

Vineyard Churches Australia (VCA) Safeguarding Policy

Reviewed and updated: 29/04/26

Policy Statement

1. All people, regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse, neglect or exploitation.
2. **VCA** commits to promoting and protecting the welfare and human rights of people that interact with, or are affected by, our work - with particular attention to children and vulnerable adults as recognised in applicable Australian State, Territory and Commonwealth laws. We have no tolerance for abuse, neglect or exploitation. We will take a person-centred, trauma-aware approach that prioritises safety and wellbeing, while ensuring fair, lawful and impartial processes for all parties involved.
3. All staff, volunteers, partners and third parties of **VCA** share responsibility for protecting everyone from abuse, neglect or exploitation. Beyond this, particular people have specific responsibilities, and they are required to carry out their duties without exception.
4. **VCA** has a process for managing incidents that must be followed when one arises.

Purpose

5. The purpose of this policy is to:
 - a. Help protect people that interact with, or are affected by, **VCA**.
 - b. Define the key terms we use when talking about protecting people or safeguarding.
 - c. Set out and develop the way **VCA** manages safeguarding risks.
 - d. Set out the specific roles and responsibilities of persons working in and with **VCA**.
 - e. Facilitate the safe management of incidents using the *Safeguarding Incident Response Plan*.
 - f. To support a positive and effective internal culture towards safeguarding.
 - g. Recognise that **VCA** operates across multiple Australian jurisdictions and safeguarding obligations arise from the laws of the relevant state or territory.
 - h. Clarify that this policy applies to activities organised, authorised or supervised by **VCA** including conferences, training events and national gatherings.
 - i. Acknowledge that each Vineyard Church and Initiative operates as an independent legal entity responsible for complying with safeguarding laws in its jurisdiction.
 - j. Clarify that activities undertaken privately by individuals connected to Vineyard churches are not considered part of **VCA**'s official activities.

Definitions and Scope

6. '**Safeguarding**' means protecting the welfare and human rights of people that interact with, or are affected by, **VCA**, particularly those that might be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation. This refers to any responsibility or measure undertaken to protect a person from harm. While **VCA** affirms that safeguarding principles apply to all people, the enforceable scope of this policy is limited to safeguarding obligations primarily relating to children and young people under 18 years of age, and vulnerable adults.

- 6a. A **'vulnerable adult'** is restricted to the meaning under applicable Australian State, Territory and Commonwealth legislation where **VCA** is operating. For the purposes of general illustration, it could mean a person aged 18 years or older who, because of disability, illness, age, cognitive impairment, or other circumstances, has reduced capacity to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation, or to make or communicate informed decisions about their care or safety.
7. **'Abuse, neglect or exploitation'** means all forms of physical and mental abuse, exploitation, coercion or ill-treatment. Examples include, but are not limited to:
- a. **Harassment, bullying or sexual harassment** — repeated or targeted behaviour that a reasonable person would consider offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening, and which creates a risk to health or safety.
 - b. **Sexual offences** — any sexual activity, touching or exploitation without consent.
 - c. **Violence or threats of violence, verbal, emotional or social abuse** — behaviour that causes physical, emotional or relational harm; social abuse means deliberately isolating, shaming or damaging a person's relationships or reputation.
 - d. **Neglect** — failing to provide reasonable care, assistance or protection to a dependent.
 - e. **Exploitation or coercion** — taking advantage of another person's vulnerability or dependence, or pressuring them for personal, financial or sexual gain.
 - f. **Discrimination or abuse of power** — treating someone unfairly because of race, sex, age, disability or another protected attribute.
8. **'Reasonable grounds to suspect'** is a situation where a person has some information that leads them to believe that abuse, neglect or exploitation has taken place, is taking place, or may take place. It comes with a low burden of proof, but is based on some information. Questions that may help a person to determine whether they have 'reasonable grounds to suspect' might include:
- a. Could you explain to another person why you suspect something? This helps to make sure that your suspicion is based on information, even if you have no proof.
 - b. Would an objective other person, with the same information as you, come to the same conclusion? This helps to make sure that your suspicion is as objective as possible.
9. A **'person-centred and trauma-aware approach'** means responding to concerns with sensitivity to the needs and wellbeing of those who may have experienced harm, while ensuring that all parties are treated fairly, lawfully, and with appropriate procedural integrity.

Roles and responsibilities

10. While the responsibility to protect people is shared by all who work at or with **VCA**, some individuals have specific obligations with which they are required to comply.
11. The members of the board of **VCA** are responsible for ensuring safeguarding governance and legal compliance.
12. The National Directors of **VCA** are required to ensure VCA has effective and appropriate ways to manage safeguarding and legal compliance.
13. Safeguarding Officers of **VCA**, e.g. *Child Protection Officer* at a conference, should be suitably trained and experienced, and are required to manage reports and ensure awareness of obligations.
14. All those operating at a managerial level in **VCA** are required to:
- a. Promote a positive culture towards safeguarding;
 - b. Implement this policy in their area of responsibility;
 - c. Ensure controls are in place in their area of responsibility.

15. All Staff and Volunteers of **VCA** are required to:

- a. Familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, the **VCA Code of Conduct**, policies and procedures for safeguarding;
- b. Comply with all safeguarding requirements and report suspected incidents.

16. All partners and contractors of **VCA** are required to implement this policy and report concerns.

Managing safeguarding risk

17. The way **VCA** manages the risks of safeguarding will be:

- a. *Holistic.* **VCA** and its stakeholders will work to prevent, detect and take action on incidents.
- b. *Risk-based and proportionate.* **VCA** will regularly assess the risks to people in its operations and develop proportionate controls to mitigate those risks.
- c. *Person-centred and trauma aware.* **VCA** will ensure its approach to safeguarding is person-centred and trauma-aware, while maintaining fair and proportionate processes.
- d. *Lawful.* **VCA** will ensure that it understands and complies with the law in everything it does, in all jurisdictions in which it works.

18. **VCA** will manage the risk of safeguarding by:

- a. Maintaining documented risk assessments;
- b. Maintaining a register of **VCA's** legal obligations for safeguarding and workplace health and safety in all the jurisdictions in which it operates;
- c. Adhering to this *Safeguarding Policy* and its *Code of Conduct*;
- d. Ensuring that all staff and volunteers are appropriately screened, trained, and supported to meet safeguarding standards in their area of responsibility;
- e. Conducting awareness-raising for stakeholders on risks, expectations, and individual responsibilities;
- f. Maintaining two reporting processes: a confidential reporting process and an overt process;
- g. Having an incident response plan;
- h. Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness and proportionality of its safeguarding approach.

Managing incidents

19. Harassment, abuse, neglect and exploitation are all serious misconduct and **VCA** reserves the right to:

- a. Take disciplinary action against any staff member, volunteer, or leader it reasonably believes has engaged in such behaviour. Disciplinary action may include removal from roles and responsibilities, termination of employment, or cessation of volunteer service, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct;
- b. Take civil legal action;
- c. Report the matter to law enforcement.

Reporting suspected incidents

20. All staff, volunteers and third parties must, as soon as practicable, report any suspicion that an incident has taken place, may be taking place, or could take place.

21. They may do this through overt, direct reporting to:

- a. Any member of the Board;
- b. The National Directors;
- c. A **VCA** Safeguarding Officer.

22. If a person wants to report confidentially, including with anonymity by using a generic email account, they may use the confidential reporting system by emailing the safeguarding@vineyard.org.au address.

23. If a person believes that another person is at risk of **immediate harm** or is the victim of a **criminal offence**, they must **dial 000**.

Responding to suspected incidents

24. All suspected, perceived, potential or actual incidents will be managed through the ***Safeguarding Incident Response Plan***.

External reporting

25. **VCA** will:

- a. Report any suspicion of a criminal offence to the police or the relevant criminal judicial body;
- b. Meet any other requirements regarding the reporting of incidents;
- c. Report any qualifying matter to the ACNC.

Privacy and data protection

26. All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Personal information relating to safeguarding matters will be handled confidentially in accordance with the VCA Privacy Policy and may be shared where reasonably necessary to protect individuals, administer safeguarding screening and training, investigate safeguarding concerns, comply with legal obligations, or obtain professional advice. Safeguarding records may be retained for longer periods where required for legal, insurance, regulatory or safeguarding purposes.

Administration of this policy

27. This Policy will be reviewed every year.

Procedures created by the policy

28. Safeguarding Incident Response Plan.

Related policies and procedures

29. Code of Conduct, Privacy Policy and Complaints Policy.