

Child & Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding Policy

1. Purpose

Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn (MCCG), is committed to the principles of Catholic social teaching, including the dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity. These principles are expressed through our values of respect, integrity, excellence, care, compassion, and inclusivity.

In light of these values, MCCG strives to ensure that safeguarding is pivotal to our service delivery and interaction with clients, carers, and families. This policy and related standard operating procedures, ensures MCCG staff are aware of their obligations under legislation and work in a way that prioritises child and vulnerable adult safety and wellbeing and minimises the risk of harm to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

2. Overview

MCCG recognises its responsibility to uphold and promote the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults. This includes our obligations under:

- child protection and safety legislation
- relevant vulnerable adult legislation
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- NSW Child Safe Standards
- National Catholic Safeguarding Standards
- Various contracts.

For the purposes of this policy, the approaches and directions used for children and young people are relevant to working with vulnerable adults¹.

¹ For the purposes of this policy, the term 'client' refers to children, young people, and vulnerable adults.



3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff including Board members, volunteers, sub-contractors, foster or authorized carers, students on placement and anyone contracted by MCCG to provide services to clients. The policy is relevant to all activities and programs which involve, result in or relate to contact with clients.

Safeguarding is everybody's business.

This policy must be read in conjunction with MCCG's Code of Conduct, Child & Vulnerable Adult Safe Code of Conduct, Authorised Carers Code of Conduct, Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct Policies.

4. Definitions

ACT Ombudsman: has legislative responsibility for handling complaints and monitoring agencies, including receiving and monitoring how organisations respond to reportable conduct reports.

Child or young person: refers to any person under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse: includes physical abuse; sexual abuse; emotional abuse (including exposure to family violence) and neglect.

Child Abuse Concern: exists where there are reasonable grounds to believe or suspect a child is being, has been, or is at significant risk of abused or neglected.

Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS): has legislative responsibility for the care and protection of children and young people in the ACT. Concerns of child abuse or neglect can be reported regarding any child under 18 years old who usually live in the ACT.



Code of Conduct (including Child & Vulnerable Adult Safe Code of Conduct): outlines the obligations of staff and describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviours by staff in the workplace and towards children and young people.

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ): has legislative responsibility for the care and protection of children and young people in NSW. Concerns of child abuse or neglect can be reported regarding any child under 18 years old who ordinarily live in NSW or are present in NSW or are subject to an event or circumstances occurring in NSW that gives rise to a report.

Duty of Care: a legal obligation to ensure the safety or well-being of others and not act or fail to act in a way that results in harm.

Incidents: are acts, omissions, events or circumstances that occur or could occur during or in relation to the provision of supports, or the alteration or withdrawal of supports that cause harm, either physically or emotionally, to a worker, client, or other stakeholder. Incidents, which may be critical in some instances, also include acts, omissions, events, or circumstances that have caused or could cause damage to property, the environment, material or cause public alarm.

Institute of Professional Standards and Safeguarding (IPSS): responsible for ensuring compliance with legal, civil and Catholic Church requirements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Investigation: a search for the truth, in the interests of natural justice in accordance with specifications of the law, legislation, regulations, policy or guidelines which, from the outset is transparent, impartial, and objective.

Mandated reporter: people who deliver services, wholly or partly, to children as part of their paid or professional work and are required by ACT and NSW law to report suspected child abuse and neglect to government authorities. All MCCG staff are considered mandated reporters.

Office of the Children's Guardian (NSW): promotes and regulates the quality of child safe organisations, including receiving and monitoring how organisations respond to reportable conduct reports.



Reportable Conduct (ACT): is defined in the Ombudsman Act and requires organisations to report allegations, offences or convictions relating to child-related misconduct by an employee to the Ombudsman. Reportable Conduct includes:

- Sexual offences and convictions where a child is a victim or is present
- Offences against the person, including physical offences and convictions, where a child is the victim or is present
- Conviction, or finding of guilt, under a territory law or a state or Commonwealth law, involving reportable conduct
- Offences against the Education and Care Service National Law (inappropriate discipline or offences relating to protecting children from harm)
- Ill treatment of a child (including emotional abuse, hostile use of force/physical contact and restrictive intervention)
- Neglect (including supervisory, care, abandonment, failure to protect from abuse, reckless acts and emotional)
- Psychological harm
- Misconduct of a sexual nature.

Reportable Conduct (NSW): refers to allegations, offences or convictions of child abuse or misconduct toward children by employees in either a professional or personal capacity. The *Children's Guardian Act 2019* (NSW) defines reportable conduct as allegations, offences and convictions relating to the following:

- a sexual offence
- sexual misconduct
- ill-treatment of a child
- neglect of a child
- an assault against a child
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- an offence under s 43B (failure to protect) or s 316A (failure to report) of the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW).



Risk management: risk management means identifying the potential for an incident or harm to occur and taking action to reduce the likelihood or severity of its occurrence.

Safeguarding: measures taken to protect and promote the health, wellbeing, and human rights of clients. Through safeguarding, the aim is to prevent abuse occurring and to reduce opportunities for it to occur.

Staff: paid employees whether employed on a permanent, temporary, or casual basis, members of the Board and anyone engaged by MCCG to provide services to children, including volunteers, contractors, sub-contractors, foster carers or authorised carers, consultants, members of committees, work experience participants and students on placements.

Vulnerable adult: a person over the age of 18 who is in need of care and support or at risk of harm, abuse or exploitation, or who faces barriers to speaking up or making a complaint about harm, abuse or exploitation, due to their age, illness, disability, trauma, homelessness, displacement or any other reason. A vulnerable adult's experience of vulnerability may be temporary or ongoing; it may be situational or change in nature or degree over time, in different circumstances or in relation to particular concerns. (QIP Safeguarding Standards – Pilot edition)

Whistleblower: is an individual who wants to make a report in connection to alleged misconduct and where the whistleblower wishes to avail themselves of protection against reprisal for having made the report.

5. Policy Statement

MCCGs operating principles of being person centred, culturally respectful and safe, flexible, and responsive, risk aware and accountable underpin the organisation's approach to Safeguarding.

MCCG has zero tolerance for mistreatment and abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults and is committed to creating workplace conditions that protect and promote their safety and wellbeing. In line with this commitment, MCCG will establish systems, processes, policies, and procedures that:

- prevent or reduce the likelihood of harm
- increase the likelihood of identifying harm



- ensure incidents, including disclosures, allegations and concerns involving harm are reported by staff
- ensure incidents and concerns are appropriately assessed, investigated, and acted upon
- ensure confidentiality is appropriately managed by staff
- information is shared with relevant authorities to promote client safety and welfare in accordance with legislation, and any reporting requirements
- are in line with the 'National Principles for Child Safe Organisations', State and Territory child safe standards and the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards
- are regularly reviewed from a risk management and quality improvement perspective.

6. Commitment Statement

In line with our mission and values, MCCG acknowledges our responsibility to uphold and promote the safety and wellbeing of children, young people, and vulnerable persons, and to respect and listen to the opinions of the clients in our care. MCCG commits to the following principles:

- Respect – to treat everyone equally
- Include clients in decisions – empower them to participate in decisions affecting them
- Give Voice – to clients so they can safely voice their concerns and complaints, and their input will be taken seriously
- Family & Community – where safe to do so, we will include families and community in our approach to safeguarding
- Inform – we will inform clients of their rights and what actions to take if they feel unsafe
- Safety – we aim to provide an environment in which clients feel safe and able to disclose risks of harm. We will respond appropriately to any reports of harm.



- Staff – we will ensure that staff are appropriately screened and qualified for their role and that they receive ongoing professional development and supervision.
- Review – we will document, review regularly and continuously improve our safeguarding policies and procedures, and risk management plans.

7. Our Clients and their Support Networks

Participation

MCCG is committed to empowering clients, carers, and families to participate in services and play an active role in decisions that affect their lives and have their voices heard. This means that:

- Clients are informed of their rights
- Clients participate in case planning and goal setting
- We recognise the importance of families and carers as support networks and significant others in our clients' lives, and therefore include them as appropriate
- We listen respectfully to our clients and take their input seriously
- We work to create opportunities for clients, carers, and families to influence service level decision making

As a means of both providing appropriate information and creating opportunities for participation, we have developed child friendly and easy read documentation which includes:

- Information on rights and responsibilities
- Ways to provide feedback and raise concerns
- Explaining confidentiality
- What to do when feeling unsafe and recognising early warning signs
- Online safety information
- Information on other support services



Diversity & Inclusion

MCCG values diversity, equality and inclusion and is committed to providing sensitive and relevant services for clients from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs. We provide care that is free from stigma, discrimination and is culturally respectful and inclusive. Through our services we aim to demonstrate that equity is upheld, and diverse needs respected in both policy and practice.

8. Our Staff

Leadership & Culture

Safeguarding is embedded in MCCG's leadership and culture with all levels of staff understanding their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Staff understand that reporting child protection and reportable conduct matters are part of our safeguarding responsibilities and contribute to safety for our clients. Our approach is to act in the best interests of children and young people in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have extended that approach to include vulnerable adults.

As client safety and wellbeing is seen as a priority for the organisation, MCCG has established a Safeguarding Working Group and a designated Safeguarding Officer.

Recruitment and Induction

Recruitment documents reference MCCG's commitment to child safety and wellbeing, that children are valued and respected and that the organisation has a zero tolerance towards child abuse.

MCCG will take appropriate steps to ensure the most suitable people are engaged to work with clients. The process includes:

- interviews
- screening checks (Working with Children Check and/or Working with Vulnerable People check, and National Criminal History check)



- 2 reference checks
- Sighting qualification records.

All new staff are required to participate in both an organisational orientation and program induction. Safeguarding and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations are covered

through this process. In addition, staff are required to read and become familiar with key safeguarding policies. This includes reading and signing the MCCG Code of Conduct and the Child & Vulnerable Adult Safe Code of Conduct.

Ongoing Development

MCCG has an established training calendar outlining core training for staff that is commensurate with their roles. This includes:

- An online safeguarding training for new staff which is to be completed during the onboarding period
- Safeguarding and reportable conduct
- Child protection matters (recognising indicators of abuse and harm, responding to disclosures, mandatory reporting)
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Cultural awareness and safety
- Understanding and managing the complaints process

Staff receive inline support through their Managers, which includes a combination of case reviews, management of KPIs, team meetings, professional development planning, annual review, and performance management (as required).

As per the supervision policy, staff are provided with professional or clinical supervision in line with their role. MCCG supervisors are appropriately trained in supervision.

Safeguarding matters are covered and discussed in in-line management as well as professional and clinical supervision.



Professional Conduct

Staff members must act professionally and appropriately when dealing with clients and others with whom they come into contact as part of their engagement with MCCG. This includes maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with all clients.

9. Our Processes

Safe environments

Through our WHS policy, MCCG will comply with WHS legislation to provide an appropriately safe environment for children and young people and vulnerable adults accessing our services. MCCG has an established schedule for site inspections, maintenance checks and safety drills. Safety features such as security cameras and duress alarms and lockdown policy and procedure are in place according to the relevance of the program and location.

The MCCG Contractor Safety Handbook outlines the management of contractors on our work sites and requires them to comply with safeguarding principles and child protection requirements.

Information Technology policies and procedures incorporate safety features for staff and clients.

When utilising telehealth services with clients, procedures are put in place to ensure the sessions are private by employing virtual waiting rooms so only the 'client' is admitted to the session. Suitable locations for telehealth sessions are discussed in advance and parental consent (as appropriate) is sought.



Where programs provide internet access for clients, they must ensure that online safety protocols are in place that meet MCCG and legislative requirements.

Through the above approaches, MCCG aims to promote safety and wellbeing in both physical and online environments and minimise the opportunity for harm.

MCCG works to ensure that the environments in which we work, feel culturally safe, respectful, and inclusive for all our clients.

Record Keeping

At induction, staff are shown how to use the client management systems to maintain appropriate records and data in relation to their professional practice and interaction with clients. Client files may include case notes, assessments, support plans, behaviour management plans, consent and demographic information and outcome measures. In addition, records are kept of any disclosure, observations and discussions regarding a child protection matter or safety matter regarding vulnerable adults.

Notes regarding reportable conduct matters are stored separately and are not part of the client file. Client records are stored securely and archived as per MCCG record management processes.

Privacy and Confidentiality

MCCG has an established Privacy and Confidentiality policy which complies with Privacy Legislation. Staff aim to respect and protect client privacy and confidentiality, while respecting the limits of confidentiality relating to client safety and where the sharing of information is required under legislation. In order to manage risks associated with safety of children, young people, and vulnerable adults, and in line with relevant laws, we share personal information within the organisation and with relevant external organisations. Client information may also be shared at the client's request and with their consent.

Staff are trained about recognising and reporting potential data breaches, which is outlined in the MCCG Data Breach Policy.



Allegations, Concerns & Complaints

MCCG is committed to facilitating and acting on client feedback, complaints, and incident reports as integral to improving client safety and the quality of services.

MCCG encourages clients, carers, and families to participate in services, provide feedback, make complaints or raise concerns. MCCG also recognises that it must provide an environment where clients feel safe and respected for this process to occur.

To ensure this participation process occurs, staff must:

- Ensure clients have access to our child friendly and easy read complaints process
- respect the views of clients, carers, and their families
- treat seriously, listen to, and promptly act upon any feedback or concerns that clients, carers or families raise
- support clients, especially children, young people, and vulnerable clients, to participate, provide feedback, and understand what they and MCCG can do if they feel unsafe
- ensure clients, carers and families know their rights, how to provide feedback, report concerns and make a complaint through either internal or external sources
- respond to feedback and complaints in accordance with the *Complaints and Appeals Policy*.

In addition, MCCG has a Whistleblower policy whereby all stakeholders can report concerns regarding misconduct on a confidential or anonymous basis, without fear of reprisal, dismissal, or discriminatory treatment.

MCCG will prioritise the safety of a child, young person or vulnerable adult who may be at risk and take appropriate action, including reporting to authorities. This may include:

- child protection services in ACT or NSW
- police
- ACT Ombudsman (reportable conduct)
- Office of the Children's Guardian (NSW reportable conduct)
- ACT Human Services Registrar



- NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission
- Funding bodies

MCCG also liaises with the Archdiocesan Institute of Professional Standards and Safeguarding (IPSS) around concerns relating to staff and may receive advice and support from them.

The complaints review process includes tracking and analysing data to inform emerging trends as well as updating policies and procedures as part of continuous improvement.

Risk Management

MCCG's approach to risk management is that it is an integral part of service delivery and its operating systems, policies, and procedures. Management and staff are responsible for ensuring MCCG provides a safe environment for clients, carers and families and are accountable for their decision-making and actions while performing their roles and undertaking workplace tasks.

In addition to an overarching risk management plan for MCCG, programs and portfolios have risk management plans which are reviewed on an annual basis or sooner if significant new risks arise.

MCCG has a Business Continuity Plan and IT management plan which is reviewed annually to ensure business can continue should a disruption occur.

MCCG also regularly reviews its compliance with legislation, standards, and regulatory/funding requirements.

Following an incident, a review is conducted of the process taken and recommendations made as part of a continuous improvement process within programs and across the agency.

Policies and Review processes

MCCG has a range of policies and documents which inform our governance structures, approaches within our programs and inform staff and stakeholders of our commitments and



procedures. Key policies are available on our website for stakeholders and staff have access to the suite of additional policies and procedures via our document management system.

Policies are reviewed every two years. In addition, they may also be reviewed due to changes in legislation, best practice, complaints, and incidents.

The Safeguarding Working Group meets a minimum of four times per year to review and consider MCCG's approach to safeguarding

