



SAFE PRACTICE GUIDE

Responding to Abuse Incidents

Why is this important?

Abuse incidents handled appropriately may prevent further harm, aid recovery and assist the Archdiocese in complying with duty of care and legal reporting obligations. The 3Rs process (Respond, Record, Report) is a simple framework for responding to abuse incidents.

What should we be doing?

An abuse incident is any abuse concern, suspicion, disclosure, report, complaint or occurrence that has occurred in the past or is occurring in the present.

Abuse incidents may arise in a number of ways including by witnessing an event, a direct or indirect disclosure by a victim, an account from a concerned party, or an anonymous report. It is imperative that all abuse incidents be taken seriously, and responded to promptly and effectively.

Step 1 - Respond

Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of any person who may be at risk is the first priority when responding to abuse concerns and incidents. This may involve:

- Taking protective action (where necessary).
- Contacting the police, other relevant authorities (e.g. Child Safety) or emergency services if there is a risk of serious and imminent harm.
- Providing personal care and support.

If a person makes an abuse disclosure, stay calm, give your full attention, listen and be supportive. Avoid quizzing for sensitive details and testing or challenging what is disclosed.

Crime – Fail to Protect a Child from a Sexual Offence

In Queensland, it is a crime to fail to protect a child from a sexual offence in an organisational setting.

If an adult in a position of power or responsibility in an organisation knows there is a significant risk that a child under the care or supervision of the organisation will be sexually abused by an adult who is associated with the organisation they must take action to reduce or remove the risk.

The law also states it does not matter that information about the sexual abuse risk was gained during, or in connection with, a religious confession.

Step 2 - Record

A record of all abuse incidents must be made as soon as possible and while the details are best remembered. A reliable record should be factual and include relevant details such as:

- The nature of the incident.
- The time, date and place of the incident
- The people involved in the incident.
- What happened.
- What action was taken.
- Whether there are any ongoing risks or concerns.

Any other relevant information or evidence should also be retained (e.g. written notes, emails, text messages, security footage, videos, photographs).

Step 3 - Report

All abuse incident must be reported.

If a person is at risk of serious and imminent harm contact the police directly or call triple zero '000'.

Report the incident to a supervisor or manager as soon as possible and notify the Safeguarding Service.

The Safeguarding Service will assess the situation and take any necessary action. This may include making a report to authorities.

Do not promise absolute confidentiality or to keep an abuse incident secret.
Only share information with others on a confidential 'need to know' basis.

REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

Mandatory Reporters

Under the Queensland *Child Protection Act 1999*, people in the following occupations are legally required to make a report to authorities if they suspect that a child has suffered, is suffering or is at an unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse:

- Registered teachers
- Registered nurses
- Doctors
- Early childhood education & care professionals
- Police Officers
- Child advocacy officers under the *Public Guardian Act 2014* (Qld)

Criminal Offence – Fail to Report Child Sexual Offence

In Queensland, it is a crime to fail to report a suspected child sexual offence to the police.

If an adult reasonably believes that a child is being or has been sexually abused by another adult they must report it to the police unless they have a reasonable excuse not to do so.

The law also states it does not matter that information about a child sexual offence is gained during or in connection with a religious confession. It must be reported to the police.

A child sexual offence may include grooming for sexual acts and possessing or controlling child abuse material.

All suspected child sexual offences must be reported to the Safeguarding Service and Legal, Governance & Risk Office.

Safeguarding Service Ph: 3324 3752 Em: safeguarding@bne.catholic.net.au.

Legal, Governance & Risk Office Ph: 3324 3575 Em: childabusealert@bne.catholic.net.au.

Papal Decree - Vos Estis Lux Mundi (2019)

This decree establishes procedures for reporting sexual abuse by priests and religious including:

- sexual acts involving force, violence, threats, or an abuse of authority;
- sexual acts with a child under 18 years or a vulnerable person; and
- producing, possessing, or sharing child pornography.

The decree also makes bishops and religious superiors accountable for reporting the above behaviours.

Priests and religious in the Archdiocese are required to report the above behaviours to the Archbishop.