



Epping Gospel Chapel

Vulnerable Person Protection

Policy & Procedures

Epping Gospel Chapel

Updated as at 5/9/2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement

Epping Gospel Chapel located at 120 Carlingford Road, Epping NSW 2121 is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all its members, leaders, volunteers and particularly to children.

The Church's Policy & Procedures aims to reduce the risk of abuse occurring, and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should abuse occur.

1.2 Scope

The Policy & Procedures apply to:

- All ministries authorised by or under the control of the church, including those ministries undertaken at the church's premises or away from the church's premises inclusive of the weekly Hands & Feet Food & Drink distribution programme.
- All leaders, members and volunteers within the church or engaged by the church.

1.3 Authority

These are the Policy & Procedures of Epping Gospel Chapel and were adopted for use by the elders and deacons and updated on 5th January and again on 5th September 2022.

The elders and deacons are committed to implementing the Policy & Procedures and training our leaders in its content and application.

1.4 Definitions

Child - Any person under the age of 18.

Vulnerable Person - an individual aged 18 years and above who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason.

Abuse can consist of one or more of but is not restricted to the following:

Physical abuse— Any non-accidental physical injury resulting from practices such as: Hitting, punching, kicking (marks from belt buckles, fingers), shaking (particularly babies), burning (irons, cigarettes), biting, pulling out hair. Alcohol or other drug administration.

Sexual abuse - Any sexual act or threat to perform such upon another person. It occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of another's trust to involve them in sexual activity. It does not necessarily involve genital contact but is any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual but the validity of consent is negated by the power differential.

Emotional abuse – The chronic attitude or behaviour of one person which is directed at another person or, the creation of an emotional environment which erodes a child's development, self esteem and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include: devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising or chronic and extreme domestic violence in the child's presence.

Neglect - Characterised by the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a person's development.

Helpers - Any unpaid person over the age of 16 who is invited by a leader to assist them in their ministry.

Leader - Any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of members placed in their care whilst holding a formal position in a recognised ministry of the church. A leader could include but is not limited to:

Religious practitioner, Small group leaders, Music drama or other ministry leaders, Counsellors, Youth leaders, Sunday school superintendents, Teachers, Kid's club leaders, Scripture teachers, Sports coaches and organisers.

Members or Volunteers – Any person, including children, who attends or participates in church ministries.

Ministry - Any organised activity that is authorised by the church.

Ministry Leader - The person recognised and authorised by the church as head of a ministry.

2. External policies

We acknowledge that some ministries in the church might have external affiliation with other organisations. These organisations will possibly have policies governing the issues of member and/or child safety and abuse. The church's policy & procedures are not intended to replace or conflict with other policies, but instead to operate in conjunction with them.

3. Policy review

The Policy & Procedures will be reviewed annually at the (*Relevant Annual Meeting) meeting. Church decision makers will inform the ministries involved when the date of review will occur, and any changes recommended by the ministries should be submitted in writing to the decision makers for consideration one month before the review date.

Any proposed changes will be submitted to the (*Relevant Annual Meeting) meeting for approval before being implemented.

4. Obligations

4.1 Spiritual

The core beliefs of the church require us to treat all people with love and dignity and to care for those who are less powerful and in need of nurture and protection.

4.2 Legal

The church and its leaders are subject to Federal and State legislation and principles established through common law.

4.3 Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as Abuse, but are unacceptable behaviour for church leaders. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature.
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.
- Inappropriate touching.

- Inappropriate literature (e.g. PG, M, MA, R or X rated material used with young children and/or recipients of H&F distribution items).
- Recording or filming without prior consent
- Acts of violence committed by a leader in the course of an activity.

The age of individuals is recognised as one of but not the only factor regarding the determinants in deciding what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour is. Ministry leaders will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

5. Selection & Screening

5.1 Leaders

Leaders involved in children's and/or vulnerable persons ministries must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to leaders commencing child-related ministries, the following precautions will be taken:

1. Volunteer leaders will be members of the church and have regularly attended the church for at least 6 months.
2. Candidate leaders will complete an application form which requests details of relevant past experience, positions held, details of two referees and permission to contact them (see Appendix 2).
3. Referees will be checked and spoken to, using an agreed set of questions which have been drafted by the church. The questions will seek to establish the applicant's suitability for the role or position and the conversation will be documented and retained on file.
4. Short listed candidate leaders will be interviewed by an experienced and responsible member of the church prior to being accepted as a leader
5. A Police and/or Community Services and/or Working with Children check which complies with the legislative requirements of (*State where the Church is located) will be requested and received prior to the leader commencing their proposed role and if necessary for Hands & Feet Volunteers.
6. Where the church has identified that an applicant has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence they cannot, under any circumstances, be considered for child related ministries.
7. These offences do not preclude the applicant from serving in other ministries and the church, after careful consideration, might welcome the applicant's contribution in more appropriate areas.

5.2 Volunteers & Helpers

Any volunteer who provides assistance in a children's ministry or in the Hands & Feet Distribution Ministry must be fully supervised at all times by an appointed leader and will be accountable to that leader. Volunteers are expected to be screened prior to commencement and should have the following:

1. An awareness of the content of the Church's Vulnerable Persons Protection Policy & Procedures and Code of Conduct and a commitment to work within them.
2. A working with Children's Check for the Sunday School only.
3. A leader is satisfied of the volunteer's maturity and their suitability for children's and Hands & Feet ministry.

6. Training

All leaders and volunteers will be issued with a copy of this policy and training in the content and application of the Church's Member Protection Policy & Procedures, Reporting procedures and the associated legal requirements.

In addition, ministry leaders responsible for recruiting leaders for child and other related ministries will undertake further education on child/member protection and vulnerable persons guidelines making reference to the compliance with the relevant online courses conducted and organised by Safe Ministry Check in partnership with Ansvar Risk.

7. A Safe environment

- Incidents of abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, two leaders will always be present when working with or supervising children.
- Leaders will not visit children or any recipients of the Hands & Feet distribution in their homes unless a parent is present or another leader accompanies them.
- When transporting children or vulnerable persons, leaders should never be alone with that individual in a car. Where this is not practical, leaders will take children and/or vulnerable person directly to and from arranged venues and will not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.
- All personal counselling is to be carried out within sight of another leader.
- Leaders will respect a member's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.
- Adults and children/vulnerable persons are expected to respect each other's privacy during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No leader will be alone in a room with a child while either is changing.
- Initiations and secret ceremonies are prohibited. All aspects of every child-related and vulnerable persons program will be open to observation by parents/guardians.
- Leaders have the right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at child-or vulnerable person related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

8. Disciplining children or vulnerable people

It is not the responsibility of the church or its leaders to discipline a child or vulnerable person. If a child or vulnerable person does not abide by the rules set down by the leader or is an obstruction to the care of other children or vulnerable person or may cause harm to others, the child/vulnerable person will be removed and referred back to their parent or guardian.

At no time will a Leader administer any form of physical, emotional or mental discipline.

9. Reporting procedures

When an allegation is made that a child or vulnerable person has been abused the matter must be reported to the elder/s of Epping Gospel Chapel immediately. Details of the allegation/s are to be entered into the log-book kept in the chapel office.

An independent principal and alternate moderator will be appointed by the church with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations that arise. The name, address and contact telephone number will be freely available to all leaders. The person appointed as the independent principal moderator is:

Name: Mr. Edward Gray
Address: 14 Hampden Street, North Rocks NSW 2151
Contact number: (02) 9871 8059 or 0407 806 404

The Independent Alternate Moderator will be appointed by convening an Elders & Deacons Meeting to appoint a suitable alternate and based on the last meeting held late November 2021, that person will be as follows where the principal moderator cannot act due to illness, unavailability and/or conflicts of interest or any other reason deeming the principal to be unsuitable accordingly

Name: Mr Grant Warner
Address: 251 Midson Road Epping NSW 2121
Contact Number: (02) 9876 4416 or 0419 608 692
Email: grant.warner@hotmail.com

Documented reporting and escalation procedures will be established by the church for handling allegations of abuse. **If there are reasonable grounds to suspect a child/vulnerable person has been or is suffering abuse, the police and the church's insurer will be contacted immediately.**

The phone number for the police is: 9858 9299 Eastwood

The phone number for our church insurer: 03 9037 6414

Reasonable grounds can be assumed when:

1. A child/vulnerable person discloses that he or she has been abused, and/or
2. Someone close to a child/vulnerable person (e.g.sibling, relative, close friend) discloses on behalf of that child/vulnerable person. The police will also be notified if a child/vulnerable person discloses an incident of abuse that has occurred somewhere other than the church (e.g. home or school).

If a disclosure of abuse is made, the person who receives the disclosure will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure. This will include:

- Treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim. The matter should not be swept under the carpet.
- Not pushing the child/vulnerable person to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation.
- Assuring the child/vulnerable person that they are understood that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault, and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- Reporting the abuse to the police and the church's insurer.
- Not making contact with the alleged perpetrator. If the leader is already providing counsel to the alleged perpetrator, it may be advisable for another person to assume this responsibility for the duration of any investigation.
- If the alleged assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the child/vulnerable person should be retained and handed to the police for forensic examination.
- Maintaining confidentiality.
- Any disclosures by a child/vulnerable person, reports of suspected abuse and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.
- The church reserves the right to carry out church disciplinary procedures in accordance with the constitution of the church.
- Where an allegation is made the accused leader will be removed from all children's or other such relevant ministry pending the outcome of all investigations.

10. Alcohol & drugs

The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on church grounds or during an activity is not to be allowed or condoned by any leader. Any Child/vulnerable person found to be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so the child can be returned home immediately.

Any child/vulnerable person required to take prescription medication will provide a letter from their parents/guardians to verify same.