



# ***ST AGNES' PARISH, HIGHETT***

## ***Child Safety Policy***

*December 08, 2016*

*Date of policy: December 08, 2016*  
*Date of next minor review: May 18, 2017*  
*Date of next major review: November 16, 2017*

## 1. Introduction

At *St Agnes' Highett* we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our parish. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel ([CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

The Church's social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. 'In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights' (Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, 26). Indeed it was Jesus who, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, '*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me*' (Mark 9.37).

## 2. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of *St Agnes' Highett* to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children in our parish. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our parish environment, on site, online and in other locations used by the parish.

This policy applies to all parish personnel, including parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

## 3. Principles

The Catholic Church has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe ([CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)).

**The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety *St Agnes' Highett*:**

- Our parish has zero tolerance of child abuse.
- All children are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our parish works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.
- All adults in our parish, including staff, clergy, volunteers, parishioners, contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.

- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of children are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, parishioners including children and contractors should be free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the parish leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

#### 4. Definitions

**Child:** A person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

**Child abuse** includes:

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
  - (i) a sexual offence
  - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the **Crimes Act 1958** (grooming)
- (b) the infliction on a child of:
  - (i) physical violence
  - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child.

**Child safety** encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

**Child neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours including shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also included in this definition of “Child physical abuse”.

**Child protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm.

**Child sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person two or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them; the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion
- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year old and an 11-year old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not intended to be included in this definition of “Child sexual abuse”.

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners.

**Reasonable Belief:** When an adult is concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency. This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a ‘reasonable belief’. A ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

## 5. Policy Commitments

All children at *St Agnes’ Highett* parish have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

### **Our commitment to our children**

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our parish.
- (b) We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- (d) We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe parish environment.

### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- (a) We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- (b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child- safety practices, policies and procedures.
- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on child safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

### **Our commitment to our parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy (called “staff” for the purposes of this policy):**

- (a) We commit to providing all *St Agnes’ Highett* staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.

- (b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- (c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by *St Agnes' Highett* parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for *St Agnes' Highett's* staff to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

## **6. Responsibilities and Organisation Arrangements**

Everyone employed or volunteering at *St Agnes' Highett* has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make (CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The parish has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety as follows:

### **6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Leadership**

The parish priest and all of the organisations of *St Agnes' Highett*, such as our Parish Finance Committee recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of, and shared responsibility for child safety. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff and clergy
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that parish personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the parish meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

### **6.2 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Staff**

Responsibilities of parish staff include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative (including mandatory reporting obligations where appropriate) and Archdiocesan processes if, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured
- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the parish's Child Safety Code of Conduct.

## **7. Expectations of our Volunteers and Parish Staff – Child Safety Code of Conduct**

At *St Agnes' Highett* community, we expect our Volunteers and parish staff to proactively ensure the safety of children at all times and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety of any child in the parish environment. All staff and volunteers, must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection and comply with all requirements. We have developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct, which recognises the critical role that volunteers and staff play in protecting the children in our care and establishes clear expectations of our volunteers and staff for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and or neglect.

Our Code also protects parish personnel through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## **8. Child Safety and Participation**

At *St Agnes' Highett*, we actively encourage all children to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them.

We discuss with our children what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns children or their parents or carers, raise with us.

We ensure all parish staff and volunteers adhere to the Child Safety Code.

## 9. Reporting and Responding

Our parish records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our parish complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and the recommendations of the *Betrayal of Trust* report.

Our parish's **Child Protection – Reporting Policy** sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child in our parish environment is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

We work to ensure all children, families and staff know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

Our parish has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child.

Our reporting process is detailed in the Code of Conduct document and also below. It is expected that all cases of suspected child abuse are reported to the Police and that a Child Protection Officer should be informed that this has happened.

Our complaints and disclosure processes are outlined and detailed in the following policies and procedures:

### **Our Parishes Responsibilities**

- We will appoint at least two Child Safety Officers to work with the Parish Priest, whose role will be to implement safeguarding policies and procedures.
- The child safety officers are appointed members of the parish and will report immediately to the Parish Priest about any incidents reported. They will present a report at least annually with the Parish Priest on the implementation of the policy in the parish.
- The Child Safety Officers will ensure that any concerns about a child/young person or the behaviour of an adult are referred to the Archdiocesan Child Safety Officer.
- We will display in our church premises where children's/young people's activities take place, the contact details of the Parish Child Safety Officers, Archdiocesan Child Safety Office along with the telephone numbers of local police and after hours child protection emergency service.
- We will ensure that all those authorised to work with children/young people are suitably recruited in accordance with safer recruitment practice, and are appropriately trained and supported in their role.



## **Child Safety Procedures**

- All child protection concerns should be acted upon immediately. If you are concerned that a child may be at risk or is actually being abused, you should contact the police immediately.
- For concerns about the immediate safety of a child or that are life threatening, call Victoria Police OOO or the After Hours Child Protection Emergency Service on 131 278
- You may also wish to speak to one of the following:
  - Parish Child Safety Officer - Owen Cooke – 0438 726 523
  - Parish Child Safety Officer - Rita Gori – 0409 564 030
  - Parish Child Safety Officer - Margaret Taylor – 9532 2596
  - Archdiocesan Child Safety Office is the Vicar General 9926 5638
  - Moorabbin Police Station 9556 6565
  - Sandringham Police Station 8530 5100

Please note these contact numbers may be subject to change by the Local Authorities at any time and should be checked and updated regularly by the Parish Child Safety Officers.

## **10. Screening and Recruitment of Parish Staff**

*St Agnes' Highett* will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the parish Child Safety Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Policy.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we make all reasonable efforts to:

- confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

We have processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of parish staff to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks.

## **11. Child Safety – Education and Training for Parish Staff**

*St Agnes' Highett* provides employees, volunteers and clergy with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their

professional and legal obligations and responsibilities, and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

## 12. Risk Management

*At St Agnes' Highett* we are committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to child safety across our whole parish environment (physical and online), and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and periodically review our risk management strategies for child safety and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

## 13. Relevant Legislation

- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act.
  - (a) **Failure to disclose offence**: Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
  - (b) **Failure to protect offence**: The offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk, but negligently fail to reduce or remove it.
  - (c) **Grooming offence**: This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

## 14. Related Policies

### 14.1 Catholic Archdiocese Melbourne Policies

- Working with Children Check Protocols
- National Police Record Check Policy
- Code of Conduct for Caring for Children “May our children flourish”
- Social media policy

### 14.2 Parish Policies

- Code of Conduct
- St Agnes' Highett Child Safety Policy (this document)

## 15. Breach of Policy

Where an **employee** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Policy, this may result in disciplinary consequences.

Where the **parish priest** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the concerned party is advised to contact the Vicar General. If there is any reasonable belief that a criminal act has been committed, the concerned party is advised to contact Victoria Police.

Where any **other member of the parish community** is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the parish priest is to take appropriate action *and / or* contact Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (Office of Professional Conduct and Ethics).

## 16. Review of this Child Safety Policy

At *St Agnes' Highett* we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.

We will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

### History of Updates to Policy

Date	Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)
December 08,2016	Date of Policy
May 18, 2017	Minor Review
November 16, 2017	Major Review

## 17. Inclusion of All

We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

## 18. References

Catholic Education Melbourne Child Safety Policy Editable Template – June 2016

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety* – September 2016

State of Victoria 2016, ***Child Safe Standards*** – *Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools: Ministerial Order. 870*, Education & Training Reform Act 2006, Victorian Government Gazette No. S2

## **ST AGNES' CATHOLIC CHURCH HIGHETT**

### **Child Safety Code of Conduct**

#### **Safeguarding Children & Young People**

This Code of Conduct has a specific focus on safeguarding children and young people at St Agnes' Parish against sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect. It is intended to complement child protection legislation and the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne's Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, "*May our children flourish*".

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish council members at St Agnes' Catholic Church, Highett, are expected to actively contribute to a parish culture that respects the dignity of its members and affirms the Gospel values of love, care for others, compassion and justice. They are required to observe child-safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

#### **ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOURS**

All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish committee members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- adhering to the parish Child Safety Policy and upholding the Parish's Statement of Commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse and harm
- keeping open the door of the confessional when children go to reconciliation
- treating everyone in the parish community with respect
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, by ensuring reasonable care is taken to cater for any additional needs being faced)
- All allegations of child abuse must be reported to the police.

#### **UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOURS**

Staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish committee members must not:

- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse

- be alone with a child unless the child is visible to others
- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical (for example, inappropriate sitting on laps)
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors or being alone with a child with no-good cause)
- initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- engage in open discussions of a mature or inappropriate nature in the presence of children
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- have any online contact (including by social media, email, instant messaging etc.) with a child
- exchange personal contact details such as phone number, social networking sites or email addresses with a child
- photograph or video a child without the consent of the parent or guardians
- work with children while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- consume drugs on parish premises or at parish events

I have read and understand “**St Agnes’ Catholic Church Highett’s Child Safety Code of Conduct Safeguarding Children and Young People**” and “**St Agnes’ Catholic Church Highett’s Child Safety Policy**” and I agree to abide by them.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_