

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

The Open Icon Baptist Church's Policy on Protecting the Safety and Wellbeing of Children (Adopted 5th April 2023)

This policy is based on the *Victorian Child Safe Standards* which came into effect for churches and other organisations from 1 July 2022. The *Victorian Child Safe Standards* set out minimum requirements and outline the actions organisations must take to keep children and young people safe. They align closely with the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*, which were informed by the findings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

This policy is an extension of the church's *Policy on Protecting the Safety of Church Participants* (Safe Church Policy), providing more detail in relation to protecting the safety of children. It makes reference to, and should be read alongside, that policy. Among other things, this policy can and should be used as a safety checklist in the process of planning any church activities or programs that will involve children.

1. Child Safe Standard 1 - The Open Icon Baptist Church is committed to establishing a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

- 1.1. We maintain and regularly review a *Commitment to Reconciliation* setting out practical steps that we will seek to implement to help make our church a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We encourage and actively support Aboriginal children's ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights.
- 1.2. We will provide opportunities for all members to grow in their appreciation of the strengths of Aboriginal culture and their understanding of its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children and young people.
- 1.3. We seek to develop an anti-racism culture within our church, and to identify and confront our own racist attitudes and behaviours. We seek to ensure that instances of racism among us are not excused or tolerated, but are addressed with appropriate consequences.
- 1.4. We seek to actively support and facilitate the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people and their families in our church.
- 1.5. In the development of our church's policies, procedures, systems and processes, we endeavour to ensure that they together contribute to creating a culturally safe and inclusive environment for Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

2. Child Safe Standard 2 - The Open Icon Baptist Church is committed to embedding child safety and wellbeing in our leadership, governance and culture.

- 2.1. As a church, we are committed to the safety of all children, and we seek to express and demonstrate that commitment openly.
- 2.2. We are committed to championing and modelling a child safe culture throughout our congregation and its leadership, and to encouraging a non-hierarchical accountability for our maintenance and promotion of that culture.
- 2.3. We seek to ensure that all our pastors, staff, Host Group, and volunteer leaders understand and are committed to implementing our child safety and wellbeing policy in all our activities.
- 2.4. We have a *Code of Conduct for Adults interacting with Children* which provides guidelines for everyone involved in our church on expected behavioural standards and responsibilities.
- 2.5. We have an *Activity Planning and Risk Assessment Checklist* that is required to be used by those planning church activities to guide them in preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and young people.
- 2.6. Our *Safe Church Policy* explains the obligations of pastors, leaders and volunteers in regard to information sharing and recordkeeping, and they are required to read and understand it.

3. Child Safe Standard 3 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to taking children and young people seriously, empowering them to understand their rights and participate in decisions affecting them.

- 3.1. We are committed to informing children and young people about all of their rights, including to safety, information and participation, and we seek to do this through both the church's official communication channels and through normal conversation.
- 3.2. We recognise the importance of friendships, and encourage children and young people to support one another to feel safe and be less isolated.
- 3.3. We encourage our children and young people to participate in sexual abuse prevention programs and we provide them with relevant related information in an age appropriate way.
- 3.4. Our pastors, leaders and volunteers are required to participate in regular Safe Church training which includes information on recognising signs of harm.
- 3.5. Our main congregational activities, including liturgies, social activities, and decision-making meetings, are intended to be open to and welcoming of the participation of children and young people. We seek to develop a culture that is responsive to the input of children and young people and encourages them to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns.
- 3.6. In addition to welcoming and including children and young people in our regular activities, we periodically offer special liturgical or social activities for them in ways which welcome and respond to their contributions, thereby strengthening confidence and engagement.

4. Child Safe Standard 4 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to keeping families and communities informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

- 4.1. Church decisions affecting children are made in consultation with their families, wherever possible.
- 4.2. The church engages and openly communicates with families and the community about its child safe commitments, and makes relevant information accessible through its website.
- 4.3. All who participate in the church and its activities, including children and young people and their families, have a say in the development and review of the church's policies and practices.
- 4.4. The church's operations and governance are conducted openly and transparently, and the whole congregation, including children and young people and their families and carers, are kept informed about matters under consideration and how to contribute to the decision making.

5. Child Safe Standard 5 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to upholding equity and respecting diverse needs in policy and practice.

- 5.1. The church, including pastors, leaders, volunteers and regular participants, recognise and seek to understand the diverse circumstances of children and young people, and to respond and provide support to those who are vulnerable.
- 5.2. All who participate in the church and its activities, including children and young people, have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand. The relevant information is available on our website or on request from our Host Group members.
- 5.3. Our church is committed to valuing and paying particular attention to the needs of children and young people with disabilities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, and LGBTIQ+ children and young people.
- 5.4. Our church is committed to valuing and paying particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal children and young people and providing and promoting a culturally safe environment for them.

6. Child Safe Standard 6 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to ensuring that people working with children and young people are suitable and are supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

- 6.1. Our recruitment policies and practices, including advertising, referee checks and staff and volunteer preemployment screening, emphasise child safety and wellbeing.
- 6.2. We encourage all members of the church to have current working with children checks or equivalent background checks, and we require it of pastors, Host Group members, and volunteer leaders.
- 6.3. We provide all staff and volunteers with an appropriate induction and ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities to children and young people, including record keeping, information sharing and reporting obligations.

6.4. Child safety and wellbeing are a focus of our ongoing supervision and people management practices.

7. Child Safe Standard 7 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to providing child focused processes for complaints and concerns.

7.1. The church has an effective child-focused complaint handling policy which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of leaders, and the approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, breaches of relevant policies or the Code of Conduct, and the obligations to act and report.

7.2. We seek to ensure that our complaint handling processes are accessible to and understood by children and young people, families, staff and volunteers, and are culturally safe.

7.3. We are committed to ensuring that complaints are taken seriously, and responded to promptly and thoroughly.

7.4. Our *Safe Church Policy* addresses the reporting of complaints and concerns to relevant authorities, and commits us to making such reports and co-operating with law enforcement.

7.5. We are committed to meeting our legal obligations regarding reporting, privacy and employment, but we do not limit our responses to the legal minimums.

8. Child Safe Standard 8 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to equipping staff and volunteers and church participants with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

We encourage all members of the church to participate in regular Safe Church training, and we require it of pastors, Host Group members, and volunteer leaders. Through this training, we are educated and equipped to:

- effectively implement the church's child safety and wellbeing policy;
- recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and young people;
- respond effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and support colleagues who disclose harm; and
- build culturally safe environments for children and young people.

9. Child Safe Standard 9 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to ensuring that its physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

9.1. We have an *Activity Planning and Risk Assessment Checklist* that is required to be used by those planning church activities to guide them in preventing, identifying and mitigating risks in the online and physical environments without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

9.2. Many of our church activities take place in an online environment and we ensure that they follow the relevant safety protocols contained in our *Safe Church Policy* and in our *Code of Conduct for Adults interacting with Children*.

9.3. Our *Activity Planning and Risk Assessment Checklist* requires those planning church activities to consider risks posed by organisational settings, activities, and the physical environment.

9.4. Whenever we contract facilities and/or services from third parties, we prioritise ensuring that those facilities or services are safe for children and young people.

10. Child Safe Standard 10 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to regularly reviewing and improving its implementation of the Child Safe Standards.

10.1. We review, evaluate and make changes to improve our child safe practices whenever new guidance or guidelines become available or whenever the exercise of the practices shows up room for improvement.

10.2. Whenever safety incidents occur or complaints or concerns are made, we analyse the incident and our responses to identify causes and systemic failures and pathways for improvement.

10.3. We report the findings of relevant reviews to the whole congregation including families and children and young people.

11. Child Safe Standard 11 – The *Open Icon Baptist Church* is committed to having policies and procedures which document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

11.1. We ensure that our policies and procedures address all the current Child Safe Standards.

11.2. We ensure that our policies and procedures are documented and easy to understand.

11.3. We seek to analyse best practice models and to consult with stakeholders in the development of policies and procedures.

11.4. We require our pastors, Host Group members, and volunteer leaders to champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.

11.5. We require staff and volunteers to understand and implement policies and procedures.