

Engadine Congregational Church Responding to situations of suspected abuse¹

At Engadine Congregational Church we are committed to providing ministry that is safe through appropriate leadership, best practices and safe environments. To this end we have developed a *'Safe Ministry Policy'*, a *'Code of Conduct'*, and *'Guidelines'* for use in our various ministry groups. Whilst it is our desire to provide ministry that is safe, and our aim that all reasonable measures will be undertaken to ensure that such is provided, we are aware that this may not always occur. This document has been developed in order to provide guidance in responding to such situations.

A one-off indicator is rarely sufficient to establish abuse or risk of significant harm. Additionally, it is important not to jump too quickly to conclusions. However, regardless of whether an incident is one-off or repeated, when reasonable grounds exist for suspecting abuse or risk of significant harm, action should be taken.

Responding to a disclosure

If a child or adult discloses something that causes you concern:

1. Listen

- Stay calm and give your full attention to the person disclosing
- Give them time to say what they need to say in their own words
- If necessary, ask open-ended questions to encourage the person to explain their story (e.g. “Can you tell me more about that?”) but don’t pressure them for details
- Be supportive but don’t try to counsel them or investigate what is being said

¹ To a large degree this document relies heavily upon information contained in the Safe Ministry Handbook provided by the Safe Ministry Team of the Sydney Anglican Diocese and used with permission.

2. Reassure

Reassure the child or adult that:

- They have done the right thing in speaking out
- They have a right to be safe
- You will support them as best you can

3. Think before you speak

- Don't promise that the abuse will stop
- Don't promise that you will keep it a secret
- In reporting the suspected abuse only speak to a person who needs to be involved
- Don't notify parents/caregivers or the accused person – leave this to FaCS or the Police

4. Report

As soon as possible, pass the information on to the appropriate person/authorities:

- Inform the child or adult that if it is necessary to keep them safe you will need to pass this information on but you will support them through the process (Note: call 000 if the person is in immediate danger)
- Write a record of what you said and what the child or adult said, date and sign it and keep it in a secure location

(Adapted from *Responding to children and young people's disclosures of abuse*, C Hunter, NCPC 2011)

Reporting concerns regarding children

General suspicions

If you have a concern about a child or a young person do not investigate or take action on your own. Note down the following in writing:

- Details of the individual child involved including date of birth and address;
- Time and place; and
- Grounds for forming the belief that abuse has occurred.

Raise the matter with the person who leads the ministry group and inform the Safe Ministry Representative.

Child or young person currently at risk of significant harm

You should make a report to the FaCS Child Protection Helpline when you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm. If you are uncertain whether to make such a report, speak with the person who leads the ministry group or the Safe Ministry Representative.

Contact the Police before making any report to the Helpline if the situation requires emergency assistance.

Contact the Safe Ministry Representative where the alleged perpetrator is a church worker.

Reporting concerns regarding adults

Making a report

In general anyone can contact the police when someone is in danger, or when a person makes threats to harm themselves or others, if they believe that a criminal offence may have been committed.

If you have knowledge of a serious criminal offence committed by a person then a report must be made to the police:

- In an emergency call 000
- If no danger is present or an urgent police response is not needed call NSW Police Assistance Line 131 444 or contact your local police

You may also contact the following hotlines for concerns regarding:

- An elderly person – NSW Elder Abuse Helpline (1800 628 221)
- A person with a disability – National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline (1800 880 052)
- Victim of family and domestic violence – 24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline (1800 65 64 63)

For advice regarding allegations of sexual abuse of an adult in a church contact the Safe Ministry Representative as each situation is different.

Who should be informed?

In general, the elders, Police and Safe Ministry Representative will often have a need to be informed of allegations of abuse or misconduct in church ministries. However, if the allegation is against one or more of the elders, do not report to them. If you are concerned that making a report would put a person's safety in jeopardy then seek advice from the Safe Ministry Representative, Police or Domestic Violence Helpline.

Important Contact Information

Elders: Roy Arellano – 0450 781 041 (roy@econg.org.au); Greg Jones – 0438 366 803 (info@econg.org.au); James Stone – 0450 313 991 (james@econg.org.au)

Safe Ministry Representative: Jane Rummey – 0410 524 954 (rummey1@optusnet.com.au)

Fellowship of Congregational Churches: (02) 9588 5128; contact@fccaus.org

Family and Community Services (FaCS) Child Protection Helpline: 132 111