



SSJG MINISTRIES INC.

## Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons Policy

Policy number	1.23	Approved by	Sr Isobel Moran
Version	1.0	Approved on	13 June 2017
Responsible Person	Mark Murphy	Scheduled review date	30 June 2022

### PURPOSE

The Mission and Values of SSJG Ministries Inc. reflect the Gospel teaching that all people have a unique dignity and the example of Jesus in especially showing care for the poor, powerless and vulnerable. Consistent with its Mission and Values SSJG Ministries is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of Vulnerable Persons, it serves. Everyone working at SSJG Ministries is responsible for the care and protection of Vulnerable Persons and for reporting any Abuse of such persons.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- To support an organisational culture of safety for Vulnerable Persons served by the organisation and thereby prevent Abuse of Vulnerable Persons from occurring;
- To make all employees and volunteers aware of the organisational strategies to prevent Abuse of Vulnerable Persons.
- To make managers aware of their responsibilities for implementing and reinforcing the organisational strategies; and
- To provide guidance to employees and volunteers as to their obligations including to report any actual or suspected Abuse within the organisation;
- To provide assurance that all reports of suspected Abuse will be investigated.

This policy is an important part of the organisation's framework for the safeguarding of vulnerable persons.

### SCOPE

This policy applies to SSJG Ministries Inc and Sisters of St John of God Inc.

### DEFINITIONS

**"Abuse"** means any action that intentionally harms or injures another person and includes, without limitation, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, financial abuse and neglect (see Attachment B for expanded definition).

**"Child"** means any person under the age of 18 years.

**“Vulnerable Person”** means:

- any person aged 18 or over who is or may be in need of services or support due to age, illness or a mental or physical disability; and
- any Child.

## **POLICY**

SSJG Ministries is committed to the safety of Vulnerable Persons within our care.

All Vulnerable Persons regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background have equal rights to protection from Abuse and SSJG Ministries has zero tolerance for abuse of Vulnerable Persons.

Everyone working at SSJG Ministries (including volunteers) is responsible for the care and protection of the Vulnerable Persons and for reporting actual or suspected Abuse.

SSJG Ministries approach to providing a safe environment for Vulnerable Persons incorporates 3 main strategies:

- safe recruitment and selection practices – helping prevent those who pose a risk to Vulnerable Persons from holding positions of trust;
- safe and supportive relationships including a Code of Conduct – having clear guidelines as to what is acceptable behaviour is an essential part of keeping Vulnerable Persons safe; and
- strong reporting culture and thorough investigation – ensuring all employees take responsibility to report any actual or suspected abuse and that any reports are investigated in an appropriate and timely manner

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Employment of New Employees**

1. SSJG Ministries has in place comprehensive human resource policies on recruitment and selection of new employees which among other things aims to:
  - Promote and protect the safety of Vulnerable Persons; and
  - Identify the most suitable persons as employees who share SSJG Ministries’ values and commitment to protect Vulnerable Persons.
2. SSJG Ministries Recruitment and Selection Policy requires all candidates to pass through its recruitment and screening processes prior to them being employed.
3. Those processes include:
  - Undertaking thorough referee checks;
  - Provision of a criminal record check; and
  - If they are engaged in ‘child related duties’ obtaining, and for the duration of their employment maintaining, a Working with Children Check.

### **Safe and Supportive Relationships**

1. SSJG Ministries is committed to safe and supportive relationships between its employees and all persons it serves including Vulnerable Persons. In giving effect to the broad purpose of this policy, it is important that all employees and volunteers know, understand and respect the physical and emotional boundaries involved in their dealings with all Vulnerable Persons they come in contact with through their daily work.

2. Employees must observe the SSJG Code of Conduct in their dealings with Vulnerable Persons.
3. Throughout their dealings with Vulnerable Persons and others accessing Ministry services it is important for employees and volunteers to understand that by virtue of their position of trust they are placed in a position of power in the relationship. This power needs to be exercised in a caring, compassionate and non-patronising way that enriches a safe and supportive relationship. Employees must not subject Vulnerable Persons to Abuse within these relationships.
4. It is important that employees and volunteers involved with Vulnerable Persons express particular concern, care and protection of them. They should be mindful that wherever reasonably possible they arrange for another adult to be present or close by when providing any form of pastoral care or other care to a Vulnerable Person. Employees also should avoid, wherever reasonably possible, being alone with a Vulnerable Person or group of Vulnerable People, in sleeping, dressing, toilet or bathing areas, and exercise prudent judgement and behaviour when another adult cannot be present.
5. Employees and volunteers should be aware that sudden or unusual changes in the behaviour patterns of those accessing Ministry services and facilities may be a sign of Abuse.

### **Reporting**

1. Reporting concerns about a Vulnerable Person's wellbeing is a vital step in preventing or stopping Abuse and protecting Vulnerable Persons from future harm. Employees and volunteers must immediately report any Abuse of a Vulnerable Person witnessed, or any reasonable suspicion of Abuse of a Vulnerable Person, to their manager.

(Reasonable suspicion of Abuse means fair and practical reason to believe an incident involving Abuse has occurred based on either verbal communication, hearsay, rumour or observation of behaviour.)

2. If for any reason an employee considers it appropriate or necessary they should report the Abuse or their suspicion of Abuse to the next highest level of management above the relevant manager.
3. Managers must immediately communicate reports of Abuse or suspected Abuse to the Regional General Manager. The Regional General Manager will report any Abuse or reasonable suspicion of Abuse of a Vulnerable Person(s) to the police as appropriate.
4. If a report of Abuse is made by a Vulnerable Person the person who receives the report will maintain appropriate pastoral care to the Vulnerable Person making the report which will include:
  - a. Listening – listen carefully to and support the Vulnerable Person and thank them for helping you to understand. Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Give the person your full attention. Let them take their own time.

Maintain a calm appearance with a listening style that is compassionate and reassuring. If the information given to you shocks, disgusts or distresses you, do not allow these feelings to show. Reassure the person that you are not upset with them but with the fact such things can happen;

- b. Affirming – Reassure the Vulnerable Person it is right to tell someone about this;

- c. Don't Blame – 'This is not your fault'. Treat each allegation seriously and don't attempt to deny the allegation or minimise its impact on the alleged victim. The matter should not be swept under the carpet;
  - d. Supporting – 'Thank you for telling me, you are very brave'. Accept the person will only disclose what is comfortable. Don't push the person who made the disclosure to discuss details of the alleged Abuse;
  - e. Safety – 'I'm sorry this happened to you. I'll do everything I can to keep you safe. I will have to speak to other people in order to help.'
  - f. Acting - Report the alleged Abuse to management as per this procedure. Maintain confidentiality.  
Don't:
    - g. make contact with or confront the alleged perpetrator;
    - h. attempt to investigate the allegation; or
    - i. make promises you can't keep.
5. The Manager receiving the report of Abuse or of suspected Abuse must promptly document the report using the Report Form and Guidelines at Attachment A.

### **Investigations**

1. All reports of Abuse or of suspected Abuse will be investigated promptly, and without prejudice. Investigations must be undertaken in a structured and objective manner to ensure that procedural fairness and the principles of natural justice are followed.
2. In conducting the investigation the privacy of the individuals involved will be respected as far as possible without prejudicing the safety of any Vulnerable Person or the conduct of a thorough and appropriate investigation.
3. Where the investigation establishes a breach of this policy that constitutes serious misconduct the consequences may include termination of employment.
4. The involvement of external investigatory or support services may be required and will be considered in responding to a report of actual or suspected Abuse.

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- **Integrity in the Service of the Church** – A Resource Document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia September 2011.
- Recruitment and Selection Policy (policy 1.15)
- Code of Conduct (policy 1.04)
- Working with Children Checks policy (policy 1.20)

### **Authorisation**



**Sr Isobel Moran**  
13 June 2017

**Receiving Report of Abuse – Guidelines for Managers**

These Guidelines are aimed at assisting managers in situations where a report of Abuse or suspected Abuse is made. Appropriate consideration must be given to confidentiality in the handling of reports of abuse.

**Receiving a report**

It is important to document the nature and circumstances of any reported abuse and have this document signed by the person making the report:

- Listen attentively to the person making the report
- Explain the need to document the allegation
- Explain what the process is for handling the report
- Explain the need for confidentiality while the investigation is being undertaken
- If the nature of the alleged Abuse places anyone at immediate risk, steps must be taken straight away to eliminate (or if that is not reasonably possible to minimise) the risk. NB The need to safeguard Vulnerable Persons will take priority over the need for confidentiality if these issues come into conflict.
- Document the circumstances of the alleged Abuse using the attached “Alleged Abuse Report Form”, including: person or persons involved; impact on Vulnerable Person; time, date, other witnesses; what was said, what behaviours occurred?
- Details of the complaint must be referred **immediately** to the Regional General Manager.
- Subsequent action, including notifying the person alleged to have committed the Abuse of the nature of the complaint, and investigating the report, should be done in consultation with the Regional General Manager as soon as possible.

## Alleged Abuse Report Form

Details of reported Abuse or suspected Abuse, including name/s of those involved	
Dates and Times	
Impact on victim	
Other Witnesses	
Your response at the time	
Action taken to manage future risk – to be completed by Manager.	
Name, address and signature of person making the report to the Manager.	

Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Expanded Definition of 'Abuse'

**Abuse**” means any action that intentionally harms or injures another person and includes, without limitation:

- Physical abuse which is any non-accidental physical injury or injuries to a Vulnerable Person, such as inflicting pain of any sort, or causing bruises, fractures, burns, electric shock, or unpleasant sensation (e.g. taste, heat or cold) as well as restrictive practices which are not contained in the Vulnerable Person’s care plan;
- Sexual Abuse which is sexual assault, sexual harassment or any other conduct of a sexual nature that is inconsistent with the integrity of the relationship between Church personnel and those who are in their pastoral care. Sexual abuse includes sexual behaviour involving the person and another person in the following circumstances:
  - The other person bribes, coerces, exploits, threatens, or is violent toward the relevant person;
  - The relevant person has less power than the other person;
  - There is a significant disparity between the relevant person and the other person in intellectual capacity or maturity;
- Psychological/Emotional abuse which is 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 Vulnerable Person’s presence;
- Financial abuse which is taking advantage of a Vulnerable Person in order to use them or their resources for another’s profit or advantage; and
- Neglect which is the failure to provide the necessary care, aid or guidance to Vulnerable Persons by those responsible for their care. Neglect may be physical, emotional, educational, environmental, medical or systemic. Neglect includes any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs a person’s health or development.