

## CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

*Your legal responsibilities as a mandated notifier*

### Mandatory Notification - In a nutshell

The Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. As part of this commitment we have a duty to ensure that all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are aware of their legal obligations as mandated notifiers and are equipped with the resources they need to fulfil this responsibility.

The following information defines what child abuse and neglect is, and what to do to ensure the safety of children and young people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, abuse and neglect in their homes or in the parish environment.

#### What is Child Abuse?

**There are four types of child abuse:**

- (1) **Physical abuse** is characterised by physical injury resulting from actions such as: hitting, punching, kicking, throwing, shaking (particularly young babies), burning, biting, pulling hair, alcohol or other drug administration.
- (2) **Sexual abuse** occurs when someone in a position of power uses their power to involve the child in sexual activity.
- (3) **Emotional abuse** tends to be a chronic behaviour directed at a child whereby a child's self-esteem and social competence is undermined or eroded over time. This may include: devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising, domestic violence in a child's presence.
- (4) **Neglect** is characterised by the ongoing failure to provide a child with their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, hygiene, education, adequate supervision, medical, dental care, forcing a child to leave home, or allowing chronic truancy.

Child abuse can occur through someone **doing** something hurtful or by someone **not doing** something to provide for or protect a child.

#### **What does the Law say?**

Under the Children and Young People (Safety) Act, 2017 (Chapter 5, parts 30 and 31), it is a legal requirement for clergy, religious, employees and volunteers in the Catholic Church in South Australia to report all suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect to the Department of Child Protection through the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 131478.



This legal requirement means that you must make a report if you suspect that child abuse and/or neglect is taking place, and you form that suspicion because:

- a child/young person tells you he or she has been abused;
- your own observation of a particular child/young person's behaviour and/or injuries, or your knowledge of children/young people generally leads you to suspect that abuse is occurring;
- a child/young person tells you he or she knows someone who has been abused (a child/young person could possibly be referring to himself or herself); or
- someone else (perhaps a relative, friend, neighbour or sibling of the child/young person) who is in a position to provide reliable information, tells you.

Where you form this suspicion on reasonable grounds, your legal obligation is to phone the;

### **Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) on 13 14 78**

Child abuse and/or neglect can be prevented. Identification and reporting may be the beginning of the intervention and prevention process. Protecting children and helping their families can reduce future abuse and/or neglect.

#### **What can I do if I am concerned?**

##### **Responding:**

If a child or young person discloses abuse you should do the following:

- Listen with care and support the child
- Take time and allow them to tell their story in their own way
- Do not investigate or ask leading questions
- Let them know what will happen next, whose job it is to help
- Record what they have said (as soon as possible and using the 'Safeguarding Record Form')

##### **Reporting:**

If you are noticing signs that make you think a child may be at risk of, or is being abused or neglected, you may need to report your concerns to the Child Abuse Report Line CARL 13 14 78 or to SA Police 13 14 44.

You can also discuss your concerns with a Parish Priest, another trusted parish member and/or contact the Child Protection Unit (CPU) on ph. 82108159 for professional advice and guidance.



You should also record your worries as soon as practical using the 'Safeguarding Record Form' available on your parish office and the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide website. This ensures that your observations and actions are on record.

**Supporting:**

Sometimes support for the family of the child or young person is the best way to ensure their safety and wellbeing. It's good to know about community services which are available to assist children, young people, and their families so you can pass on information or refer if necessary. There is a list of some resources and organisations who can offer support to those in need at the end of the document.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide has a responsibility to ensure child-safe environments where children and young people feel respected, safe and protected.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MANDATED NOTIFIERS

#### **Do I have to notify if the abused child/young person discloses to me in confidence?**

Notification is mandatory under the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 and is not regarded as a breach of professional etiquette, ethics or conduct. You are not helping the child/young person if you agree not to tell anyone.

Mandatory notification overrides professional etiquette, ethics, or conduct.

Notification does not provide grounds for civil action if the report is made in good faith. Good faith simply means an honest belief by the notifier that the child/young person was abused or that the substance of the notification which may be only a suspicion is based on reasonable grounds. Good faith does not mean that you are personally required to believe, beyond doubt, that the abuse or neglect has occurred.

#### **What if I have a strong relationship with this child and the family?**

When you make a report you may feel torn between your legal responsibility to report and your own belief that reporting may jeopardise the opportunity to maintain or develop a satisfactory working relationship with the family. The child/young person's safety is paramount, and therefore it is essential that all suspicions of abuse and neglect be reported. If the suspected abuse or neglect is not reported, the child may remain at risk and may ultimately be at risk of permanent harm or even possible death.

In effect, by not notifying, you become a part of the abuse because you are:

- Colluding with the abuser by maintaining the secret
- Protecting the abuser and not the child/young person

#### **Can I ask for feedback on what happened after I notified?**

Feedback is given on a 'need to know' basis for mandated notifiers.

If you have an extensive relationship with the child, or children, and their family, the degree of information you receive will be greater compared with an individual who has minimal contact with the family. During an investigation, the family is entitled to the same level of confidentiality as would be expected with any other situation.

#### **Do I need to tell the family or child that I have made a notification?**

As a notifier, you are not obliged to inform a child, their family or carers that you have made a notification about the child/ren.



You will need to make a judgement about whether discussing this notification with the child or family has the potential to strengthen or damage your relationship with them. If allegations are serious and may require a criminal investigation, advising a child or their family that you have made a notification may compromise evidence later used in a court.

Sharing this information may also place the child/ren at risk of further retribution and they may not feel as though they can speak. It is also important to consider the impact upon a child or family if they are informed of a notification where the Department of Child Protection decides at the time that the notification does not warrant any statutory intervention.

### **Do I need to consult with a supervisor before notifying?**

If you are unsure, it may be beneficial to discuss your concerns with a supervisor or person in authority. However, you do not need permission to make a notification. You may wish to contact the Archdiocesan Child Protection Unit for guidance and support ph 8210 8159.

### **What happens if I do not notify?**

Failure to report is an offence under the Children and Young People (Safety) Act, 2017, and currently carries a maximum penalty of \$10,000. It is the individual who is fined, not the organisation that employs them.

(Adapted from the Department of Human Services, Safe Environments for Children and Young People. Through their eyes – Reference Guide).



### **IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

#### **Reporting or Discussing Concerns**

Child Abuse Report Line: 13 14 78

SAPOL (non emergency): 13 14 44

Archdiocesan Child Protection Unit: (08) 8210 8159

Professional Standards Office: (08) 8210 8275

#### **Support for Children and Families**

**Centacare Catholic Family Services: (08) 8215 6700**

*Individual and family support services*

**St Vincent de Paul: (08) 8112 8700**

*Financial counselling, emergency food assistance, housing and homeless support*

**Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636**

*Mental Health information and advice*

**Blue Knot Foundation: 1300 657 380**

*Support for adult survivors of childhood trauma*

**Lifeline: 13 11 14**

*24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention service*

**1800 Respect: 1800 737 732**

*National sexual assault, domestic violence counselling service*

