

Blaxland Gospel Chapel – Protection Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Statement

Blaxland Gospel Chapel is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all its Employees, Members, Visitors, Volunteers and particularly to Children, Aged and Vulnerable People.

Blaxland Gospel Chapel Protection Policy aims to reduce the risk of Abuse occurring, and to ensure that a caring and appropriate response is taken should Abuse occur.

1.2 Scope

This Protection Policy applies to:

- All ministries under the control of Blaxland Gospel Chapel,
- All Employees, Members, Volunteers, Contractors and Visitors within Blaxland Gospel Chapel or engaged by Blaxland Gospel Chapel.

1.3 Authority

The Protection Policy was first adopted for use by the church elders on 29th October 2017. This revised version was adopted by the elders on 18th October 2022.

The elders are committed to implementing the Protection Policy and to training our Employees, Members, Contractors and Volunteers in its content and application.

1.4 Definitions

Abuse, can consist of one or more of but is not restricted to the following:

Elder Abuse, a single or repeated act, occurring in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.

Physical Abuse, any non-accidental physical injury resulting from practices such as hitting, punching, kicking (marks from belt buckles, fingers), shaking, burning (irons, cigarettes), biting, pulling out hair, alcohol and/or other drug administration.

Sexual Abuse, any assault or abuse of a sexual nature, sexual molestation, indecent exposure, sexual harassment or intimidation.

Emotional Abuse, the chronic attitude or behaviour of one person which is directed at another person, or, the creation of an emotional environment which erodes a person's self-esteem and social confidence over time. Behaviours may include Insulting, bullying, devaluing, ignoring, rejecting, corrupting, isolating, terrorising or other extreme acts in the aged or vulnerable person's presence.

Financial Abuse may include:

- Misappropriation of money, valuables or assets,
- Forging signatures on cheques,
- Denial of access to personal assets,
- Accessing a person's funds electronically and/or
- Forced or unauthorised changes to legal documents.

Neglect, characterised by the failure to provide for basic needs. Any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a person's health or development.

Child, any person under the age of 18.

Leader, any person (paid or unpaid) over the age of 18 who is responsible for the control and safety of members placed in their care whilst holding a formal position in a named Organisation. A leader could include but is not limited to:

- Activity Coordinators,
- Elders,
- Deacons
- Small group Leaders,
- Music, drama or other Leaders,
- Counsellors,
- Youth Leaders,
- Teachers,
- Volunteers,
- Club Leaders,
- Sports Coaches and Organisers.

Member, any person, including children, who attends or participates in the Blaxland Gospel Chapel's activities, objectives or strategic plan.

Organisation, Blaxland Gospel Chapel, located at the corner, Rusden Road and Boorea St, Blaxland, NSW

Volunteer, any unpaid person over the age of 16 who is invited to assist in the ministries of the church.

2. Policy Review

This Protection Policy will be reviewed annually by the Elders and the Protection Officer. Updated policy to be made available to all members, presented at the next church business meeting, and made available online.

3. Obligations

3.1 Responsibility

The core expectations of any responsible Organisation require us to treat all people with fairness and dignity and to care for those who are less powerful and in need of nurture and protection.

3.2 Legal

All relevant organisations within Australia are bound by Federal and State legislation and principles established through common law. Blaxland Gospel Chapel is committed to adhering to all relevant legislation.

3.3 Ethical

Some actions may not be regarded as Abuse, but are unacceptable behaviour for Blaxland Gospel Chapel. These include:

- Inappropriate conversation of a sexual nature.
- Coarse language, especially that of a sexual nature.
- Suggestive gestures or remarks.
- Jokes of a sexual nature.
- Inappropriate touching.
- Inappropriate literature (e.g. PG, M, MA, R or X rated material used in inappropriate settings).
- Recording or filming without prior consent.
- Acts of violence committed by a Worker, Leader or Volunteer in the course of an activity.

Blaxland Gospel Chapel's leadership will ensure that high standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

Each person associated with Blaxland Gospel Chapel has the right:

- To full and effective use of his or her personal, civil, legal and consumer rights;
- To be treated with dignity and respect and to receive services without exploitation, abuse or neglect;
- To receive services without discrimination or victimization, and without being obliged to feel grateful to those providing his or her care and accommodation;
- To personal privacy;
- To be treated and accepted as an individual, and to be treated with respect;
- To complain and to take action to resolve disputes;
- To have access to advocates and to other avenues of redress; and
- To be free from reprisals, or a well-founded fear of reprisal, in any form for taking action to enforce his or her rights.

4. Selection & Screening

4.1 Employees, Agency Staff, Contractors & Volunteers

Employees, Agency Staff, Contractors and Volunteers involved in activities or programs with children, aged and/or vulnerable people must be carefully selected and screened. Prior to commencing employment or volunteer services, the following precautions will be taken:

- All employees and/or volunteers must complete an application form which requests details of relevant past experience, positions held, details of two referees and permission to contact them (see Appendix 2).
- A Police and/or Community Services check which complies with the legislative requirements of New South Wales will be requested and received prior to the

Employee or Volunteer commencing their proposed role. The check must show that the individual is not precluded from working in childcare or aged care.

Where the Organisation has identified that an applicant has previously committed a violent or sexually related offence, they cannot, under any circumstances, be considered for employment or engagement with Blaxland Gospel Chapel.

5. Training

All new Workers/Employees, including Agency Staff, Contractors and Volunteers will be issued with a copy of this policy and receive training in;

- The content and application of the Organisation's Protection Policy,
- Reporting procedures and the associated legal requirements.

All youth and children's ministry Workers/Employees, including Agency Staff, Contractors and Volunteers will also be required to complete appropriate "Safe Ministry Check" training.

Refresher training courses based on current "best practice" and changes to legislation will be provided to the whole church during a business meeting on an annual basis.

6. A Safe Environment

Incidents of Abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, working in pairs is the preferred method.

Two or more employees and/or volunteers will be present whenever an individual child or vulnerable person is being supervised or cared for. Where this is not possible, it should be done in a room which can be observed easily by others. In circumstances where one-on-one care is provided, there must be measures in place to identify if abuse is occurring such as regular rotation of staff, client feedback framework and independent case workers.

Inexperienced staff/volunteers will always work with a more experienced staff member or volunteer when caring for a vulnerable person(s).

When transporting vulnerable clients, staff will avoid being alone with a client in a car. Where this is not practical, they should specifically confirm that they will take clients directly to and from arranged venues and not to spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.

Staff will avoid one-on-one care with members of the opposite sex if possible. It is preferable to have another person present.

Workers will respect a client's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.

Adults and Children are expected to respect each other's privacy during times that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Workers will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No Worker will be alone in a room with a Child or an Elderly or Vulnerable person while any/either is changing.

Secret initiation ceremonies are prohibited. All aspects of every program related to children, aged and vulnerable people will be open to observation by family, friends or guardians.

Workers have the right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at such activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

7. Disciplining Children

It is not the responsibility of Blaxland Gospel Chapel or its Workers, Volunteers or Leaders to discipline a Child. If a Child does not abide by the rules set down by the Organisation, or becomes an obstruction to the care of other Children or Members, and may cause harm, the Child will be removed and referred back to their parent or guardian.

At no time will a Leader administer any form of physical, emotional, financial or mental discipline.

8. Reporting Procedures

Blaxland Gospel Chapel actively encourages the reporting of all abuse including Sexual Abuse.

Blaxland Gospel Chapel is committed to building an environment where either a victim or employee/volunteer feels able to report such abuse.

Employees and/or volunteers must report reasonable suspicions of abuse to the Protection Officer of Blaxland Gospel Chapel.

Reasonable Suspicion means fair and practical reason to believe an incident involving abuse has occurred based on verbal communication, hearsay, rumour or observation of behaviour.

An independent person will be appointed by Blaxland Gospel Chapel with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations of harm or abuse that may arise.

The details of those reporting abuse will be kept private and confidential.

A documented reporting process with escalating procedures has been established by Blaxland Gospel Chapel for handling allegations of abuse.

The escalating procedures will be as follows:

- The automatic suspension from all work or other duties within Blaxland Gospel Chapel of any person while under investigation by Blaxland Gospel Chapel, or by the police, for committing abuse;
- The automatic termination of their employment, or involvement in any form of leadership within Blaxland Gospel Chapel if found guilty of committing abuse, either by internal investigation or by a court.

If there is reasonable suspicion that a Member has been or is suffering abuse, the Police and the Organisation's Insurer will be contacted immediately.

The phone number for the Police is: 4751 0299

The phone number for Blaxland Gospel Chapel's Protection Officer (Ben Penrose) is 0490 317 261

The Police will also be notified if a Member discloses an incident of Abuse that has occurred somewhere other than Blaxland Gospel Chapel's premises, (e.g. an outing).

If a disclosure of abuse is made, the person who receives the disclosure will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the one making the disclosure.

This will include:

- Treating each allegation seriously and not attempting to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim. The matter should not be swept under the carpet.
- Not pushing the Member to disclose details of the alleged assault or attempting to investigate the allegation.
- Assuring the Member that they are understood: that their disclosure is being taken seriously; that what has happened is not their fault, and that they are correct in disclosing the incident.
- Reporting the abuse to the police and Blaxland Gospel Chapel's insurer.
- Not making contact with the alleged perpetrator. If the Worker or Volunteer is already providing counsel to the alleged perpetrator, it may be advisable for another person to assume this responsibility for the duration of any investigation.
- If the alleged assault has taken place recently, clothing worn by the Member should be, if reasonably practical, retained and handed to the police for forensic examination.
- Maintaining confidentiality.

Any disclosures by a Member, reports of suspected abuse and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.