

**DUTY of CARE and CHILD
PROTECTION GUIDELINES**



BOOKLET 7

**PACKAGE for
CHURCH LEADERSHIP
TEAMS - MANAGING
ALLEGATIONS OF
ABUSE & CRITICAL
INCIDENT RESPONSE**

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Taking Action - Managing Allegations of Abuse & developing a critical response plan

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Senior Ministers / Lead Pastors and Eldership teams need to have a clear plan for responding to and managing allegations of abuse effectively by knowing how to:

- Outwork their duty of care compassionately
- Attend to immediate needs of victim(s) and offer ongoing support
- Liaise with & take advice from relevant authorities as required
- Communicate wisely with parents and other parties affected
- Diligently protect other potential victims from harm
- Follow legal due process in relating to alleged abuser
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.

In 2012-2013 Royal Commission of Independent Education Inquiry, chaired by Justice Dabelle (otherwise known as the Dabelle Enquiry), was asked to conduct an independent review into the events and circumstances surrounding the arrest and later conviction of an employee of an Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) Service at a school in metropolitan Adelaide (SA), on charges of sexual assault committed against a child in his care.

The catalyst for this review was the failure of the Department for Education (DECD) to give appropriate information in a timely manner to parents of children at the metropolitan school¹, and the inquiry report that followed also included some helpful guidelines to ensure the safety, health and well-being of children at schools.

Some of the recommendations from the Dabelle Inquiry's *Guidelines for Managing Allegations of Sexual Misconduct at DECD Sites* have been adapted below to provide practical steps for Senior Pastors and Church Oversight members to follow in the event that an allegation of abuse is made against any person who has a connection with a local CRC church.

The guidelines below are specific to allegations of abuse that are:

- (a) disclosed at the church;
- (b) occurs on the church property;
- (c) occurs on the way to or from the church related program;
- (d) while a child / young person is otherwise under the church's care including any camp or off-site activity.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

If an allegation of abuse is made, the fact that a Police Officer may have already notified your relevant State / Territory Reporting Authority does not relieve the Team Member and Senior Leadership Member from the obligation to notify.

NOTE – GO TO (Booklet 4, pages 9 and 10) for the relevant Reporting Authority for your State / Territory

¹ 2012-2013 Royal Commission of Independent Education Inquiry: Introduction pg 2 - 4. The Meaning and Terms of Reference <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/educationinquiry/files/links/DebelleInquiry.pdf>

Publication of Identity

When a person has been, or is about to be, charged with a criminal offence, it is necessary to comply with the legal obligations imposed by relevant State / Territory laws.

- Where the alleged victim is a child, the name of the alleged victim or anything that might identify the victim can never be published. Care must, therefore, be taken to ensure that nothing is said that might identify the alleged victim publically.
- The name of the accused person can be published but only after certain events have occurred. The release or publication of identity information should be guided by your State / Territory Legislation.

Suppression Orders

A Suppression Order is an order forbidding publication of information pertaining to a specific event. The specific preclusions can vary with each event. Prior to releasing / publishing any information the court should be contacted by the Senior Pastor or Church Oversight to determine whether a suppression order has been placed. This includes before any letters are sent out to Parents of other children who may disclose alleged abuse. If there is any uncertainty about what is prohibited, Church Oversight should obtain legal advice. It is still possible to give some information to staff, Church Oversight members and parents while complying with these legal restrictions (This Booklet, page 11).

Avoiding Defamation

When allegations of abuse have been made, care must be taken to avoid stating anything that might defame the person against whom the allegations have been made. If the Church Oversight wishes to send a letter before a person has been arrested and charged with an offence, it is desirable to obtain legal advice as to the terms of the letter to ensure that nothing is said that defames that person. If that person has been arrested and charged, it is lawful to state that fact but nothing should be said which would suggest that the person is in fact guilty of the alleged misconduct.

It must be emphasised that these are guidelines only. The manner in which a Church Oversight will learn of allegations will vary. It is not possible to draft guidelines that will address every possible variation of fact.

Immediate Steps (see This Booklet page 7 for more details on Immediate Action Steps)

The fundamental steps that should always be observed are to notify immediately:

- Police
- Parents / Carers of the victim, unless a Parent / Carer is the accused person
- The Senior Pastor / Church Oversight
- Relevant Reporting Authority for your State / Territory

Detailed Note Taking

Memories fade and recollections of events will be difficult at a later date when Team Members are asked to recall events or conversations. It is essential that all Team Members involved keep a written record of all conversations relating to the allegations. The notes should, if possible, be made in the course of the conversation or immediately after. An **Accident and Incident Report Form** should also be completed including any supplementary statements (available online at crcchurches.org/docresources).

Team Members should be aware that they may be called to give evidence in court proceedings. Detailed notes will then be very helpful to assist the recollection of events and conversations. It is also important to be aware that notes may be subpoenaed for court proceedings and, therefore, should be completed in a legible and professional manner.

Storage & Access

- Appoint one person to supervise and co-ordinate all paperwork relating to the matter until all aspects of that matter have been resolved.
- Create a central file for each incident in which all documents relating to the incident and a copy of all relevant correspondence including emails are kept for future reference.
- All documentation should be labelled with the date of completion and the date in which the documentation was turned over to church oversight.
- All files are to be kept in a secure location and in a locked cabinet to which access is limited.
- Keep a log attached with each file that needs to be filled in each time the information is accessed, particularly recording who accessed the file, date and purpose for viewing.

What should be documented?

Complete a detailed Critical Incident Report (this Booklet pages 18 – 19) which should include:

- A summary of the concern / critical incident
- Specific details regarding the concern / critical incident
- Names and contact information of all persons contributing information to the report
- Indication of any supplementary reports to be attached

It is recommended that following any critical incident, any person contributing information should submit a statement in writing, in addition to any verbal statements made.

Supplementary Reports and Additional Documentation

- Information contained in the Critical Incident Report (see this Booklet pages 18-19) and any supplementary reports should contain factual based information regarding a contributing person's observations **and** any actions taken.
- Conjecture and opinion have a place in the reporting process as it documents a contributing person's perspective and state of mind, however, such documentation is to be clearly labelled and listed separately as a personal opinion, as opposed to factual observations.
- Additional documentation should include any written, photographed or electronically communicated information related to the incident.

Immediate Action Steps

Allegations of abuse might be made either to the Senior Pastor / Church Oversight or directly to a Team Member. On other occasions, the first knowledge that the Senior Pastor or Ministry Leader has of the allegations is when police make contact to say that they have arrested a person and charged them with a Criminal Offence.

The following is a list of the steps which the Senior Pastor or Church Oversight member should ensure are followed, where an allegation of abuse has been made:

- If the first knowledge of the allegation is when a person is arrested and charged, the Senior Pastor or Church Oversight member should proceed from **Step 4**.
- All the steps are important and need to be attended to immediately.
- The Senior Pastor has responsibility to undertake or, if tasks are delegated, oversee the execution of all the steps. Some steps can be taken simultaneously.

Actions of Team Leader

Step 1: Obtain medical assistance for child if required

The Team Leader should immediately attend to any medical treatment that the victim might require.

Step 2: Receive Report of Allegation

- If an allegation of abuse is made to a Team Member at the church, it should be reported to the Team Leader immediately.
- The Team Leader must immediately notify their direct oversight person (if applicable) and the Senior Pastor that an allegation has been made.
- The Team Member to whom the allegation is reported should record the allegations on an **Accident and Incident Report Form** (available online at crcchurches.org/docresources)
- If the allegation involves a Team Leader / Ministry Leader, the Team Member should immediately notify the Senior Pastor that an allegation has been made.
- If the allegation involves the Senior Pastor, the Team Leader must offer to support the Team Member in notifying a Church Oversight member immediately. Church Oversight is then required to immediately notify their State Chairman and Executive for their assistance and input.

Step 3: Report to Police

When the allegations of abuse are disclosed at the church, the Team Leader must immediately report the allegations to police. The Senior Pastor should also speak with police to ascertain how best to work with the authorities in managing the allegation received. Police should not interview people (be they the victim or the alleged offender) at the church except as a matter of urgency or immediate necessity. In the ordinary course, people should be interviewed at a place nominated by police that is off-site.

Actions of Senior Pastor

Step 4: Preservation of Evidence (if applicable)

The Senior Pastor should immediately take basic steps to have the place where the alleged offending occurred secured, if that is on the church property, until police arrive. An example is locking the computer room if the allegation is about accessing or possessing child pornography. The police will properly secure the crime scene on arrival. If uncertain what to do, the Senior Pastor should contact police.

Step 5: Preventing Access to Children

When it is necessary to prevent the accused person from having any further contact with children at the site, the Senior Pastor should, in consultation with a Church Oversight member and police, take steps to prevent the accused person from attending the site.

Step 6: Inform Parents / Carers of Victim

Unless a Parent / Carer is the accused person, the Senior Pastor should immediately inform the Parents / Carers of the victim of the allegations. This should be done in a sensitive manner, taking into consideration the victim's wishes.

Step 7: Inform Church Oversight

The Senior Pastor should inform the Church Oversight that a Critical Incident has occurred and an allegation of abuse has been received as Church Oversight may be required to advise the Senior Pastor and endorse further action to be taken.

Step 8: Place accused person on Special Leave

The Senior Pastor should place the accused person on special leave with pay (if employed) or special leave from their volunteer role and direct them not to attend the church property, pending a decision by the Church Oversight whether the accused person should be suspended. If guidance is required, consult with Police.

Step 9: Notify your relevant State / Territory Reporting Authority of allegation of abuse

The Senior Pastor should, as soon as practicable, notify the relevant Reporting Authority for their State / Territory. Note that the obligation to report allegations of abuse exist even if police have made an arrest and have already notified the Reporting Authority.

Step 10: Begin a Critical Incident Report (see this Booklet pages 18 and 19)

The Senior Pastor should begin compiling a Critical Incident Report, including any supplementary reports. As part of this report the Senior Pastor should ascertain from Police and then document:

- Details of the charge
- Short summary of nature of offending. This will be brief and can be, effectively, the first paragraph of the police apprehension report.
- Bail conditions.

- Date of first court appearance and location of the court.
- Whether there is a reasonable suspicion of other victims.
- Whether there are any complicating factors that would affect disclosure to Parents / Carers.
- Contact details of the investigating police officer.
- Whether the offence is a Major Indictable Offence, a Minor Indictable Offence or a Summary Offence.

Step 11: Inform and Involve the State Executive Chairman and Team as required

State Executive members may be consulted with at any time should the Senior Pastor required advice or support in managing allegations of abuse.

However, a Church Oversight member must inform their State Executive Chairperson of the incident by phone or email if the allegation of abuse involves the Senior Pastor. If the information is given by phone, it should be confirmed by email.

Step 12: Call Extraordinary Meeting of Church Oversight

The Senior Pastor is to inform the Church Oversight of the above information obtained from police and prepare a proposed media statement. An extraordinary meeting of the Church Oversight may need to be called to determine the next steps in supporting the Senior Pastor with managing the allegation of abuse.

Actions of Church Oversight at Extraordinary Meeting

1. Endorse an appropriate Media Statement that briefly outlines information obtained from police about the details of the charge, how the church is managing the allegation of abuse and working with authorities. This will help the Senior Pastor (or person delegated by them) to be prepared in the event a Media Statement needs to be released.
2. Ensure that the Senior Pastor, Team Leader and other Team Members (if applicable) have fulfilled their Mandatory Reporting obligations to report the allegations to the relevant State / Territory reporting authority.
3. Ensure that the Senior Pastor and other Team Members involved in managing the allegation of abuse have made notes of any relevant events and conversations and ensure copies are placed in the central file.
4. Decide upon the future employment / ongoing involvement of the accused person:
 - Where the accused person is a member of staff, the Church Oversight is to ascertain whether the accused person will be suspended from duty pending the outcome of the investigations.
 - If the accused person is suspended, the Senior Pastor should send that person a formal Letter of Suspension.

- If the accused person is a contractor, legal advice should be obtained whether the contract can be terminated.
- If the accused person is a volunteer, the services of that person should immediately be terminated.
- In the event of the charges being withdrawn or in the event of an acquittal, the Senior Pastor in consultation with the Church Oversight should determine what is to occur in relation to the future employment of the accused person.

5. Ensure follow up counselling and pastoral care support is taking place

The offer of counselling and other support for the victim and the victim's family should be made orally and as soon as possible after the Senior Pastor learns that the accused person has been charged. Contact details for support services should be provided to parents. It should be followed by a letter confirming the offer of counselling. Details of other available services can be listed for their later reference. A safety and support plan should also be developed for the victim in consultation with their parents. Contact details for support services should be provided to parents. (See Booklet 4, page 11 for more details on *Follow Up and Pastoral Care*).

6. Make a Risk Assessment

The Risk Assessment will consider whether there is a reasonable suspicion that there might be other victims. Where necessary, the Senior Pastor should consult with Team Leaders / Ministry Leaders to ascertain if they can identify any other situations where children may have been accessible to the alleged offender.

When making the risk assessment the Church Oversight should consider the following factors:

- the nature of the offending,
- the circumstances in which the alleged offending occurred,
- the place or places where the alleged offending occurred,
- the age and gender of the victim,
- the age and gender of the accused person,
- whether the accused person had regular and frequent contact with other children or a group or groups of children and the nature and circumstances of that contact,
- the opportunities that were available to the accused person to offend against other children.

On occasions it might be relatively easy to identify a group that might include possible victims. The following are some examples;

- If the alleged offending is by a Team Member of a Children's Ministry program, it might be reasonable to suspect that other children in the Children's Ministry program might be victims.
- If the accused person is a Youth program bus driver, it might be reasonable to suspect that other victims might be other young people who used the bus.
- If the accused person is a pre-school music and movement class teacher and the alleged victim is in that person's class, it might be reasonable to suspect that other children in the class might be victims.
- If the accused person is a small group leader who has families with children attending the Home Fellowship meeting in their home and is also a member of an after school children's outreach program, it might be reasonable to suspect that children attending the home fellowship meeting as well as children in the after school kid's outreach program might be possible victims.
- The other alternative is that it is not possible to identify any particular group of children because the accused person might have had regular and frequent contact with all of the children at the church.

7. Responsibly Give Appropriate Information

Although a suppression order and other state/territory information may forbid publication of the name of the accused person generally to the public, it is proper for those with a legitimate interest in the matter to be informed of the alleged offending.

Those who have a legitimate interest in the offending are:

- Church staff and relevant Ministry Leader(s) (even if they are volunteer roles)
- Members of the Church Oversight
- Parents of children who are likely to have been in contact with the accused person

As considerable care must be taken when informing staff /key volunteer leaders, the Church Oversight members and concerned parents, Senior Pastors and Church Oversight members should follow the guidelines below

Guidelines for Senior Pastors / Church Oversight: How to Responsibly Give Appropriate Information

It is necessary to consider the question of providing information at three points in time (or three 'stages'). They are:

1. When no more is known than what is contained in the allegations;
2. After the accused person has been charged; and
3. After the committal or other appropriate relevant date

Stage 1 - When Allegations Only

Informing Staff / Key Volunteer Ministry Leaders

It might be necessary for the Senior Pastor to make arrangements to replace the accused person who has been placed on special leave and to make other consequential administrative arrangements. The Senior Pastor is at liberty to inform the staff / key volunteer ministry leaders involved in the administrative arrangements, of the allegations, but should not inform other volunteers at this stage.

The Senior Pastor should also inform those staff / key volunteer ministry leaders that the accused person has been suspended on full pay or is not going to be involved in their voluntary role, pending the outcome of the investigation. It is important that all present at this meeting understand the need for confidentiality about any allegations and the accused person. However they will need to understand the nature of any allegations as they may have some other essential information which will be necessary for the investigation.

Staff / key volunteer ministry leaders should be informed that the accused person is not allowed at the church property and if the accused person is seen at the site to report it to the Senior Pastor. Staff / key volunteer ministry leaders should refer any people who have questions to the Senior Pastor. Staff should be instructed that, if they have any information that will assist the police investigation, they should contact police and provide that information.

If the identity of the victim is known and consent is obtained from the victim or the victim's Parents / Carers, specific staff members/key volunteer ministry leaders such as the alleged victim's Youth Ministry Leader or Children's Ministry Leader may be told who the victim is on a confidential basis in order to provide appropriate support for the victim.

Informing Parents / Carers

Generally speaking, **while allegations are being investigated**, it is not appropriate to inform Parents / Carers (other than the victim's Parents/Carers) of those allegations. The allegations might prove to be false, may not be substantiated, or there may be insufficient evidence to warrant criminal proceedings. A letter that named the accused person and reports what are no more than allegations has a real potential to be defamatory. As a general rule, the church should not, therefore, inform Parents / Carers (other than the victim's Parents / Carers) of allegations.

If there is an occasion when it is necessary to send a letter to Parents / Carers referring to allegations that letter should not name the staff member / volunteer Team Member or other person associated with the church against whom the allegations have been made. Legal advice should be obtained before sending such a letter. It will be necessary also to consult police.

If a parent should ask a staff member or key volunteer ministry leader why the suspended person is no longer at the church, the staff member should refer the inquirer to the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor should give the inquirer an answer that is as neutral as possible and does not disclose the nature of the alleged offending. One example of an appropriate answer is: *"The Team Member has been suspended. I am sorry I cannot give you any further information at this stage. As soon as I am in a position to do so, I will let you have more information."*

If the inquirer persists, the Senior Pastor should do no more than state that the Team Member has been suspended because his or her conduct is being investigated by police and the Senior Pastor will give more information when the outcome of the police investigation is known.

Stage 2 - After Accused Person Has Been Charged

Informing Staff / Key Volunteer Ministry Leaders

Following the arrest of a Team Member the site leader should convene a meeting of staff / key volunteer ministry leaders for the purpose of informing them that a Team Member has been arrested and to name that person and the offence:

- Informing them of changes to staff required by the absence of the accused person,
- Informing them that the accused person is not permitted on the site grounds,
- Asking them to inform the Senior Pastor if the accused person is seen at or near site grounds so that the Senior Pastor may take appropriate action, and;
- Informing them that, if they have any information that will assist the police investigation, to report that information to police.

Staff / key volunteer ministry leaders should also be instructed to keep the matter confidential in order to protect the confidentiality of the victim and also instructed that it is an offence to publish any material identifying the accused person at this stage of the criminal proceedings. If new staff / key volunteer ministry leaders join the church or commence new roles the Senior Pastor should give the same information to those new members of staff / key volunteer ministry leaders.

If the identity of the victim is known and consent is obtained from the victim or the victim's parents/carers, specific staff members / key ministry leaders such as the alleged victim's Youth Ministry Leader or Children's Ministry Leader may be told who the victim is on a confidential basis in order to provide appropriate support for the victim

Informing Parents / Carers

The manner in which information is given to parents/carers and the kind of information given to parents/carers will depend on the result of the risk assessment. Particular care must be taken when informing parents/carers of the fact that a Team Member has been arrested and charged with an offence. Parents/Carers will be advised either by letter or at a meeting, as described below.

Letters

- As a general rule, the accused person should not be named in the letter to parents/carers
- The letter should be sent as soon as reasonably practicable.
- There is no one letter that will be suitable for all occasions.
- With the assistance of the Church Oversight the Senior Pastor will have to prepare a letter suitable to the occasion in question.
- Before finalising the contents of the letter the Senior Pastor must consult with police as to the timing and content of the letter.

When drafting a letter to be sent to Parents/Carers, regard should be had to the following:

- The presumption of innocence;
- Any restrictions on the publication of the name of the alleged offender until committal or according to the specific requirements of the church's state/territory law.

If contrary to the recommendation in these Guidelines, it is decided to name the accused person and if the letter is to be sent to a large number of Parents/Carers, advice should be taken in regards to:

- Whether the letter is permitted under state/territory legislation
- The fact that a person who receives the letter might post it on social media sites;
- The fact that the name of the person alleged to have committed the offence can lawfully be published at a certain date in the future
- Whether a suppression order has been made by a court

The purpose of a letter is twofold:

- To inform Parents/Carers of the fact that a Team Member has been charged with a criminal offence and to state whether there is any concern for the safety and welfare of children other than the victim.
- The letter should be sent by post or by email.
- It should not be sent home with a child or young person.
- It should not be posted on the church notice board or in a newsletter.

No Other Victims

If the result of the risk assessment is that there is no suspicion that there might be other victims, a letter should be sent to all Parents / Carers at the site stating that fact. The letter should state that a Team Member of the church has been arrested and charged with an offence, naming the offence but not naming that person.

When A Group Is Identified

If the result of the risk assessment is that there is a group of children who might include victims, two letters should be sent to Parents / Carers. Neither letter should name the accused person:

1. The first letter should be sent to the Parents / Carers of those children in the group in which it is suspected that there might be other victims. It will inform Parents / Carers of the fact that a Team Member has been arrested and charged with committing an offence, naming the offence but not naming that person. It would inform those Parents / Carers that a meeting is being called to give information to Parents / Carers. At the same time, it would endeavour not to suggest that the children of those Parents / Carers who received the letter are in fact victims.
2. The second letter should be addressed to all other parents of children in that specific ministry department at the church. It will contain essentially the same information as the first letter save for the fact that it will state that, while there is no evidence that any child at the church is involved, a meeting is being called of Parents / Carers whose children have

been in regular and frequent contact with the accused person and state that the recipient may attend the meeting if he or she wishes to do so.

When A Particular Group Cannot Be Identified

In those cases where there is a reasonable suspicion of other victims but it is not possible to narrow down the group of children as the accused person has had regular and frequent contact with most of the children and young people at church, a meeting should be held with all Parents / Carers. It will be necessary for only one letter to be sent to all Parents / Carers.

A Meeting of Parents / Carers

Where, as a result of the risk assessment, there is a reasonable suspicion that there might be other victims, a meeting should be held for the Parents / Carers of those children who are in the group of possible victims. At that meeting those Parents / Carers should be given information and instruction that cannot be given in a letter.

The information and instruction provided at the meeting should deal with such matters as:

- Informing Parents / Carers of the kind of behaviour that is indicative of a child having been the victim of abuse
- The appropriate way to provide opportunities for a child to talk about a traumatic experience
- How to support a child and manage the situation if they disclose abuse
- The information and instruction should be directed to the type of offending that had been alleged. It should include a strong message to be available to the child but not to interrogate the child.
- The information should be given by a qualified and experienced expert such as a psychologist with experience in assisting children who have been victims of child abuse, who would be able to answer any questions Parents / Carers might have.
- The meeting should also make sure that Parents / Carers receive appropriate advice on how to deal personally with any disclosures made by their child.
- Parents / Carers should be provided with the contact details for relevant support services.
- The Senior Pastor may name the accused person and answer any questions Parents / Carers might have.
- The Senior Pastor should ask Parents / Carers to treat the information as confidential. They can be told that publication of the name of the accused person could be in breach of state / territory laws.
- It might be preferable to encourage Parents / Carers to treat that information as confidential by stating that it is in the interests of the victim and the Parents / Carers of the victim to keep the matter confidential.
- It should be stressed at the meeting that nothing should be said or done that might identify the victim.
- Following the meeting, Parents / Carers should be provided with an information sheet containing information about good parenting practice when dealing with a victim or possible victim of abuse. That document should also include guidance as to how best to respond to disclosure by a child who has been abused. The information sheet should also be made available to those Parents / Carers who cannot attend the meeting.

Stage 3 - After Committal (or as required by the relevant State / Territory Legislation)

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- After the accused person has been committed to stand trial or be sentenced or after any other date required by the relevant State / Territory law, there are no restrictions on informing either staff / key volunteer ministry leaders or Parents / Carers of the fact that the accused person has been charged with a criminal offence.
- Any information given to persons in those groups can name the accused person and state the offence with which the accused person has been charged. At this stage, there is no need for confidentiality about any of those facts.
- However, if a suppression order has been made legal advice should be obtained on the question whether it is possible to give information to staff / key volunteer ministry leaders or Parents / Carers.

Informing Parents / Carers of Previous Students

- In consultation with the church oversight, the Senior Pastor should ascertain the names of children who in previous years would have been in contact with the accused person. Having done so, the Senior Pastor should send a letter to the parents of those children whose addresses are known.
- A letter must, in any event be sent to parents of children who left within the previous year.
- This information should be given to those parents after committal or other relevant date as required by State / Territory legislation unless their child is identified during the risk assessment as being at risk of having been abused. They should then be informed in accordance with the procedure Stage 2 (This Booklet, page 13).

Informing Other Churches

Where the accused person has been in any Team Member role at other churches, where they have worked with or had access to children or young people, the Senior Pastor will notify those other churches so that they can consider whether it is necessary to inform Parents / Carers in the same way as stated above.

Informing the State Executive Chairman

The relevant State Chairperson should be informed of allegations of abuse by a Senior Pastor at a church as soon as reasonably practicable after the Church Oversight becomes aware of the allegations.

- Where a Senior Pastor has been arrested and charged, the State Chairperson should be told the name of the church, the name of the accused person, the charges and the nature of the offending. This should preferably be in writing.
- The initial briefing should be followed by a more detailed briefing in writing, when the Church Oversight has more information.
- If it is proposed that the Church Oversight will send a letter to parents, a copy of the letter should be included in the briefing.
- There will be occasions when it will be necessary for the Church Oversight to give the State Chairperson briefings as events unfold so that State Chairperson or National Executive is in a

position to respond quickly and appropriately to any issue that might arise in the course of the management of the allegations.

Monitoring Court Proceedings

- The Church Oversight should appoint an oversight member to monitor the court proceedings and inform the Senior Pastor of the stage the prosecution has reached.
- Unless a suppression order has been made, the Senior Pastor may inform parents by letter of the stage the prosecution has reached as outlined in the church's relevant State / Territory laws, i.e. this may include when a plea of guilty has been made; at the end of a trial, to inform whether the accused person has been acquitted or convicted; after the accused person has been sentenced; and after any appeal.
- Any letters should be drafted in consultation with the Church Oversight, legal advice and must be sent by post. Before sending any letters, it is necessary to check whether a Suppression Order has been made.

Responding to the Media

If the media inquire about the allegations, the Senior Pastor should consult the Church Oversight who will obtain advice whether to respond and, if so, how to respond. Where allegations of abuse involve the Senior Pastor the Church Oversight will consult the State Chairperson who will obtain advice from the National Chairman or their delegate as to whether to respond, and if so, how to respond.

Reporting the Outcome

It is desirable to inform the staff, key volunteer ministry leaders and parents of the outcome of the Criminal Proceedings. If the accused person is acquitted or if the charges against him or her are withdrawn or if the proceedings lapse for any reason, it is essential to inform staff, key volunteer ministry leaders and parents of the fact. The letter should be drafted by the Church Oversight and should be signed by the Senior Pastor / the Church Oversight Chairperson.

Should the accused person be acquitted or if the charges against him or her are withdrawn or if the proceedings lapse for any other reason, the Church Oversight will need to guide the process of how this person is to participate in the life of the church community going forward. However, this does not guarantee that the previously accused person will be restored to their original position. If there is insufficient evidence to complete the Police Investigation or Judicial Process, the Oversight is to take all necessary precautions to ensure the protection of children under the church's care. This may include precluding someone from being restored to their original position or working in children or youth ministry at the church in the future.

Develop a Critical Incident Response Plan

Incidents happen to all of us even with careful planning and attention to safety. Some incidents are more serious than others. Critical incidents include, but are not limited to:

- Serious vehicle accidents
- Death of a participant
- Lost or significantly injured participant (I.e. lost for more than several hours, injuries requiring emergency evacuation)
- Natural tragedy (e.g. bushfire, flood)
- Significant violence between participants
- Sexual assault
- Participant engaging in significant self-harm
- Suicidal participant, attempted or actual suicide

Delegation of Responsibilities

During and following critical incidents, emotions can run high – it is essential that emergency procedures are documented and shared with all staff members or volunteers and should be reviewed frequently, so that *everyone* knows what their role is, where to report and who to report to upon identification of a Critical Incident.

Identify actions that should be taken before, during and after a Critical Incident occurs

Emergency procedures should be implemented to ensure appropriate and uniform response following allegations of abuse and neglect in the same manner that they would be implemented for any Critical Incident. These procedures should include:

- Documentation of all potential risks and their possible consequences. Be prepared.
- Have on hand resources needed i.e. medical supplies, extra clothing, food or other support materials.
- Emergency contact numbers for Police, Ambulance and Children's Services.
- Specific practice for protection of confidentiality for all involved parties.
- Briefing of staff and volunteers as is applicable and on a '*needs to know*' basis to protect confidentiality
- Required documentation (i.e. notes taken following observation of actions, concerns or specific disclosure.)
- Determine immediate and long term needs for support for all parties involved following the incident.

Communication

Clear procedures to establish expected lines of communication are to be put in place prior to any incident. They are essential in helping to provide information to all required parties to ensure a thorough and processed response.

Internal review

An internal review process should be in place and should include the names or positions of persons for overseeing follow-up and review of all Critical Incidents. Establish who that responsible person is within each church and have an alternate person named in the event the first is either absent or involved directly in the concern.

Know How to Implement This Plan If Required

Raise awareness

- Talk openly about Critical Incident scenarios that could occur.
- Make the prevention and detection of abuse and neglect an integral part of the day to day running of all programs within the church.
- Have written material, pamphlets and related resources readily available.

Team Leaders should discuss with their direct oversight / coordinator how they (and their Team Members) are to respond in the event of a Critical Incident occurring in a program or ministry they lead. It is advisable that this discussion includes:

- Immediate safety of participants
- Contacting emergency services
- Contacting a Senior Leader from the church for support
- Providing for participants immediate practical needs
- Communicating with young people
- Contacting parents
- Accepting regressive behaviour in young people affected
- Protecting young people from exposure to media
- Ensuring young people are not left alone for any time until they are reunited with their family
- Reuniting young people with their family as soon as practical
- Not assuming public responsibility or talking to the press themselves
- Supporting other Team Members

Provide training

Training is a significant aspect to the implementation of your church's Critical Incident Plan. Training provides awareness and the tools to respond appropriately and with confidence when abuse or neglect is suspected.