocese is guided by a widely accepted set of principles for;

- The development of a safe environment for children and young people
- The implementation of procedures for the prevention of abuse, and
- Responding to allegations and disclosures of abuse.

Roles and Responsibilities

Under the *Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)* the key role of responsibility for child protection systems that prevent and respond to abuse in the Diocese lies with the Bishop of Wagga Wagga who is the designated Head of Agency for:

- the Catholic Schools office, Parishes within the Diocese and all other employees employed under the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga.
- Centacare South West NSW Ltd and all other employees including Contractors employed under the Company with the Company owners as the Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga.

Child Protection: Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy

Purpose

The Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga affirms the dignity and worth of all children in its care. It commits itself to the highest standards of a child safe organisation, together with zero tolerance of child abuse in any of its forms, *'the Church also, in all its actions, makes clear the dignity and value of every human person, especially those most vulnerable'*. (National Committee for Professional Standards, 2010, p. 1)

This commitment of the Church applies in a special way to children and young people:

"... [S]pecial attention must be devoted to children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights... By fostering and exercising a tender and strong concern for every child that comes into this world, the Church fulfils a fundamental mission: for she is called upon to reveal and put forward anew in history the example and the commandment of Christ the Lord, who placed the child at the heart of the Kingdom of God: 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' " (Pope John Paul 11, 1981, p. 26)

The purpose of this policy is to make an unequivocal statement on the Diocese's commitment to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and to ensure that all personnel understand and fulfil their legal and ethical obligations. It is a direct response to the challenge of Pope Francis *'to encourage and advance the commitment of the Church at every level ... to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, and to respond to their needs with fairness and mercy.'* (2015)

The Diocese is committed to:

- Embedding a culture of safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults
- Developing effective preventative systems and processes to ensure safe and supportive environments for children in its care
- Responding appropriately to disclosures of abuse and concerns of inappropriate behaviour
- Maintaining comprehensive confidential records and processes

For the purpose of this policy;

- Child means a person under the age of 16 years
- Young person means a person who is aged 16 years but who is under 18 years
- Child abuse is defined as all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child.
 - A child safe organisation is one that consciously and systematically;
 - o creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm occurring to children
 - o creates conditions that increase the likelihood of any harm being discovered
 - o responds appropriately to any disclosures, allegations of suspicions of harm

This policy is to be read in conjunction with DWW Standards for a Child Safe Organisation, DWW Child Protection Procedures, DWW Child Protection Head of Agency Safeguarding Roles and DWW Wagga Wagga Guidelines for Professional Conduct in the Protection of Children and Young People and Centacare South West NSW Ltd Client Welfare Policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all personnel working within the Diocese of Wagga Wagga under the jurisdiction of its Bishop as Head of Agency including;

- Diocesan Clergy, members of religious congregations, those in ministry
- Employees in Catholic parishes, schools, agencies, organisations, groups, boards, councils and committees, individuals or groups authorised to act in the diocese
- Volunteers working in Catholic parishes, schools, agencies, organisations, groups, boards, councils and committees
- Students (e.g., work experience, professional placements)
- Contractors and sub-contractors working for the Diocese

Diocesan agencies such as the Catholic School Office (CSO), the Special Religious Education Team (SRE) and Centacare are required to have child protection policies and/or codes of conduct specific to the requirements of their mandates and responsibilities. It is therefore recommended that personnel working for these agencies also refer to the relevant child protection policies and codes of conduct for these agencies as part of their role.

Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Church Documents

The Diocese has a duty of care and a legislated responsibility to promote the wellbeing, safety and protection of children, particularly those in its care, from all forms of harm.

The Diocese is totally committed to the care and protection of children and recognises the principles and its obligations under child protection legislation and Church-related documents such as:

- Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW) and Regulation 2013
- Ombudsman Act 1974 and Ombudsman Regulation 2011 (NSW)
- Keep Them Safe 2009 Amendments to Children & Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)
- Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW)
- Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)
- Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)
- Integrity in the Service of the Church (September 2011)
- Towards Healing (revised January 2010)
- Integrity in Ministry (reprinted April 2010)

The Diocese also continues to be attentive to reports and findings emanating from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and to the findings of any of its relevant inquiries.

Principles

Within the Diocese, approaches to creating a safe environment and procedures for the prevention of abuse and responding to allegations and disclosures of abuse are based on the following principles:

- All children have a right to safety and freedom from abuse of any kind
- All adults working with children have a responsibility to care for them, to promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any form of abuse
- When any action is taken to prevent or respond to any type of abuse, the welfare and wellbeing of the child are the primary concerns
- The integrity of the family unit is respected but not to the detriment of the child and the right of the child to be heard
- The dignity of persons involved in situations where abuse is suspected or disclosed should be respected; they should be treated with fairness, sensitivity, dignity and respect. In the interests of justice, appropriate confidentiality should be maintained, with information that relates to suspected or disclosed abuse being provided only to those who have a right or a need to be informed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Under the *Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)* the key role of responsibility for child protection systems that prevent and respond to abuse in the Diocese lies with the Bishop of Wagga Wagga who is designated as Head of Agency.

The Diocese's Head of Agency document *Child Protection Head of Agency Safeguarding Roles (2016)* details the roles and relationship the Diocese considers to ensure compliance with all its obligations under the Act.

Child protection is a shared responsibility. All agencies of the Diocese are required to be active in building an aware culture, understanding the nature of child abuse and reportable conduct, and putting child protection systems into practice. These responsibilities require:

- Child protection policies and procedures that ensure all reasonable steps are taken to protect children
- Practices and interventions that continually build a culture of safety, characterised by respect, fairness and the development of mutual trust and reconciliation
- Current training in child protection and ongoing professional development
- Promotion of open communication, tolerance and positive relationships
- Processes for monitoring the culture
- Mechanisms for active participation in the development of policies and processes
- Integration of policies into strategic frameworks so that practices are seen as integral to how all sectors of the Diocese operate and not legislative 'add-ons'