

New (11) Child Safe Standards 2023:

The Victorian government updated the child safety legislation in 2022, to further strengthen child safety standards within organisations which includes Grace Community Bible Church (GCBC). There are 11 new standards which were implemented in Victoria and these new standards apply to all who attend GCBC and or are in contact with children (A child is someone under the age of 18).

These standards form a foundation to GCBC's Safe Church Program (SCP), to apply to all. As a church we are to be a testimony God's love and goodness - **Matt 18:5-6** *"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

Our aim here at GCBC is to always welcome all, especially children, so that they feel welcome and special in understanding God's love **Rom 15:7** *welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

Below is a summary of the 11 new Standards which apply to all who attend GCBC and or are in contact with children.

Child Safety Standard 1

Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

GCBC complies with Standard 1. We believe that God established one race and we care and respect all children from for all nations and cultures including Aboriginal children and young people.

Child Safety Standard 2

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture.

This standard focuses on culture starts at the top in leadership. GCBC has implemented standard 2. At GCBC the leadership see that Child Safety is our calling and the children at GCBC are a blessing from God.

This standard has been developed out of the evidence that shows external leadership have:

- Failed to protect and report abuse that becomes known to them about children,
- Fail to appropriately deal with the perpetrators,
- Fail to deal with the perpetrators of horrendous sexual crimes against children.
- This STD for Child Protection is built into the leadership structure of the church:

The leadership of GCBC takes Standard 2 very seriously and are committed to promoting child safety, assessing, and mitigating risks and facilitating the reporting of any illegal or inappropriate behaviour or suspected abuse of children, within their area of responsibility. As such:

- The leadership has rigorous procedures, compliant policies for ensuring child safety is on the agenda and reported appropriately.
- Leadership has accessible processes for making a formal report and investigation of allegations against all leaders, members, and visitors.
- The leadership our accountability under the Reportable Conduct Scheme and to the members of GCBC. As such, the leadership have set forth:
 - A clear, comprehensive child-safe Program for the church,
 - A Code of Conduct document, plus procedures for managing risk and reporting abuse,
 - Rigorous Child Safe screening strategies in updated and in place.
 - Leaders and members in contact with children undertake yearly training in child Safe, to know the law and the reporting obligations. All staff, volunteers and members are to have:
 - WWCC with GCBC connected to card. Keeping up-to-date records of all members.
 - Required to know and follow Safe Church Program.
 - Reporting Procedures.
 - Code of Conduct is to be read and signed annually.
 - Training and induction process to be done annually.

Child Safety Standard 3 (important change)

This standard focuses on empowering children about their rights and to be able to participate in decisions affecting them and they are to be taken seriously. The legislation focuses on allowing all children to the best of their ability participate and be given extra protection by:

- Teaching them and letting them know what is in place for their protection
- What they can do if they feel anxious, unsafe, or actually experience abuse.
- Teaching children about their rights. These include:
 - The right to be heard,
 - The right to be heard to be consulted
 - The right to be included in decision-making processes that affect them,
 - Particularly the strategies and procedures in place to keep them safe.
 - This includes - Intruding on personal space, commenting on a child's body or looks and being inappropriate about sexual activities or relationships.
 - Child has a right to protection by the adults who owe them a duty of care.

Strategies for Engagement & Inclusion

Empowerment of children includes:

- Encouraging their input and feedback re-classroom activities.
- With feedback we can help improve the quality of their experience, their safety, and their wellbeing of children.
- Listening to their concerns – taking them seriously!
- A frequent complaint from the children is that *'I told the teacher, but they didn't listen to me'*.
- This standard focuses on empowering children to not be dismissive of their concerns or unsympathetic or making the child feel powerless and worthless.

Children see and experience the world differently to adults. Learning from children includes:

- Hearing from them,
- Investigating their concerns,
- Seeking to allay fears can empower children,
- Help them enjoy experiences and learn more effectively.
- Teaching children skills and practicing them before any experience
- This gives a child a sense of being in control and competent, which is empowering.
- Children need to know the rules and what is expected to feel safe (even if they push back against them) - **Providing boundaries and expectations for behaviour.**
- **Exercising self-discipline** – stick to your own rules, be consistent, be predictable.

Child Safety Standard 4

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Central to Child-safe Standard is the idea that families should be consulted about the kind of activities they would like their children to be involved in and give you the opportunity to provide feedback on how well they were run and enjoyed by the children.

GCBC embraces teaching people to grow in their faith in Christ, regardless of

- age, gender, ethnic background, status, or ability.
- We support families praying to and worshipping God together and relationship with Christ.
- We also provide:
 - Clear communication about planned events and strategies to make them safe.
 - Integrity and due diligence in practices around child safety
 - Consistency of 'message' and practice
 - Relationships of trust and respect
 - Delivery of programs and activities
 - Providing seminars on parenting and keeping children safe

Child Safety Standard 5

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice Child Safety Standard 3

Child Safety Standard 6

People working with children are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

The Child Standard focuses on the GCBC's rigorous selection process, and commitment to keeping children safe. GCBC makes it clear that the leadership and membership of the church is in absolute opposition to child abuse. GCBC staff and volunteers go through a variety of screening methods to ensure they are suitable to be appointed into adult ministry roles over children, these include but not limited to:

- Only appointing members and adherents to these volunteer roles,
- Reference checks and interviewing potential volunteers,
- Seeking recommendations for appropriate individuals to work in particular adult ministries,
- Police checks and/or Working With Children Checks,
- The creation of role descriptions for roles working with adults,
- Ministry questionnaires and online training for completion by staff and potential volunteers,

Child Safety Standard 7

Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.

This standard focuses on GCBC's Complaint Handling Guide and demonstrates the importance of child-protective practice. GCBC has a management and investigative complaints process focused on achieving good and fair outcomes by:

- Determining the validity of an allegation or complaint
- Achieving justice for the victim of abuse
- Ensuring that the perpetrator of child abuse is justly convicted and punished
- Providing data for the organisation of flaws and inadequacies in the systems and processes in place to identify and mitigate risk
- Maintaining the reputation of GCBC as a safe place, a fair place and one committed to best practice.
- Ensuring continual improvement in practice and genuine response to data in the area of child protection.
- Those working with children are often the frontline adults to receive complaints from children. Great wisdom is required to determine the kind of mistreatment that is being alleged, how serious it is and how to report this to church leadership, the police, or Child Protection Services.

The initial steps for adults in this common scenario are as follows:

The flow chart below is one way of visualising a child-sensitive process for dealing with a complaint & achieving a good, positive outcome for the child and the church.

Listen to the child: carefully, attentively, respectfully / Clarify key points and take notes.

Reassure the child.

- This means affirming them as a person,
- Letting them know it was right to tell someone,
- Assuring them that you will follow up and keep them safe.
- Report to the leadership / Support the child.
- If the incident is at the serious end (physical, sexual abuse) - trauma involved for the child,
- Comfort, encourage and protect the child,
- Especially if you believe them to be at risk, Their well-being is your first consideration.

Child Safety Standard 8

Staff / volunteers equipped with the knowledge, skills & awareness to keep children safe through, as well as ongoing education and training.

GCBC provides ongoing training for all who work with children over their behaviour via a Code of Conduct document which all must agree and sign as part of attending GCBC. All adults understand how they are to behave and conduct themselves, how to observe and note concerning signs and behaviours that could signal abuse, and most importantly, we need to know how to report, both within the organisation and to external authorities.

The **Code of Conduct** detailing behavioural guidelines.

- Must be read, understood, and complied with.
- Signing a declaration of commitment to the Code of Conduct

Knowing Reporting Obligations. Here is a brief summary:

- Complaints or disclosures from children are the most obvious ways to come to a 'reasonable belief' that abuse of a child is occurring.

Under the legislation, a report MUST then be made.

The Child Protection policy notes two scenarios:

1. Abuse of a child occurring OUTSIDE of the church, by someone not connected to the church
2. Abuse of a child by a church staffer, volunteer, or member, (INSIDE the church)

Child Safety Standard 9

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

GCBC provides ongoing training for all adults working with children over their behaviour via a Code of Conduct document and risk management which has become an essential part of planning and delivering programs.

GCBC risk management includes:

1. Protecting the child from **risks to health** from infectious diseases or allergies.
2. Protecting the child from **physical risks** that might come from trips, falls or other hazards that could be foreseen and avoided with due diligence.
3. Protecting the child from **abuse** by another child or adult. (This is the focus of Child Protection legislation). The types of abuse are defined as physical, sexual, emotional /psychological and neglect. We also include abuse that is spiritual, racial or discrimination on the basis of gender identity, ethnicity or disability.
4. Protecting children from risks in the online environment, via digital devices.

NOTE - It is wise to consider that there are also considerable risks for the adults involved with children, risks to reputation, both emotional and physical health and wellbeing. Children can be abusive; parents can be stumbled, harassing or even physically violent. All of these 'risks' need to be considered and managed. See GCBC child safe officer for more clarity regarding duty of care.

Elders and Members use ongoing Risk Checklist to monitor that risk management and effectiveness in church. GCBC has identified areas that are hazardous and **could be deemed 'hot spots'**! Examples of GCBC 'hot spots':

- GCBC toilets – children using the toilets are out of sight, rarely supervised and children of various ages can be in there at the same time, so bullying or other abuse can occur there. To counter this risk GCBC has a designated toilet facility for children.
- Other hot spots being outside around or in a room by themselves with adult,
- Any place where children can be out of sight and the supervision is irregular – thus these places are potentially risky.
- Surrounding areas can also have more hazards than other areas,
- Hazards that might cause a fall, trip or head injury.
- Good maintenance and supervision are essential elements of risk mitigation.

Child Safety Standard 10

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

The legislation recognises that developing a culture of safety and awareness to protect children. This is an on-going task for GCBC Leadership and members. GCBC's focus is to improve as an organisation and looks at practices, reviews activities, reviews mistakes, incidents and 'near misses' and listens to the feedback provided by children and their parents/carers. This is down by:

1. **Regular debriefing** after events and activities is one way to capture important data and to look for ways of improving how we operate. Complacency and a lack of rigorous review assumes that what we do is good enough and makes no serious attempts to improve and refine planning and implementation.
2. **Logging of incidents, 'near misses' and reports.** Keeping a data base of incidents, accidents, 'near misses' or reported concerns helps create an overview of safety and effectiveness of procedures and practices.
3. **Regular review of documentation** – policy is only as good as it is tested, reviewed, and refined. Boards and leadership have an obligation to ensure policies and procedures are up to date, implemented and working.

Child Safety Standard 11

Policies & procedures document how the organisation is safe for children & young people

The fact that you are reading this far is an indication of the commitment of your leadership to implementing the policies and procedures approved, including ensuring that those working with children are trained and informed.

Crimes in Victorian Law relating to Child Safety

'Failure to Disclose' Offence

*Any adult associated with the church who forms a reasonable belief that **a sexual offence** has been committed in Victoria, by an adult against a child, must disclose that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DFFH /Child Protection. The offence applies to **all adults** in Victoria, not just professionals who work with children. **Maximum penalty-3 years imprisonment.***

In a Nutshell

If you become aware of sexual abuse against a child, and you **don't disclose it** (i.e. report it) this is now a crime!

'Failure to Report' Offence

*Any church member **in a position of authority**, who becomes aware that an adult associated with GCBC (such as an employee, contractor, volunteer, or visitor) poses a risk of **sexual abuse** to a child under the care, authority or supervision of GCBC, must take all reasonable steps to remove or reduce that risk. This may include, for example, removing the adult from child-related work pending investigation. If a member in a position of authority fails to take reasonable steps in these circumstances, this may amount to a criminal offence. The offence applies to leaders, and ministry leaders. **Carries a penalty of imprisonment for up to 5 years.***

In a Nutshell If a person in **leadership** fails to report child sexual abuse and take steps to protect the child, this is a crime!

'Grooming' Offence

*The Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014, which commenced in Victoria on 9 April 2014, introduces the offence of Grooming for sexual conduct with a child. This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. According to the Amendment, the criminal offence is as follows:
Grooming has the ultimate aim of sexual exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of the adult. Therefore, an allegation of grooming against a person is a very serious accusation and one which has the potential to destroy a reputation or a career, even if it is shown to have no basis after investigation.
This offence carries a penalty of imprisonment for up to 10 years*

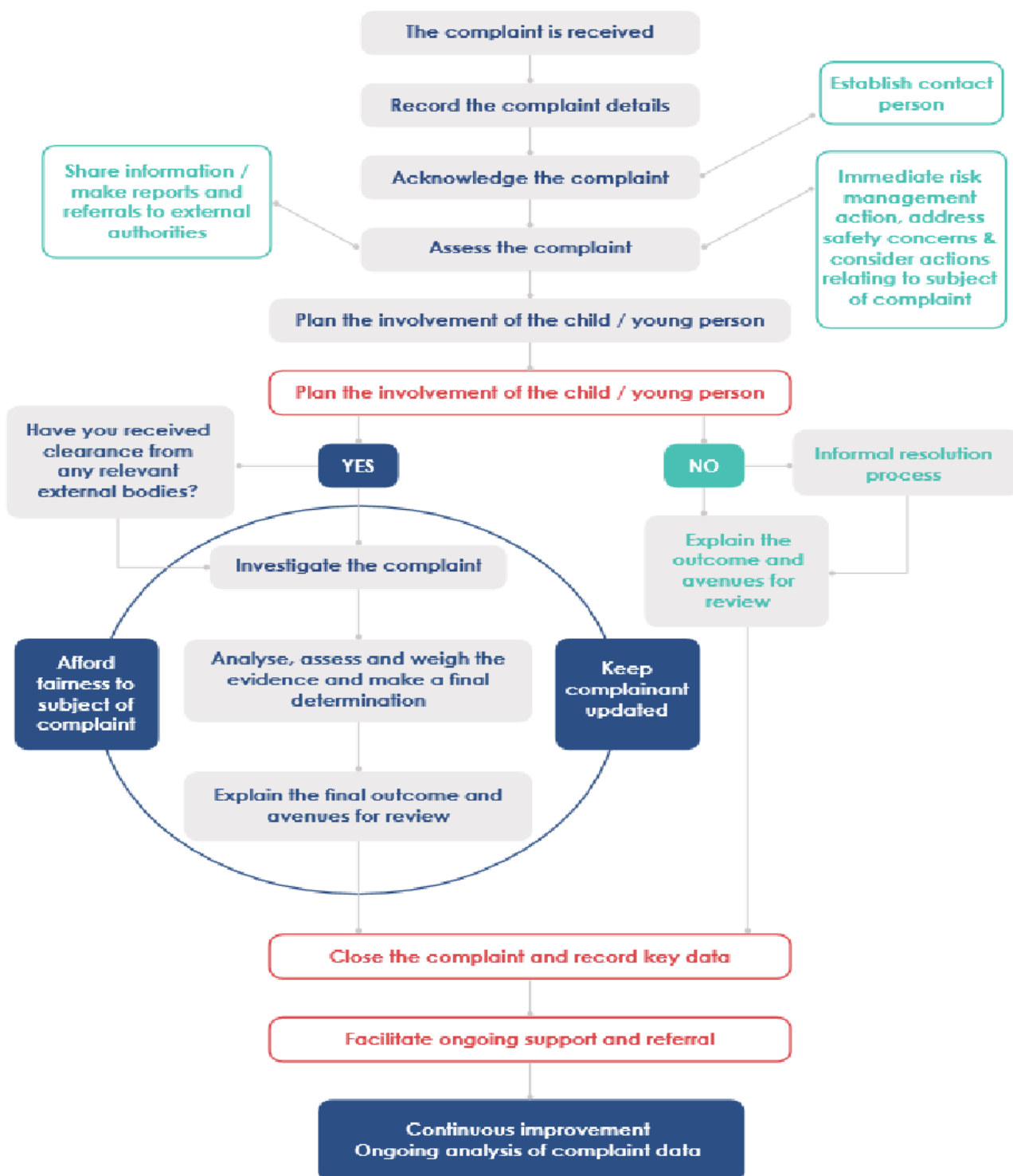
In a Nutshell

Any kind of 'special' relationship with a child can look like grooming. We live in a sexualised world. Grooming provides the target child with what they most crave – recognition, being special, time together, understanding.

Do not develop a close relationship with one child, spend time alone, share secrets or physical affection. Avoid being alone with a child. Be visible, let others know what you are doing.

Complaint Handling:

Upholding the rights of children and young people (an overview)



Comparison of National Principles, Victoria’s initial 7 Mandatory Standards and Victoria’s new 11 Standards.

Category	National Principles	Vic Seven Standards	New Eleven Standards
Leadership and culture, with a focus on aboriginal children	1. Committed leadership, Culture and Governance	1. Organisational culture and leadership.	S1. Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued. Culturally safe environments for 1 st nation children.
Leadership and culture, with a focus on aboriginal children	1. Committed leadership, Culture and Governance	1. Organisational culture and leadership.	S2. Child safety is embedded in leadership, governance and culture
Empowering children, families, and communities	7. Children are safe, informed and actively participate.	7, Empowering children, promoting participation	S3. Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
	8. Families and communities involved in ensuring child safety	Not mentioned in the 7 Standards, but key to building trust and reputation.	S4. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
Diversity and Equity	9. Equity and diverse needs respected in policy and practice	Covered in 3 overlays: aboriginal children; children from diverse culture /language back grounds; or with a disability.	S5. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
Screening, training, and supervision	3. Recruitment and screening – selecting suitable people	4. HR practices Screening and supervision and training.	S6. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
Complaints and Reporting	5. Child – focussed processes to respond to complaints and concerns	5. Responding to and Reporting of allegations of child abuse	S7. Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused.
Screening, training, and supervision	4. Ongoing training & support		S8. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
Risk management and mitigation	6. Physical and online environments promote safety, minimise harm	6. Risk identification and mitigation	S9. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
Review and Improvement	10. Regular review and improvement	Not stated, but implied.	S10. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.
Child Protection Policy	2. Child Safety Policies and procedures	2. Child Safe Policy – commitments to child safety	S11. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.
Code of Conduct	Not mentioned specifically	3. Child-safe Code of Conduct	S11 (Not mentioned but assumed)

ChildSafe Commitment

- I will behave at all-times consistent with the code of conduct within this document.
- I will immediately report any breach to the Safety Officer or Elder as appropriate.
- I am aware that GCBC expects me to **uphold these standards at all times**.
- I have read this document and had opportunity to discuss its contents with the Child Safe Officer.

By signing this document, I hereby declare that I have read all of the above, fully understand, and agree with the contents and to follow this agreement.

Name:

Signature:

print name

Date:

Once complete please return via email to childsafecofficer@gracebiblechurch.org.au