



CHILD SAFETY REPORTING PROCEDURE

EVALUATION, REVIEW, AND UPDATE

COCWA is keen to receive feedback on this procedure. Any future revision will take into account feedback, and any developments in regulation and best practice.

The Child Safety Reporting Procedure, will otherwise be reviewed regularly.

This document is clearly marked with the date of adoption by the Churches of Christ in Western Australia Inc Board. The Board will provide opportunity for Churches and Partners to contribute to the review of this procedure.

BACKGROUND

This procedure sets out who needs to report what, when, and to whom, when there is a current safety concern. It includes all forms of child safety including child sexual abuse.

Other aspects of preventing and responding to safety issues are set out in our Child Safety Policy.

If there are matters relating to historical abuse, contact the COCWA Executive Minister through the COCWA office on 08 9471 8500.

WHO SHOULD REPORT?

This policy applies to everyone involved with children in a church. A child is anyone under the age of 18.

WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED?

Any child safety concerns must be reported including:

- Disclosure of abuse or harm
- Allegation, suspicion or observation of inappropriate behaviour
- Breach of Code of Conduct
- Environmental safety issues
- Any behaviour or circumstances that create some concern about safety

Abuse means all forms of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse and neglect, and includes actions that result in actual or potential harm to a child.

WHAT SHOULD BE REPORTED?

All safety issues must be reported to the Safe Contact Person.

Depending on the issue, the person with the concern may also need to report to the authorities, as set out in this procedure.

PROCEDURE

Please refer to the attached flowchart for a summary of the procedure, and contact the COCWA Executive Minister at any stage for assistance on 08 9471 8500.

1. CALL EMERGENCY SERVICES (000) IF THERE IS IMMEDIATE DANGER

Remove any immediate threat if possible, and call 000.

2. LISTEN TO ANY CONCERNS BEING RAISED

If you are under 18, and a child starts to talk with you about behaviour which sounds concerning because it may indicate child abuse, ask a leader or the Safe Contact Person in your church for help.

If you are over 18, interact with the child as follows:

- support the child and reassure them that telling someone was the right thing to do
- emphasise that what occurred was not their fault
- stop questioning the child and witnesses if the conduct described is likely to constitute criminal conduct
- consider whether expert assistance is needed to support a child to communicate their concern or disclosure (for example, disability expert, language or cultural interpreter)
- limit questioning; ask only open questions
- undertake to do something in response to what the child has said and, where appropriate, explain what will be done and the expected time frame
- don't make promises that cannot be kept, including that the information will remain confidential; tell the child who will be told and why
- document the conversation using the child's exact words as far as possible

If in doubt, ask a leader or the Safe Contact Person in your church for help.

3. WRITE UP THE CONCERN

Make notes straight away, using the relevant form. If the form isn't immediately available, make a note of the following:

- information that has led to concerns about the child's safety (e.g. physical injuries, behaviour)
- the source of this information (e.g. observation of behaviour, report from child or another person)
- the actions taken as a result of the concerns (e.g. consultation with COCWA Executive Minister, report to Child Protection)

4. REPORT TO POLICE IF YOU HAVE A REASONABLE BELIEF OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WHO HAS TO MAKE A REPORT TO POLICE?

If you are 18 or over, you are personally obliged to report to police if you have a reasonable belief that a person who is 18 or older has committed or attempted to commit a sexual offence against a child who is under 16, unless:

- reporting would endanger someone other than the perpetrator; or
- all of the information has already been reported to police by someone else.

A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. It is not the same as having proof, but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

A 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child states that they have been sexually abused;
- a child states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
- someone who knows the child states that the child has been sexually abused; or
- signs of sexual abuse leads to a belief that the child has been sexually abused.

If in doubt, you can contact the COCWA Executive Minister or the police for guidance, but you have to make your own decision about whether to report to the police or not.

HOW TO MAKE A REPORT TO POLICE

To make a report to police when there is no immediate danger, contact 131 444. Numbers are available on the website.

Alternatively contact your local police station. You can find the relevant number at <https://www.police.wa.gov.au/>

NOTIFYING OTHERS

You must also complete the relevant form, and give this to your Safe Contact Person and to the COCWA Executive Minister.

You should respect everyone's privacy and not discuss your concerns with anyone else, except confidentially if you need to seek support yourself.

If in doubt about how to provide or obtain appropriate pastoral support, seek guidance from the COCWA Executive Minister.

5. REPORT TO YOUR CHURCH'S SAFE CONTACT PERSON OR CONTACT THE COCWA EXECUTIVE MINISTER

All concerns about abuse including suspected or potential abuse must be reported to the church's Safe Contact Person, and the COCWA Executive Minister. If the Safe Contact Person is suspected of inappropriate behaviour, seek guidance directly from the COCWA Executive Minister rather than raising your concerns with the Safe Contact Person.

6. FOLLOW UP TO ENSURE THE CHILD IS PROTECTED

If you are an adult in a responsible position in the church you must follow up to make sure that appropriate action has been taken to protect the child, or risk committing an offence.

7. WHAT ABOUT MANDATORY REPORTING?

A mandatory reporter is only required to make a report to DCP if your concern arises while you are acting in your capacity as a mandatory reporter. For example, a practicing psychologist who notices concerning behaviour at church would not have to make a report to DCP under the mandatory reporting legislation but would otherwise have to follow steps 1 – 6 of this Reporting Procedure.

Likewise, you do not need to make a report if you can prove that you honestly and reasonably believed that all of the grounds for your belief have already been reported.

WHO IS A MANDATORY REPORTER?

Currently under section 124B of the Children and Community Services Act 2004 the following people are mandatory reporters:

- doctors;
- nurses,
- teachers;
- police officers;
- midwives; and
- boarding supervisors.

When the relevant amendments to the Children and Community Services Act 2004 commence operation, the following additional persons will become mandatory reporters:

- ministers of religion;
- psychologists;
- early childhood workers;
- youth justice workers;
- out of home care workers;
- school counsellors;
- Departmental officers of the Department of Communities; and
- Assessors who visit residential care and secure care services.

WHEN WILL THE LAW CHANGE?

It is intended the new reporter groups commence as mandatory reporters in a staged way to enable the necessary training to occur beforehand.

Table 1 Staged Implementation of mandatory reporter groups

Mandatory Reporter Group	Proposed commencement
Minister of religion	1 November 2022
Assessor	1 November 2023
Departmental officer of the Department of Communities	
Out-of-home care worker	
School counsellor	1 May 2024
Psychologist	
Early childhood worker	1 November 2024
Youth justice worker	1 May 2025

If in doubt, check with the COCWA Executive Minister.

DO I HAVE TO MAKE A REPORT?

If you are a mandatory reporter you must make a report if the child is under 17 and you have formed a belief on reasonable grounds that the child is in need of protection, that is:

- the child has suffered or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, AND
- the child's parents have not protected, or are unlikely to protect the child from that harm.

A belief is based on reasonable grounds that criminal child abuse has occurred when all known considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are taken into account and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated, the nature of and details of the allegation, whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator.

Note that you are only required to make a report to DCP if your concern arises while you are acting in your capacity as a mandatory reporter. For example, a practicing psychologist who notices concerning behaviour at church would not have to make a report to DCP under the mandatory reporting legislation but would otherwise have to follow the other expectations in this Reporting Procedure.

You do not need to make a report if you can prove that you honestly and reasonably believed that all of the grounds for your belief have already been reported.

HOW TO MAKE A REPORT

Refer to the DCP guide to identifying and reporting child abuse.

WHEN TO MAKE A REPORT

A mandatory report must be made as soon as practicable after the reporter forms their belief regarding the sexual abuse of a child. A mandatory report can be made in writing or orally. If an oral report is made, it must be followed by a written report as soon as practicable after making the oral report (ideally within 24 hours). Failure to submit a written report as soon as practical after submitting an oral report is an offence that carries a maximum penalty of \$3,000.

Mandatory Reporting Online Training

COCWA now requires all mandatory reporters complete mandatory reporting online training provided by the Australian government as part of the ministry accreditation process and/or if you are a minister of religion under COCWA as of November 1, 2022.

Mandatory Reporting Online Training (CR.007260) has been developed for:

- existing mandatory reporters
- new mandatory reporter groups
- anyone who wants to learn more about mandatory reporting.

Completion of the training will provide:

- a foundation to recognise and report a belief, based on reasonable grounds, that a child has been or is continuing to be sexually abused
- an overview of Western Australia's child protection system
- information on:
 - o types and effects of abuse and neglect
 - o recognising and responding to sexual behaviours displayed by some children
 - o responding to disclosures of abuse

The training is divided into three parts and each part has two modules. Each module focuses on a key information area followed by a short quiz. Allow up to two hours to complete the training.

If you are not a Department of Communities staff member

Use a computer that you can return to if you don't finish the training in one sitting. If you change computer or IP address part way through, your progress will not be saved and you will have to restart the training.

At the end of the training, you will be required to enter some demographic information. Please be aware that by providing the Department of Communities with the optional information asked for in this survey, you are agreeing to its possible use in the following ways:

- as an indicator of how widely the training is being accessed by mandatory reporters, and by which mandatory reporter groups and organisations.
- as feedback on how successful the training is for preparing new mandatory reporters to meet their reporting obligations.

This information will also generate a completion certificate, which will be emailed directly to the email address you provide.

[Click here for Mandatory Reporting Online Training \(CR.007260\).](#)

AUTHORISATION

Church name:	
Approved by governing body on:	
Scheduled review date:	

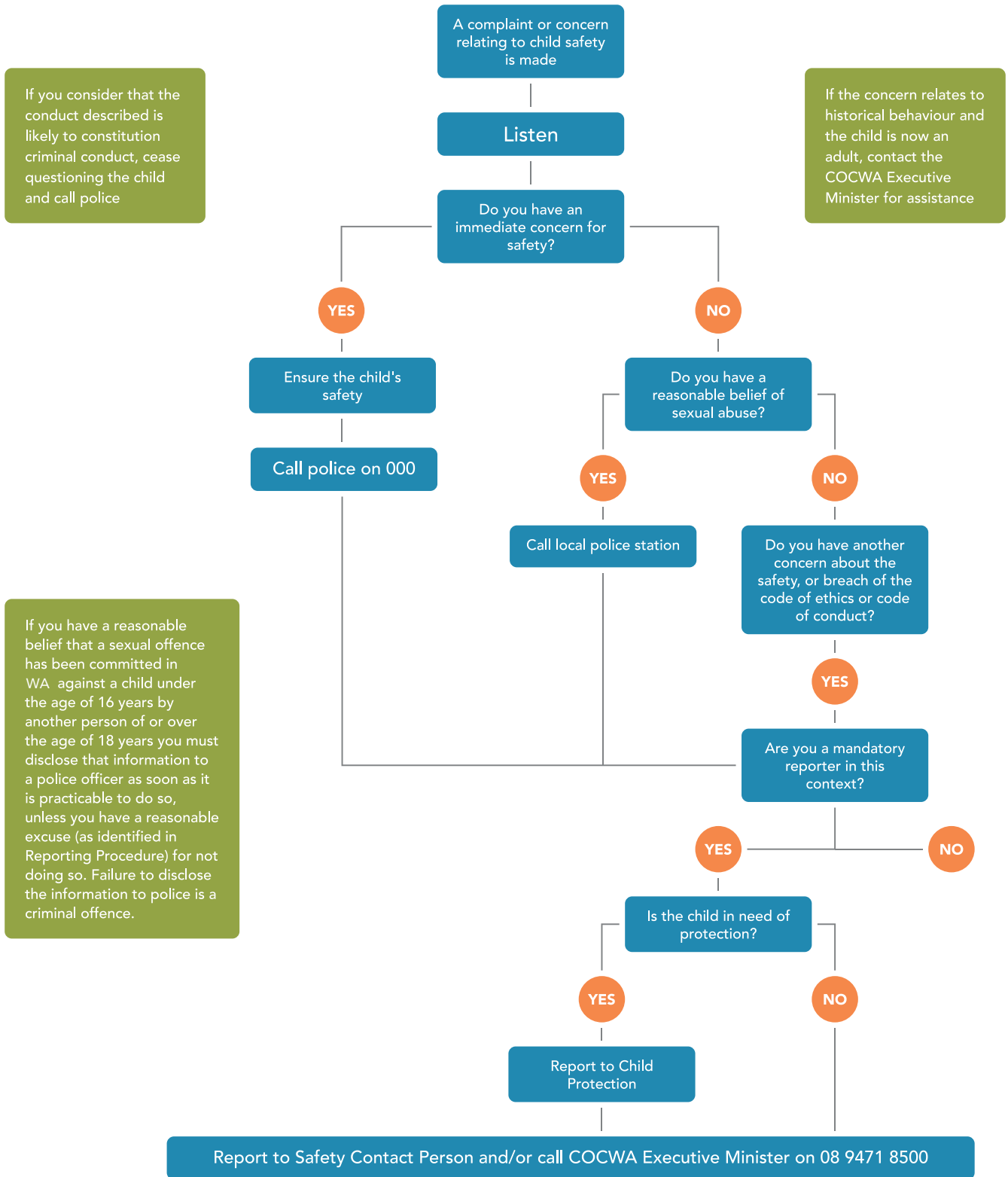
SAFE CONTACT PERSON

Name:	
Phone number:	
Email:	
Other contact details:	

RELATED POLICIES

See the **Child Safety Policy** distributed alongside this Procedure or with others on the COCWA website.

To the extent that the Duty of Care for Responsible Leadership of Children and Youth Policy of Churches of Christ in Western Australia covers issues not covered by this Child Safety Policy or other new policies, it operates as our policy on those issues until COCWA distributes replacement policies.



Following a report, an investigation may need to be conducted. Churches must not investigate allegations of abuse without first seeking guidance from COCWA via the Executive Minister on (08) 9471 8500. If you are an adult in a responsible position in the church you must follow up to make sure that appropriate action has been taken to protect the child, or risk committing an offence (failure to protect). Ensure pastoral care is appropriately provided at all stages.