

# Encounter (Sunbury) Inc.

## Child Safety Policy

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## Introduction

Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children. We have zero tolerance for child abuse.

Everyone involved at Encounter is responsible for the care and protection of children and the reporting of information about child abuse.

This policy document should be read in conjunction with “A guide for Faith Communities on the Reportable Conduct Scheme”, provided by the *Commission for Children and Young People*. ([ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Uploads/religious-orgs-guidance-web-lower-resolution.pdf](http://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Uploads/religious-orgs-guidance-web-lower-resolution.pdf))

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is:

1. To minimize the risk of child abuse occurring within Encounter.
2. To work towards an organisational culture of child safety.
3. To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for, identifying possible risk for child abuse, establishing controls and procedures for preventing abuse and/or detecting any abuse when it occurs
4. To provide guidance to staff/ volunteers as to action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation.
5. To provide a clear statement for staff/volunteers forbidding any abuse.
6. To provide assurance that any and all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.
7. To increase awareness and vigilance throughout the church congregation so members become more discerning.

## **Policy**

Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. is committed to promoting and protecting children at all times. Children usually attend Encounter in the care of an adult.

Encounter runs various programs for children. These programs are considered to be in the best interests of participants. All children, regardless of their gender, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family or social background, have equal rights for protection against abuse.

During programs children will be listened to, their opinions valued and used to further develop child protection policies. Through training those working with children will become more aware of what children are saying.

All children will be treated with respect. Encounter is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Children with a disability will be provided with a safe environment.

Encounter has zero tolerance for child abuse. Everyone involved at Encounter is responsible for the care and protection of all children, especially those attending the church. Any suspected child abuse needs to be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor and Safety Officer. Child protection is a shared responsibility to be undertaken by all people that attend Encounter.

If any person believes a child is in immediate danger of abuse they should contact the authorities – the police on 000.

## Definitions

<b>CCVT</b>	<i>Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania</i>
<b>Congregation</b>	<i>means people who attend Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. worship services.</i>
<b>Child (or Young Person)</b>	<i>means a person below the age of 18.</i>
<b>Child Protection</b>	<i>means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to protect and safeguard children from harm.</i>
<b>Child Abuse</b>	<i>means all forms of abuse – physical abuse, emotional abuse or ill treatment, sexual abuse or exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial (e.g., for financial gain) or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child.</i>
<b>Child sexual assault</b>	<i>is any act which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards.</i>
<b>DHHS</b>	<i>Department for Health and Human Services</i>
<b>Encounter</b>	<i>Encounter (Sunbury) Inc.</i>
<b>Leaders</b>	<i>are those people over the age of 18, who are members of Encounter (Sunbury) Inc., and have been given a role in providing activities for children and young people.</i>
<b>Reasonable grounds for belief</b>	<i>is a belief based on reasonable grounds that child abuse has occurred when all the circumstances and information are taken into account.</i>  <i>Reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>• the child is in need of protection</i></li><li><i>• the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of physical injury</i></li><li><i>• the parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.</i></li></ul> <i>Reasonable belief does not mean you have to have proof, but it is more than a rumour or speculation.</i>  <i>Examples of reasonable belief might be:</i>

- *if a child states they have been physically or sexually abused.*
- *if a child says they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused.*
- *if someone who knows a child states the child has been physically or sexually abused.*
- *if professional observations are made.*
- *if there are signs of abuse shown in bruises or behaviour.*

**SSR**

*Social Services Regulator*

## Procedures

The Encounter Board is responsible for:

- Nominating a person as “Head of the Organisation” with primary responsibility for Encounter’s management of any allegations of abuse of children.
  - This should be a senior person in the organisation who can fulfil the responsibilities of the head of the organisation, is located in Victoria, and consents to the nomination.
  - To avoid conflicts of interest head of the organisation should not be a pastor.
  - At Encounter, the Head of the Organisation role defaults to the Chair of the Board unless the board nominates an alternative person.
- Ensuring that child safety is part of its risk management, and that appropriate systems, policies, procedures and Encounter Code of Conduct are implemented.
- Ensuring that the risk of child abuse is minimised through appropriate and effective internal controls.
- Completing an annual risk assessment for all activities children and youth attend, including where necessary a separate risk assessment for incidental activities.
- Ensuring that staff and volunteers are aware of and follow relevant laws, organisational policies and procedures and the Code of Conduct.
- Ensuring that all adults within Encounter are aware of their obligation to report suspected abuse of children in accordance with these policies and procedures.
- Providing support and education for staff, volunteers and attendees in prevention and detection of child abuse and undertaking child protection responsibilities.
- Facilitating the recording and reporting of any inappropriate behaviour or suspected abusive activities to the appropriate authorities, which may include Victoria Police.
- Investigating and acting on reports of child abuse.
- Contacting CCVT as soon as practicable should an incident occur, in order to be offered up to date advice and guidance.

All Staff and Volunteers share the responsibility for the prevention and detection of child abuse and must ensure they:

- Promote child safety at all times.
- Provide an environment that is supportive of all children's emotional and physical safety.
- Assess the risks of child abuse within their area of responsibility and act to minimise any risk where possible.
- Be familiar with the various types of abuse which may occur within their area of responsibility and be alert for indicators.
- Make themselves familiar with the Encounter Code of Conduct and the policies and procedures of Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. in relation to Child Protection and comply with all requirements.

## Reporting

The Head of Organisation must be made aware of any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk. Anyone being informed of such an allegation must inform the Head of Organization. The Head of Organisation should inform the Senior Pastor of any allegation received.

The Head of Organisation must report allegations to SSR within three business days and inform SSR of any actions taken within thirty calendar days.

If required, after consultation, referral should be made to the appropriate child protection authority or to the police.

Should a person feel a matter they have reported is not being dealt with or addressed they must report again to another person in authority or the police.

<b>1</b>	<b>Reasonable grounds for belief of allegation or incident of child abuse</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Inform the Senior Pastor or the Encounter Safety Officer</b> Complete a Risk of Significant Harm Form (and Incident Form if applicable)	
<b>3</b>	<b>Risk of Significant Harm Form</b> Submit to Head of Organisation	<b>Incident Form</b> Submit to Administration Manager
<b>4</b>	<b>Head of Organisation</b> informs SSR, Victoria Police, CCVT, DHHS, as appropriate.	<b>Administration Manager</b> provides copies to Encounter Safety Officer, Senior Pastor, Chair of Board, CCVT.

## Investigating

Should there be a situation which is deemed to be reportable then the appropriate authorities assume responsibility for investigation. It is possible Encounter (Sunbury) will not hear of the outcome.

If there is an **allegation of a criminal offence** (such as a sexual offence), this must be reported to Victoria Police. It is **not** the role of volunteers or staff at Encounter. to conduct an investigation into a criminal offence. If the police decide to investigate the allegation, Encounter must wait for police clearance before conducting its own investigation.

If there is an **allegation of Reportable Conduct** (see Reportable Conduct Scheme), this must be reported to SSR and Encounter will undertake an investigation. The Head of Organisation needs to appoint and supervise an investigation to establish the facts and make findings about the allegation (the reportable conduct).

All investigations are confidential. It is the duty of each person to cooperate fully with an investigation but also to ensure the rights of the child are upheld and all information kept confidential only to be shared with a person in authority or an investigating body.

### Process of an investigation

1. Report the allegation to the police (if criminal)
2. Assess whether the allegation is reportable
3. Report the allegation to the Commission (3 business days)
4. Plan and establish an investigation
5. Conduct a thorough and fair investigation
6. Complete an investigation report
7. Make or recommend findings
8. Report findings to the Commission

### Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme

As a religious organisation, Encounter is required to report to SSR any allegation of reportable conduct. The five types of reportable conduct are:

- Sexual offences against, with, or in the presence of, a child
- Sexual misconduct against, with, or in the presence of, a child
- Physical violence against, with, or in the presence of, a child
- Behaviour which causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- Significant neglect of a child.

Allegations can be made against anyone who works at or is involved in the church, including employees, volunteers, officers, religious leaders, carers or contractors.

If anyone has a reasonable belief that reportable conduct or misconduct that may involve reportable conduct has occurred, then the head of the organisation must report this to SSR.

The most recent version of the SSR resource "A guide for Faith Communities on the Reportable Conduct Scheme" should be consulted when deciding whether an allegation is reportable and when undertaking an investigation.

If there is uncertainty whether someone is covered by the Scheme, SSR should be contacted directly.



## Screening Requirements for staff and volunteers

Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. undertakes a comprehensive and thorough screening process for all personnel who come into contact with children.

The recruitment of staff and volunteers will include appropriate checks to ensure the person is suitable to work with children. These may include one or more of the following:

- Working with Children Check, which is current and kept up to date for all staff and volunteers working with children. Until the WWC check, or proof of application for a WWC check, has been sighted they must not begin their engagement with children. If a staff member or volunteer is issued with an interim exclusion notice they will be asked to step down from any ministry where children are present until the matter is resolved. Where an exclusion is issued the person will be removed from any ministry where children are present and may be removed from all ministry involvement. If the board deems it appropriate further action may be taken, potentially including removal from Encounter.
- If a resume is requested, qualifications will be checked and referees contacted.
- CCVT Safe Church Awareness Training.
- Police Check.
- First Aid Certificate.

Staff and Volunteers must sign the Encounter Code of Conduct (Appendix I) showing they have been advised of their responsibilities, including towards children and young people.

If it is alleged a member of staff or volunteer may have committed an offence or have breached the Code of Conduct the person will be stood down while an investigation takes place.

If the investigation decides that the Code of Conduct has been breached and an offence committed disciplinary action will occur. This may include being asked to leave Encounter. The findings will also be reported to external bodies if required.

All personnel will be informed of the need to promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of Encounter.

The Senior Pastor and/or Encounter Board must appoint staff and volunteers who share Encounter's values and commitment to the protection of children, and they MUST prevent a person from volunteering at Encounter if they pose a risk to children.

## Privacy

All personal information will be kept with respect to privacy of the individual involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety.

## Evaluation

Every two years or following an incident a review shall be conducted to assess whether the policies and procedures of Encounter require modification to protect children under their care.

## Contact Numbers

- For concerns that are life threatening, call Victoria Police 000.
- For concerns about the immediate safety of a child after hours or on weekends or public holidays, call the After-Hours Child Protection Emergency Service on 131278 - toll free for all Victoria.
- DHHS: [Reporting child abuse - DFFH Services](#)) During business hours contact the appropriate local government area: Northern and Western Suburbs 1300 664 977
- SSR can be contacted via: [SSR.vic.gov.au/reportableconduct](https://www.ssr.vic.gov.au/reportableconduct), Phone: 1300 310 778, Email: [enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.au)

# APPENDIX I

## Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. Code of Conduct

### Purpose

This Code of Conduct outlines appropriate standards of behaviour which Encounter (Sunbury) Inc. “the church” expects from all staff and volunteers.

The purpose of this Code is to:

- Affirm the values that guide our ministry
- Promote and foster confidence within the church and the community
- Facilitate Leaders to be accountable
- Guide our conduct and actions in Christian Leadership
- Provide possible victims’ pathways for voicing their concerns

Following this code will help to protect people participating in our programs and activities from abuse and inappropriate behaviour by staff and volunteers.

It will also help staff and volunteers to maintain the standard of behaviour expected of them and will reduce the possibility of unfounded allegations of abuse being made against them.

### Commitment to Safety

The church is committed to being a safe place for all people. We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. We are committed to the inclusion and empowerment of all people, and believe all people have the right to have their views and opinions valued, especially on matters that directly affect them. We actively work to create a culture of safety and employ transparency, accountability and risk management practices to prevent abuse from occurring.

The church has a zero-tolerance policy for any type of abuse and will report all allegations and concerns for the safety of vulnerable people to the appropriate authority.

### Upholding this code of conduct

All members of staff and volunteers are responsible for promoting the safety and wellbeing of all those participating in church activities.

Staff and volunteers are responsible for maintaining a professional role with children, which means establishing and maintaining clear boundaries that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings or a violation of relationships.

All members of staff and volunteers are expected to report any concerns or breaches of this code to the Elders and Senior Pastor

Staff and volunteers who breach this code of conduct may be subject to the church’s

disciplinary procedures. Any breach of the code involving external workers/volunteers may result in them being asked to leave the church and any associated programs/events/ministries.

Serious breaches may also result in a report being made to authorities such as the police, the local statutory authorities and/or the denomination's Professional Standards office.

#### **I WILL:**

- Conduct myself in a manner that is consistent with the values of the church
- Conduct myself in a manner appropriate to the positional power I have as a representative of the church
- Have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and seeking His teaching and guidance
- Being committed to my spiritual growth through regular prayer, bible reading and quiet time with God
- Attend church services regularly
- Act with sexual purity. Sexuality is a gift from God. We will express our sexuality in healthy and God directed ways.
- Act with financial integrity.
- Treat all people with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, culture, disability, birth or other status
- Respect cultural differences
- Provide a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment for all people
- Encourage open communication between all people, allowing people to participate in the decisions that affect them
- Encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like
- Be accountable and transparent in my actions, words, and conduct
- Comply with all relevant Australian and local legislation
- Self-assess my behaviour, actions, language and relationships with vulnerable people
- Take responsibility for ensuring I am accountable and do not place myself in positions where there is a risk of allegations being made. Wherever possible, I will ensure that another adult is present when I am working in the proximity of children. I will discuss other measures as necessary with the Safety Contact Person or appointed person
- Avoid favouritism
- Ensure any contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults is appropriate and in the parameters of the program/event/ministry
- Ensure language is appropriate and not offensive or discriminatory
- Provide examples of good conduct in daily activities
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour by others
- Follow and report any concerns of abuse in accordance with the church's reporting

procedure

- Report any concerns or suspicions regarding abuse by a fellow worker, volunteer, contractor or visitor, in accordance with the church's reporting procedure
- Keep confidential all information that I am party to regarding child protection cases, disclosing and discussion information only with the Safe Contact Person or other parties as designated by them and according to reporting procedures
- Immediately disclose to the Safety Contact Person all charges, convictions, and allegations made against me

#### **I WILL NOT:**

- Engage in bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, sexual abuse or spiritual abuse of any person
- Engage in behaviour that is intended to shame, humiliate, belittle, or degrade others
- Condone or participate in behaviour that is illegal, unsafe, or abusive
- Act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive
- Act in a way that shows unfair and differential treatment of people
- Use inappropriate, offensive, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning, culturally inappropriate or discriminatory language
- Use any computer, mobile phone, video, camera, or any other device to exploit or harass anyone
- Make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory or sexually suggestive comments in any format including verbal, written or online
- Use any prohibited substance
- Seek personal advantage or financial gain from my position, other than in wages, recognised reimbursements, allowances, and deductions
- Take property belonging to others, including intellectual property (copyright)
- Knowingly make false, misleading or deceptive statements
- Allow allegations, disclosures or reasonable concerns about abuse to go unreported
- Do things of a personal nature that a child or vulnerable adult can do for him/herself, such as assistance with toileting or changing clothes.
- Hit or physically assault any person (this includes physical punishment of children other than my own)
- Develop inappropriate relationships with children, young people, or vulnerable adults
- Conduct a sexual relationship with any person under my care or supervision including all recipients of ministry
- Conduct a sexual relationship with a child or young person or indulge in any form of sexual contact with a child or young person
- Seek to contact, or spend time with, any child or young person that I meet in my role as a representative of the church outside of the designated times and activities set for performing my role
- Release or discuss any personal confidential information about suspected or

proven child abuse or protection cases other than with the Safety Contact Person and other parties as designated by them and according to reporting procedures

- Let children and young people have my personal contact details (mobile number or address)
- Make inappropriate promises to children and young people, particularly in relation to confidentiality

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**Consent:**

I understand the above code of conduct and I agree to uphold the standards of behaviour described in it. I understand that disciplinary measures and legal steps will be taken by the church if I am found to be in breach of the Code of Conduct. This will include reporting to the relevant authorities.

**Name:**

**Witness Name:**

**Signature:**

**Witness Signature:**

**Date:**

**Date:**

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*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*  
*Galatians 5:22-26 (NIV)*