



Version 1.0

Updated as of 14.5.2025.

Footscray Church of Christ

Complaints and Incidents

Management Process

Introduction

Footscray Church of Christ is a safe church with a positive complaints and incident reporting culture.

All incidents and complaints must be reported.

An incident is a near miss or injury occurring within Footscray Church of Christ's ministries.

All incidents or injuries must be reported, whether or not medical attention is required.

A complaint includes a concern for someone's welfare, a disclosure or witnessing of abuse, a breach of the FCOC Code of Conduct, or any other concern that someone may wish to bring to the Safe Ministry Contacts Administrators' attention.

A basic outline of the process is:

1. Ensure immediate safety (step 1)
2. Notify Safe Ministry Contact Administrator and confidential documenting of incident or complaint (step 2)
3. A supported response by the Safeguarding Team (steps 3- 7)

This process is detailed in the following document.

Roles with Responsibilities in this document

Most senior person in charge of ministry activity: This may be a volunteer or staff member. The person who is in a position of leadership is responsible for immediate action to ensure safety.

Safe Ministry Contacts Administrator (SMCA): The Elder who is also a Safe Ministry Contact and whose focus is on Footscray Church of Christ's safety policies and procedures.

Safe Ministry Contact/s (SMC): A member of Footscray Church of Christ who has training and responsibility for hearing and responding to safety concerns.

Pastor: The leader of the Footscray Church of Christ.

Elders: The elected governance body of Footscray Church of Christ.

Safeguarding Team: This consists of the Safe Ministry Contacts Administrator, the Chair of the Elders, the Pastor (where appropriate) and with support from CCVT Safe Places staff.

CCVT Safe Places staff: The staff employed by Churches of Christ Victoria and Tasmania to assist churches with maintaining safe ministries and complying with the relevant legislation.

Process

1. Immediate Action and Safety

1.1. Ensure Immediate Safety: Take any immediate action required to ensure the safety of all involved. This may involve:

- Medical attention: Administering first aid or calling an ambulance.
- Calling 000 to report to police or another emergency response.
- Making the area safe or moving people to a safe place.
- Separating individuals or temporarily suspending those accused from their roles.

This is the responsibility of the most senior person in charge of a ministry activity.

If you are concerned that someone is at immediate risk call 000

1.2. Confidentiality: Maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved, sharing information only with those who need to know to ensure safety and compliance with legal obligations.

2. Incident Reporting

2.1. Internal Reporting:

Staff, volunteers and members contact the Safe Ministry Contact Administrator or a Safe Ministry Contact to report the incident or complaint.

Footscray Church of Christ Safe Ministry Contact Administrator
Melody Trinh

Footscray Church of Christ Safe Ministry Contacts
Bronwyn Wells

Lorien Francis

Ethan Lamontte

External Reporting

The public can contact the Safe Ministry Contact Administrator via the Safety Concern Form on the church website, or via email fcoc.safeministry@gmail.com

- 2.2. Documentation: The incident or complaint is documented in the Footscray Church of Christ Complaint Record. This is the responsibility of the SCMs and SCMA. The report is securely stored and is only accessible to the Safeguarding Team.
3. Assessment and Decision Making
 - 3.1. Initial Assessment: The SMCA should assess the report to determine the immediate risk and whether external authorities need to be notified (e.g., police, child protection services).
 - 3.2. External Reporting Obligations: Based on the assessment, decide whether the incident or complaint meets the criteria for mandatory reporting to external authorities and make the report as required by Victorian legislation. This is the responsibility of the SMCA and the rest of the Safeguarding Team.
4. Action Plan
 - 4.1. Develop an Action Plan: Depending on the nature of the incident or complaint and whether it's been reported externally, develop an action plan that may include internal investigation, support measures for the victim, and engagement with external authorities. This is the responsibility of the Safeguarding team.
 - 4.2. Support and Care: Ensure that appropriate pastoral care and support are offered to all parties involved, including the victim, their family, and the accused (where appropriate). This is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Team.
 - 4.3. Support and Care cont.: There should also be a pastoral response for those supporting the investigation (i.e. the Safeguarding Team, the SMCs, the Elders) This could include additional supervision, group debriefing sessions and personal/professional support as needed. This is the responsibility of the Elders.
5. Investigation
 - 5.1. Internal Investigation: If applicable and not in conflict with external investigations, conduct a thorough internal investigation following procedural fairness principles (Appendix A). This may involve interviews with involved parties, gathering additional information, and reviewing relevant documents. This is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Team.
 - 5.2. Outcome of Investigation: Based on the findings, determine the appropriate outcome, which may include disciplinary actions, policy changes, or additional training requirements. This is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Team.

6. Review and Reflection

- 6.1. Policy and Procedure Review: Regularly review and update safeguarding policies and procedures, including the Complaints and Incident Management Process, to reflect learnings from incidents and changes in legislation. This is the responsibility of the Elders and Pastor.
- 6.2. Training and Education: Use incidents as opportunities for learning and reinforcing the importance of safeguarding within the organization. Ensure ongoing training for all staff and volunteers. This is the responsibility of the SMCA and SMCs.

7. Documentation and Record-Keeping

- 7.1. Secure Records: Maintain secure and confidential records of all safeguarding concerns, actions taken, and outcomes. Ensure compliance with privacy laws and record retention policies. This is the responsibility of the SMCA.
- 7.2. Monitoring and Reporting: Develop mechanisms for monitoring compliance with the Complaints and Incidents Management Process and reporting to the organization's leadership or board. This is the responsibility of the SMCA, SMCs and Elders.

Resources

These resources are a helpful reference for understanding FCOC's obligations for handling complaints safely. They can be found in the fcoc.safeministry google drive (see Safe Ministry Contact Administrator for access).

A Guide to creating a Child Safe Organisation

Note: Standard 7 is particularly relevant.

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/New-CSS/A-guide-for-creating-a-Child-Safe-Organisation-27.04.23.pdf>

A guide for Faith Communities on the Reportable Conduct Scheme

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Uploads/religious-orgs-guidance-web-lower-resolution.pdf>

Mandatory Reporting to Child Protection in Victoria - people in religious ministry factsheet

<https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-10/Mandatory%20reporting%20to%20child%20protection%20in%20Victoria%20-%20people%20in%20religious%20ministry%20factsheet.docx>

Appendix A

***Procedural fairness principles**, also known as natural justice principles, are fundamental to ensuring fair and unbiased processes, especially in the context of investigations and decision-making. They are designed to protect the rights of all individuals involved, ensuring that decisions are made impartially, transparently, and based on evidence. In the context of incident management within organisations, adhering to procedural fairness involves several key elements:

1. Right to be Heard

Every individual whose rights or interests may be significantly affected by a decision has the right to be heard. This includes the opportunity to make submissions, respond to any allegations, present evidence, and counter evidence presented against them.

2. Right to a Fair Hearing

The process should be conducted without bias or conflict of interest. Decision-makers must be impartial, and there must be an assurance that no decision is made until all relevant evidence is considered. This may involve separating the investigation and decision-making roles between different individuals or committees.

3. Reasonable Notice

Individuals involved should be given reasonable notice of the proceedings, including any meetings or hearings they are expected to attend. This notice should include details of the allegations or concerns raised, so they can adequately prepare their response.

4. Fair and Transparent Procedures

The processes for investigation, decision-making, and any resulting actions should be clearly outlined and made available to all stakeholders. Procedures should be consistently applied and should allow for an investigation that is thorough and considers all relevant material.

5. Reasons for Decisions

Decisions, especially those that adversely affect an individual, should be accompanied by reasons. This transparency helps to ensure that decisions are based on evidence and the applicable rules or policies, and it provides an opportunity for review if procedural fairness is questioned.

6. Review or Appeal Process

An effective incident management process should include a mechanism for review or appeal, allowing decisions to be challenged if there's a belief that procedural fairness was not observed.

Applying these principles within the **Complaints and Incident Management Process** ensures that when safeguarding concerns are raised, they are handled in a way that is just and equitable for everyone involved. It not only helps protect the rights of individuals but also enhances the integrity and trustworthiness of the organisation's safeguarding processes.