

RESPONSIBLE CARE

**WORKING WITH CHILDREN
AND YOUTH**

**GUIDELINES FOR CHURCHES
2000**

BAPTIST CHURCHES OF TASMANIA

PREFACE

I am delighted to warmly commend to all pastors, church leaders, and all working with children and young people, this excellent resource researched and produced by a sub-committee of the Pastoral Committee of the Baptist Churches in Tasmania, in consultation with the Baptist Union of Western Australia, to whom our sincere thanks for willingness to offer us their relevant resources for consideration and adaptation to our own situation.

This is a very practical document and will require close attention by all leaders in our churches. If we are to have credibility from those whose children are entrusted to our care, we must leave no stone unturned in our efforts to ensure safeguards of the highest order are in place, not only because of the moral obligation we have, but also because, as Christians we must demonstrate the highest integrity in any ministry we offer in the name of our Lord.

'Responsible Care' was adopted by the Baptist Union Council in February 2000 following "in principle" approval at Annual Assembly, October 1999.

Rev. Ted Nibbs
President

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The Pastoral Committee of the Baptist Union of Tasmania gratefully acknowledges the permission of the Baptist Union of Western Australia to use their equivalent 'Guidelines' as a basis for the production of this Statement of Procedures.

The Western Australia document has been adapted and modified to provide for our Tasmanian situation.

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INTRODUCTION

1. BIBLICAL CONCERN

The Bible consistently expresses God's concern for the well-being of the weak and powerless members of society. In particular there are clear statements on the importance of children and their protection, e.g. Matthew 19:14; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 17:2; Ephesians 6:4. Christ's words and example provide a strong rationale for churches being responsible in the care of minors.

2. LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

There is also legal responsibility to exercise care towards minors. Churches must be able to show that they have taken all reasonable precautions in appointing people supervising or caring for minors and that procedures for supervision of children and young people are adequate.

In addition to adults, any person who has attained the age of sixteen years and who is tasked with the care of other minors who have not attained the age of sixteen years is legally liable if they fail to take proper care of the child or abuse the child.

In recent years the community has become more aware of the reality of child abuse. Abuse can be physical, emotional or sexual and it is appropriate that churches do all that is possible to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth participating in their activities.

The following procedures seek to provide guidelines that are biblically and legally responsible.

GUIDELINES

1. RECRUITING LEADERS AND OTHER WORKERS

In the past churches have accepted well intentioned people from a church background, but this is no longer sufficient. For any activity involving the custody of minors there is a legal duty of care.

It is therefore necessary to have evidence that the church has taken all reasonable precautions in the supervision of minors. The Church recognises that some people are not suitable to work with children or young people. The reasons can be varied. For example, people who have been convicted of sexual offences, violence or drug use and people who are being investigated regarding such offences are generally not suitable for appointment as leaders. Caution should be

used in accepting people with a history of serious emotional and/or mental illness.

Leaders already appointed shall complete an application form and undergo a police check. After a maximum of 5 years, leaders should be interviewed again to up-date information on the original form. While no screening is foolproof, every effort should be made. No application should be accepted without contacting the churches/people named as referees. It is not wise to accept people as leaders without further investigation if their contact churches/people are hesitant.

Everyone who wishes to work with children and young people, regardless of reputation or experience, should go through the same process which clearly demonstrates our care for those in our care and also shows we do not discriminate, in favour of or against, anyone. The pastors and other leaders in positions of trust should also be included.

Notwithstanding the above, a simplified procedure may be permitted in the case of persons under the age of eighteen who in all probability will have had very limited experience in working with children and young people.

2. PROCEDURE

2.1. PANEL

We recommend that each church appoints a panel of 2 – 4 Church members to process applications from those who apply to work with children and young people. Where possible, both sexes should be represented on the panel and at least one pastoral leader. Normally, the leader or representative of the activity, in which an applicant wishes to be involved would be included in the panel. The panel should treat information received as confidential.

2.2. APPLICATION FORM

Each applicant shall be handed personally the prescribed application form for completion and return to the panel member named on the form. Each applicant should be interviewed. It is recommended that the applicant, when handed the form, be told the names of those on the panel. It should also be emphasised that the use of the form does not imply any lack of trust in the integrity of the applicant.

In order to remain an approved worker with children or young people the application process should be repeated every five years.

With the agreement of the leaders concerned, an alternative simplified application form may be submitted by persons under the age of eighteen.

3. SUPERVISORY PRACTICES

2.3. POLICE CHECK

Each applicant with the possible exception of those under the age of eighteen shall undergo a police check in order to ensure that all leaders and workers with children and young people are 'safe' for the children or young people. Pastors and senior church leaders should set the example and be the first to undergo such checking.

3.1. STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

Leaders should normally be at least seventeen years of age. All leaders must complete the application form. Where activities are co-educational male and female group leaders should be present. Whatever the activity, there should be at least two leaders available at all times. In the case of creche, one of the two may be under seventeen, but must be approved by the church leadership in the same way as adult leaders.

3.2. PHYSICAL CONTACT

Most children and young people enjoy physical contact with adults, and will seek opportunities for this through expressions of affection and in play.

Some children, however, do not seek or enjoy physical contact and should be allowed to determine the degree of physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances (for example, when they are needing medical attention). It is therefore inappropriate in the normal course of events to initiate close physical contact. Any initiative should come from the child. Even if a leader asks a child for a hug, the child may feel powerless to say "No". As a general rule, open displays of affection initiated by children in the presence of others are acceptable.

Physical contact between leaders and those in their care may be misconstrued. Any physical activity which is or may be construed as sexually stimulating to another person is inappropriate and must be avoided. Children and young people may or may not be aware of creating such situations. It is the duty of a leader to be alert to such circumstances and to act appropriately.

(We need to be aware of the special moral and legal responsibilities of the leaders, by virtue of their position of authority, no matter what the provocation or initiative taken by those in their care.)

There will be occasions where displays of affection are natural and children must not be shunned if they initiate and demonstrate their need for comfort, bearing in mind the age of the child and the circumstances. Leaders should take care that

4. WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF ALLEGED OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

such situations do not occur in private. As far as possible a leader should not be alone with a child or young person when they cannot be observed. Special care should be exercised in relation to toileting. These procedures are designed to protect both leaders and those in their care.

Physical punishment should not be administered, even if in fun. It may be construed as physical abuse. Limited physical restraint may be appropriate in certain circumstances, such as protecting children from harm.

In-service training for leaders should include training which helps them to understand the effects of abuse and its implications for them, how they should handle their allegations or suspicions, and what are appropriate reporting procedures.

4.1. RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED ABUSE

An adequate response is never easy, and any response involves judgements and emotions. Follow-up requires expert handling, generally beyond the ability of most personnel.

Sometimes a leader may have reason to suspect abuse. **Whatever the situation, it is always to be treated as suspicion or allegation, not fact.**

4.2. RESPONDING TO A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHO ALLEGES ABUSE.

Again, leaders should be involved in training which will deal with their own responses, and reactions. They should also have an understanding of what action to take.

It is important to listen carefully, demonstrating only care and concern. This is not the time for an investigation, so questions should be open, not closed, and kept to a minimum. The child or young person must not be prompted or asked directly whether they have been abused. Any allegation should be made by the child or young person in their own words. (Apart from the present investigation any possible legal proceedings by the authorities could be seriously jeopardised.)

The child or young person will need plenty of reassurance and pastoral care after making the allegation. Leaders should not attempt formal counselling prior to reporting the allegation.

4.3. REPORTING ALLEGED OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

Leaders must report alleged or suspected abuse when:

- A child or young person tells them she/he has been abused.
- Someone else (relative, friend, acquaintance or sibling of the child or young person) tells them of alleged abuse.

- A child or young person tells them she/he knows someone who has been abused.
- They see or sense significant evidence that leads them to suspect abuse.

One leader should never take action alone, but should always consult with the pastor, or, in exceptional circumstances, with another church leader.

All instances of alleged sexual abuse made by a minor must be reported by the pastor or other person appointed by the church to the appropriate authorities. (It is imperative that the church not be seen to cover up or diminish the seriousness of the allegation.)

4.4. ALLEGATION OR SUSPICION OF ABUSE AGAINST A LEADER

Any allegation or suspicion of abuse directed against a leader begins a crisis period for the church as well as the individual. It is therefore important to follow the procedures set out in this document.

Any allegation or suspicion must be acted on promptly, and should be reported to the pastor or some other responsible person appointed by the church. The pastor or other responsible person, if deemed warranted, shall inform without delay the President of the Baptist Union of Tasmania or the Superintendent or the Chairperson of the Pastoral Committee so that the necessary B.U.T. mechanisms may be set in place. It is important to preserve confidentiality.

However, where this is not possible, the good name and respect due to all involved, including the person making the allegation, and their family, should be preserved.

The parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child or young person should be informed of the allegation or suspicion and the action being taken. They should continue to be advised of further developments including those involving other authorities.

The leader in question may need to be removed from active participation with children or young people until the matter is resolved. Pastoral care of the leader must be maintained.

All enquiries from the media should be handled by the President of the Baptist Union and under no circumstances should the identities of the persons involved be indicated.

No allegation of abuse should be dismissed without action being taken. Everyone involved has the right to be heard and to be taken seriously.

If authorities such as the police are involved, a specifically delegated person/s needs to support the person accused through whatever process follows. The church needs to arrange continuing care and counselling for all persons involved.

**BAPTIST CHURCHES OF TASMANIA
RESPONSIBLE CARE OF CHILDREN / YOUTH**

- Application For Ministry by Persons over 18 -

This application form except in relation to persons under eighteen for whom an alternative form is available, shall be completed by applicants for any position (voluntary or compensated) to be appointed by or on behalf of a Tasmanian Baptist Church or a subsidiary organization or ministry likely to involve working with children and young people. The purpose of this process is to help provide a safe and secure environment for those minors who participate in Church related programmes and to help alleviate any concerns of parents. It will also help protect personnel and the Church or organisation.

Committee or Ministry Area: _____
(Please specify Committee, Board or area of ministry above)

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name: _____ Spouse: _____
(Surname) (First Name) (if applicable)(First Name)

Address: _____ Home Phone: _____

Normal Occupation: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Marital Status *(Please tick relevant box):*

Married Single Engaged Separated Divorced Remarried Widowed

State (outside Tasmania) or country where you have lived, and when. _____

CHURCH DETAILS

Name of Church of which you are a member/attender or with which you identify in some way:

Pastor: _____ Contact telephone: _____

List (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly in the past five years:

SUITABILITY FOR MINISTRY

I agree to provide a copy of a personal Police check.

Have you ever been convicted of child abuse or other crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? Yes No *(Please tick relevant box)*

If so, please comment: _____

Have you ever had a problem in the area of controlling your feelings or behaviour towards minors?

Yes No *(Please tick relevant box)*

If yes, please comment: _____

Is there any other relevant information relating to child abuse or any other matter that you think we should know about? Yes No *(Please tick relevant box)*

If yes, please comment: _____

Please not hand

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- Application For Ministry by Persons under 18 -

This application form, or the more general one, ie for persons over eighteen, shall be completed by applicants who are under the age of eighteen years, for any position (voluntary or compensated) to be appointed by or on behalf of a Tasmanian Baptist Church or subsidiary organization or ministry likely to involve working with children and young people. The purpose of this process is to help provide a safe and secure environment for anyone who participates in Church related programmes and to help alleviate any concerns of parents. It will also help protect personnel and the Church or organisation.

Programme or Ministry Area: _____
(Please specify)

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name of Applicant: _____ Date of Birth: _____
(Surname) (First Name)

Home Address: _____ Telephone: _____

Term Address (if different): _____ Telephone: _____

CHURCH DETAILS

Name of Church of which you attend or with which you identify in some way: _____

Pastor: _____ Pastor's telephone: _____

List any other churches you have been involved with in the last two years _____

CHARACTER REFEREES

Please provide details below of two adults who know you well and will be able to give a character reference concerning you. Preferably these should include at least one from the church with which you are presently associated.

1. Name of Referee: _____ Telephone: _____

2. Name of Referee: _____ Telephone: _____

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT

I understand that I am legally liable if I fail to take proper care of any minor placed in my care. The information contained in this application is true to the best of my knowledge. I authorise the referees listed in this application, and any other relevant persons, to provide information they may have regarding my character and fitness for ministry involving children and/or young people.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to perform all my duties in relation to the programme or ministry with respect to which I am applying in a proper manner. I understand that this means respecting the dignity and personal privacy of those amongst whom I shall be working. I undertake to advise immediately the person to whom I am responsible in this service should I become unsuitable for it in some way..

Applicant's signature _____

Witness: _____ Date _____

Parent's or Guardian's Signature: _____ Date _____

Thank you for completing this form.

Please return this completed form to local applications panel member.....

Received on..... (date) by (panel member)

Planned and handwritten