



SAFE PRACTICE GUIDE

Responding to Abuse Incidents

Why is this important?

The Archdiocese is committed to fostering a culture where people are encouraged, enabled and supported to report abuse concerns and incidents. 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.

The Church's National Response Protocol for Responding to Abuse Concerns and Allegations of Child Abuse provides principles and detailed procedures for managing child abuse incidents (past or present).

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 appropriately.

Step 1 - Respond

In responding to an abuse incident, the first priority must be the safety and well-being of the person who experienced the abuse and others who may be at risk.

If a person is seriously harmed or is in immediate danger, call emergency services on triple zero '000' or contact the police directly. Provide appropriate care and support until assistance arrives.

Otherwise, take appropriate action to intervene and stop the situation, where possible and safe to do so, and manage any present risks.

If a person make 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.

Step 2 - Record

It is important that the details of abuse incidents be documented. Make accurate and detailed notes about the incident including:

- the name and contact details of the person who experienced the abuse,
- where and when the incident occurred,
- what happened that gave you cause for concern or suspicion,
- what was said or reported that led you to think an incident occurred (if a verbal disclosure was made, write down the exact words),
- any information about the alleged abuser, and
- any immediate safety concerns or risks.

Make a record at the time (if possible) or as soon as possible after the incident while it is best remembered.

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

Step 3 - Report

Abuse incidents must be reported as soon as possible, and within 24 hours.

If a child is at risk of significant harm contact Child Safety Services or the police directly without delay.

Notify the delegated responsible person in the parish, ministry or agency (e.g. Local Safeguarding Representative, Parish Manager).

The delegated responsible person must report the incident to the Safeguarding Service.

The Safeguarding Service will help to assess the situation and take any necessary action.

Important

Do not promise absolute confidentiality or to keep an abuse incident secret.
Only share information with others who have delegated responsibility.

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, or neglect:

- 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 criminal offence to fail to report a suspected child sexual offence (past or present) to the police. An adult commits a crime if they reasonably believe that another adult has, or is committing a child sexual offence, and they fail to report it to police as soon as practicable.

A child sexual offence may include grooming for sexual acts, possessing or controlling child abuse material, indecent treatment of a child (e.g. fondling) and sexual intercourse with a child.

It does not matter that a suspicion about a child sexual offence was formed in connection with a religious confession.

Suspected child sexual offences must be reported to the police and Legal, Governance & Risk Office on 3324 3575 or email 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.