

CityLife Child Safety Policy

1. Introduction

The Board of Elders of CityLife Church Inc. (CityLife) and the Board of Management of CityLife Community Care (CLCC) have zero tolerance for child abuse or harm and take actions to prevent its occurrence.

CityLife is committed to safeguarding the protection, well-being, and dignity of children engaged in our activities, programs, and services.

In this policy “CityLife” will refer to both CityLife Church Inc. and CityLife Community Care.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Child Safety Policy is to outline the principles, guidelines, and procedures governing our commitment to safeguarding children.

Our comprehensive child safety approach encompasses prevention, identification, intervention, advocacy, collaboration, and capacity building efforts to foster a secure and nurturing environment for children engaged in CityLife activities.

Child safety at CityLife is characterised by the elimination or reduction (to the extent possible) of the risk of abuse for participants in our programs and services. We provide independent, morally and legally compliant, and pastorally caring responses in the event of allegations of abuse.

Additionally, our commitment extends to the training and awareness of individuals working or volunteering at CityLife. They are equipped with the knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities to establish controls and procedures for preventing child abuse, detecting such incidents, and knowing the appropriate actions to take upon hearing about or suspecting abuse, whether within or outside the CityLife community, commensurate with their role.

Our approach also involves facilitating the reporting process for allegations of abuse or concerns about child safety. This includes providing guidance to individuals such as children, families, members of our church community, and those working or volunteering at CityLife, ensuring they know how to make a report and are encouraged to do so.

3. Biblical Perspective

Children are gifts from God to be cared for responsibly and justly. As a community of faith, CityLife is committed to the safety of children, so they may thrive in the richness of life.

Acts 20:28 (NLT)

‘So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders’.

Matthew 19:14

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Proverbs 31:8-9

‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.’

4. Scope

This policy and its procedures apply to the following:

- All ministries affiliated with CityLife, whether conducted on church premises or elsewhere.
- All individuals, including staff, leaders, and volunteers, associated with the church or contracted by the church, provided they are 18 years of age or older.

It is important to note that volunteers and young leaders below the age of 18 years are ineligible for a Police Check. They are expected to assume primarily supervised roles, meaning they should be under the direct supervision of a leader who is 18 years of age or older.

5. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply.

- 5.1. **Bullying** is the ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm¹.
- 5.2. **Child/ren** means any person/s below the age of 18 years.
- 5.3. **Child safety** means any responsibility, measure or activity undertaken to safeguard children from harm.
- 5.4. **Child abuse** means all forms of physical-, emotional-, sexual-abuse including grooming, family violence, and neglect, or any actions that result in actual or potential harm to a child.
- 5.5. **Child Safety Contact Officers** have a responsibility to:
 - receive child safety complaints and reports of abuse;
 - maintain appropriate confidentiality;
 - provide information and guidance on CityLife’s Child Safety policies and procedures including mandatory reporting requirements;

¹ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/bullying.aspx>

- provide information on who to speak to for further advice or support, such as the Executive Minister (or delegate), Safe Ministries Manager, and Business Manager; and
 - in certain situations, a Child Safety Contact Officer may be required to report complaints raised to the Executive Minister (or delegate), Safe Ministries Manager, and Business Manager, where the allegations present a risk to the safety and wellbeing of a child, or is legally required to do so, at the earliest opportunity and within 24 hours of the report being made.
- 5.6. **Discriminate** is treating, or proposing to treat, someone unfavorably because of a personal characteristic protected by the law, such as age, sex, gender identity, race or disability².
- 5.7. **Emotional abuse** is the chronic attitude or behaviour of one person to a child which erodes their development, self-esteem, and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising, or chronic and extreme family violence in the child's presence.
- 5.8. **Grooming** includes any actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and influencing a child, and in some circumstances members of the child's family and other adults, for the purpose of sexual activity with the child, at a later time.³
- 5.9. A **Leader** is any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of children placed in their care whilst holding a recognised position in a ministry of the church. A leader includes but is not limited to Pastors, Life Group leaders, Music/Drama/Arts/Technical crew/Media/Audio leaders, Counsellors, Welfare or Support Service Workers, Youth leaders, Children's Ministry Leaders, Trainers or other ministry leaders. A leader must be:
- a CityLife Partner;
 - have been a participant of the worshipping community of the church for at least 6 months; and
 - agree to abide by the CityLife Leadership Standards.
- 5.10. **Ministry** is any organised activity that is authorised by the church or its related entities.
- 5.11. **Ministry Leader** is any person recognised and authorised by the church as head of a ministry.
- 5.12. **Neglect** is characterised by the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a child's development.
- 5.13. **Partner** is any member of CityLife Church, in accordance with guidelines set out in the CityLife Church Constitution.

² <https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/discrimination>

³ <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/WEB.0189.001.0001.pdf>

- 5.14. **Physical abuse** is any non-accidental physical injury. It can result from practices such as hitting (marks from belt buckles, fingers), punching, kicking, shaking (particularly babies), burning (irons, cigarettes), biting, pulling out hair. It also includes the condoning or administration of alcohol or other drugs.
- 5.15. **Reasonable Belief** is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds. It is NOT the same as having proof. For example, indicators that represent a 'reasonable belief' include:
- a child states that they have been abused;
 - a child states that they know someone who has been abused (sometimes the child may be talking about themselves);
 - someone who knows a child (such as a relative, friend or sibling) states that they know or believe the child has been or is being abused;
 - a child displays some abuse indicators that lead you to a belief that is held in good faith, and that there is no other satisfactory explanation;
 - there are physical signs of abuse, and there is no other satisfactory explanation.
- 5.16. **Sexual abuse** is any act of a sexual nature towards a child which exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards. It occurs when a person uses their power and authority to take advantage of a child's trust to involve them in sexual activity. It does not necessarily involve genital contact but is any act which erodes the sexual boundary between two persons. It may appear consensual, but the validity of consent is negated by the power or age differential (e.g., leader to a child).
- 5.17. **Volunteer** is any person working for CityLife on a voluntary basis for no financial payment or gain, and who is not a leader.
- 5.18. **Working With Children's Check (WWCC)** is a Victorian Government check on a person's national criminal history and professional conduct determinations from organisations including the Victorian Institute of Teaching and the Commission for Children and Young People.

6. Responsibilities

The safety and care of children is paramount, and all individuals contributing to the operations of CityLife share a collective responsibility for upholding child safety and protection standards.

Every staff member, contractor, leader, and volunteer at CityLife bears a shared responsibility for the welfare and protection of individuals, and is obligated to report any information related to suspected child abuse.

Duty of care extends to every manager, supervisor, and employee with responsibilities for children. They are required to ensure that reasonable procedures are in place to safeguard against child abuse.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary actions, including but not limited to termination of employment or cessation of volunteering at CityLife.

Managers or supervisors who fail to take appropriate corrective measures upon becoming aware of child abuse may also be subject to disciplinary actions.

7. Policy

7.1. CityLife Commitment to Child Safety

CityLife Church prioritises the safety, protection, and well-being of all children. This commitment is foundational as we endeavour to foster an environment where every child can flourish, understanding that they are created in the image of God, who loves and cares for them.

Our commitment extends to providing safe people, places and programs for all children to participate in, with particular attention to those who have diverse circumstances and who are at greater risk of facing prejudice, exclusion, and discrimination. This approach includes safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people with disabilities, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and those who are unable to live at home. We are committed to working with families in a mutually respectful and reciprocal way, cultivating a caring faith community where children and young people feel genuinely welcomed.

CityLife is also dedicated to shielding children from abuse from their peers and operates in accordance with Victorian legislation regarding the Age of Consent.

7.2. Commitment to a Culture of Child Safety

CityLife is committed to review, evaluate, and enhance child safety processes, consistently working to identify, prevent, and manage any potential risks. Complaints, concerns, and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and systemic failures, informing a culture of continuous improvement in child safety at CityLife.

The following are key documents from our Child Safety Framework that supplement this policy in fostering a culture of child safety at CityLife.

- The [CityLife Child Safety Code of Conduct](#), which sets standards and guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, outlining responsibilities when working with children. All individuals working or volunteering with children at CityLife must read, sign, and adhere to this code. Non-compliance with the CityLife Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary measures as per the *Complaint or Grievance Policy* for employees, or the *Church Discipline Policy* for unpaid leaders and volunteers, and may also lead to criminal prosecution.

- The [CityLife Child Safety Complaint and Report Handling Procedures](#) document outlines the necessary steps to respond to actual or suspected child abuse and implement learnings for continuous improvement in child safety.
- The [CityLife Child Safety Recruitment, Selection and Training Guidelines](#) document outlines the steps that are taken to facilitate the selection of suitable and safe people, and how they are equipped with training and education at induction and thereafter.

7.3. Uphold diversity and create a culturally safe environment

CityLife is committed to fostering cultural safety, including children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability. We affirm the principle that every child, irrespective of gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family and social background, is entitled to equal protection from abuse.

7.4. Children, families and the community are included in promoting child safety

CityLife is committed to inclusivity through communicating with children, families, and the broader community about promoting child safety practices and processes. We emphasise that everyone shares the responsibility for promoting the safety and well-being of children, and value the opinions of children and families in the development of child safety and protection processes whenever feasible.

CityLife recognises that some children and young individuals may require specific support tailored to their unique needs to participate in our programs and activities. Acknowledging the individual nature of their experiences and requirements, the church understands that no single approach will suit every need, and commensurate with the skills of staff and volunteers, we will work with the child and young person and their parents/guardians to find suitable support.

7.5. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

CityLife is committed to establishing safe and secure physical and online environments for all its staff, partners, attendees, leaders and particularly to children across all of our congregations and worksites. Our risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying, and mitigating risks to children at the church's premises or at off-site locations.

When a ministry in CityLife works with another organisation in an activity that could involve children, CityLife upholds its process for child safety at a minimum, whilst operating in conjunction with processes held by these organisations.

Transparency and accountability are key components of our approach. Authorised parents/guardians and other approved relatives, such as grandparents, are welcome as visitors to observe all aspects of every child-related program. Unauthorised individuals will be promptly asked to leave, and if refusal persists, Police will be contacted to ensure compliance with reasonable requests.

7.6. Recruitment and screening

For roles involving the care of children, CityLife's recruitment and screening processes aim to identify individuals who align with our values and share a strong commitment to safeguarding children. Our aim is to prevent any person who may pose a risk to children from working at CityLife.

Throughout the recruitment process, which includes advertising, referee checks, and pre-employment screening for both staff and volunteers, there is a deliberate emphasis on prioritising child safety and well-being.

Screening involves assessing the background of applicants, and any person charged with a violent or sexually-related offence, regardless of conviction status, is precluded from involvement in child-related programs or working in immediate proximity to such programs.

Applicants are required to obtain a Working with Children Check at a minimum and may need to pass a Police Check before commencing work at CityLife. Furthermore, individuals are subject to regular intervals of checks during their tenure with CityLife, ensuring an ongoing commitment to maintaining a safe environment for children.

7.7. Implement training strategies to underpin our reasonable duty of care for child safety

Staff, leaders, volunteers, and contractors at CityLife undergo comprehensive training to acquire the knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary for ensuring the safety of children. This training is provided at induction prior to commencing their roles and is reiterated at regular intervals in accordance with the [CityLife Child Safety Training Matrix](#).

The training encompasses understanding this policy and at a minimum the:

- [CityLife Child Safety Code of Conduct](#);
- [CityLife Child Safety Complaint Handling and Reporting Procedures](#); and
- [CityLife Child Safety Recruitment, Selection and Training Guidelines](#).

Additionally, the training includes instruction on the following:

- Recognition of indicators of child abuse and grooming;
- Handling complaints and reporting incidents related to suspected abuse, neglect, discrimination, and bullying, with clear guidance on escalation and reporting to relevant authorities;
- Identification and mitigation of risks in both online and physical environments, while preserving a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections, and learning opportunities;
- Creating a culturally safe environment that respects the diverse needs of children and families;
- Understanding obligations related to information sharing and recordkeeping; and
- Compliance with mandatory reporting requirements.

8. Incident reporting and complaint handling

CityLife places responsibility on every individual working or volunteering within its community to report any information concerning actual or suspected child abuse. We treat all complaints and reports of abuse seriously, responding promptly and thoroughly.

CityLife provides an effective procedure for resolving complaints in a respectful, sensitive, fair, and timely manner, while also maintaining confidentiality within the parameters of duty of care and mandatory reporting constraints.

CityLife has accessible, child focused [CityLife Child Safety Complaint Handling and Reporting Procedures](#) which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of staff, leaders, volunteers, and contractors for addressing various types of complaints, breaches of this policy or other CityLife child safety documents, and outlines the obligations to escalate and take appropriate action. All disclosure, observations or reports leading to a reasonable belief of a child being abused, bullied, or discriminated against, are reported and handled as described in these procedures.

CityLife is committed to reporting complaints and concerns to relevant authorities, irrespective of mandatory reporting requirements, and actively cooperates with law enforcement agencies for subsequent investigations.

9. Child Safety Contact Officers

Each site has trained Child Safety Contact Officers. Disclosures and complaints can be reached to the following email address, which will be picked by our Child Safety Contact Officers:
childsafety@citylife.church

10. Related Documents

CityLife's Child Safety Framework comprises several supplementary documents that facilitate understanding and implementing this Child Safety policy effectively. These documents include:

- CityLife Child Safety Code of Conduct
- CityLife Child Safety Complaint and Report Handling Procedures
- CityLife Child Safety Recruitment, Selection and Training guidelines
- CityLife Child Safety Training Matrix
- Overview of Child Safety Policy for Kids Volunteers under 18
- Charter of Commitment to Children and Young People
- Child Safety Incident Report
- CityLife Complaint or Grievance Policy
- CityLife Church Discipline Policy
- Victorian Child Safe Standards

For a full list of relevant legislation governing child protection in Victoria and CityLife's approach to child safety, please refer to the CityLife Complaints and Reporting Procedures, Appendix A.

11. Policy Owner:

Policy developer: Child Safety Committee

Policy implementation: Board of Elders

Policy Queries: Executive Minister

12. Document History and Version Control Table:

Version Number	Author	Approved by (e.g. SLT) & Date:	Brief Description
Version Number	Author	Approved by (e.g. SLT) & Date:	Brief Description
1.0	Exec	BOE 9/4/2015	New policy
1.1	Exec	BOE 15th September 2015	Differentiate between reporting requirements for mandatory reporter incidents & other
1.2	HR	7th December 2015	Update contact officers
2.0	Exec	BOE 10 March 2016	Changes applied following legal review
2.1	Risk Management Committee (RMC)	BoE 22nd March 2018	Changes applied following broadening the requirement of WWCC, and review after use of policy since initial approval.
2.2	RMC	Risk Management Committee 10th August 2018	Addition of Legislative references
2.3	Exec Minister	Exec Minister 31st Jan 2020	Update several Legislative Reference hyperlinks that had expired
3.0	Various	Board of Elders 29/4/2021	Full review of policy.
4.0	Child Safety Committee	Board of Elders 25/07/2024	Renamed Child Safety policy. Full policy update, addressing new Victorian Child Safe Standards.