

LifeHouse Child Protection Policy Manual

Leaders, Workers & Team Members



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LifeHouse Child Protection Policy Manual

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INTRODUCTION

LifeHouse seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and young people who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children and young people from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behaviour while also protecting our staff and leaders (workers) from false accusations.

Please note: This policy remains applicable outside of LifeHouse events and services.

Foundations

Open communication is vital for our success. LifeHouse Church encourages you to support the other members of your team and discuss with your leaders any concerns openly and with a spirit of humility and gentleness. We want to be a church that actively exercises transparency in our motives and actions. That is not only doing the right thing, but also being seen to do the right thing. We commit to church ministry events and programs built on solid Safer Churches foundations and accept a duty of care to do everything reasonably practicable to protect others from harm and yourself from accusations. It is our hope that this manual provides you with a sound understanding of the policy and guidelines and will be embraced and properly implemented.

Training

LifeHouse Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” or “young people” include all persons under the age of 17 years. “Child” refers specifically to all persons aged 0-11 and “young people” aged 12-17.

When we refer to the term “leader” this includes all workers and team leaders, both paid and unpaid persons who work with children.

The term “junior leader” refers to a leader aged 17 years and younger working as a helper in children’s ministry.

1. Recruitment and Screening Policy

All persons who desire to work with the children and young people participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1. Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with LifeHouse Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children or young people.

1.2 Online Application

All persons seeking to work with children or young people must complete and sign an online application in a form to be supplied by LifeHouse Church. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children or young people, previous LifeHouse affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file.

1.3 Working with Children Check and Police Check

All adult applicants would be asked to acquire a valid Working with Children Check card. Applicants with existing cards will be asked to update their details with the Department of Justice to ensure that the relevant department receives notifications of their status. In the interim, they would need to provide a copy of their card so that it may be stored on file. Junior leaders who attain adult age during the course of their service would be asked to acquire a Working with Children Check card promptly.

4. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

5. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children or young people, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be from an institution, LifeGroup leader, and/or Pastor, but preferably from a source where the applicant has worked with children or young people in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file.

2. Visitor Policy

The word 'visitor' would characterise anyone who is not approved as a LifeHouse child or young person leader. This may be a parent, guardian, or new recruit. Such people would need to:

1. Write down their name and signature in the visitor log.
2. Wear a red visitor lanyard and tag.

2.1. Parent Helpers

Parent helpers are considered volunteers and would therefore be asked to acquire a valid Police Check and Working with Children Check.

3. Toilet Policy

3.1 General Toileting Procedure

All children will be encouraged to avoid a toilet visit during their stay in the program. However, should this be necessary the following procedure will be followed:

1. Two leaders will be assigned to escort the children to the toilet.
2. Leaders will enter the toilet to see if the toilet is empty and ready to use.
3. Leaders will remain at the toilet door, ensuring the children close the cubicle door adequately while making use of the toilet.
4. Children are then escorted back to children's area.
5. Should a child require assistance, leaders must maintain their line of sight with each other. And if there is prior knowledge that the child may not be able to accomplish toileting alone, *The Distressed Child Procedure* should be followed to request parental support.

Toilet visits must not be taken when only one child requires to go. It must be taken in groups. If only one child requests to go to the toilet, the leader will contact the parent/guardian directly.

3.2 High School Toileting Procedure

High-school youth (young people) are able to enter the toilet by themselves. As a leader, it is advised that you avoid lingering around the toilet area without reason to avoid unusual behaviour allegations.

3.3 Preschool Toileting Procedure

Leaders must call the child's parent when they need to go to the toilet or require a nappy change.

3.4 Special Needs Toileting Procedure

The Special needs ministry navigator handles all toileting needs of the children. A second adult is required to be present during all bathroom visits. Parents and volunteers are notified of this policy. Parents may choose not to have the designated church leader to toilet their child and may do this themselves if they prefer.

4. Safety Policy

4.1 Registrations (Check In/Out)

1. Every child must be checked in by their parent or guardian
2. An adult leader must always be positioned such that they can view the entrance/exit of the program and ensure procedure is being followed
3. Children may not be checked out unless the identity of the parent/guardian has been adequately confirmed by the following methods:
 - a. Parent/guardian has provided a corresponding pick-up card (which would have been given to them upon registration)
 - b. The room leader has sighted the parent/guardian
 - c. Child has sufficiently identified the parent/guardian (only in the instance that the other methods were not available)

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4.2 Visiting or New Children

Every visiting or new family must complete a registration form. This is important in case of an emergency, the occasional absent mindedness of a parents (if they forget their child) and for the conduction of a head count. It also has the added benefit of being able to follow up the family after their visit.

4.3 Distressed Child Procedure

A child may become distressed for many reasons. This procedure also applies to instances where parental support is required for toileting. There are three main variations to this procedure. In the event a child is distressed;

1. The parent may be called or texted on their mobile phone to come and pick up their child
2. Their ID number or name may be displayed on the screen in the auditorium signaling to the parent that they are needed in the program
3. If leaders are aware of where the parent is seated in the service, they may go and personally collect the parents to come and pick up their child. This option is to be used as a last resort

4.4 Supervision Policy

LifeHouse Church endeavors to uphold a minimum adult-to-child ratio in accordance with government recommendations, for the purpose of ensuring safety and providing an optimal learning environment for every child.

Our supervision policy is:

1. Every child must always be in line of sight of the leaders and workers in the program
2. One adult leader must remain in the room in the event of an emergency
3. Every program must uphold the adult-to-child ratio for their room. That is,

1-3 year olds	1:10
2-5 year olds	1:10
Primary School Kids	1:10
High-risk Activities	1:5
Special Needs	1:1

Please note that this does not apply to junior leaders (under 17 years). Junior leaders are not to be counted in the supervision ratios.

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our children's programs and activities. At the minimum it is expected that we uphold a rule of 1 adult leader and 1 junior leader per room. If the minimum ratios are not met, the Ministry Leader will decide whether to merge rooms.

4.6 Sick Child or Young Person Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children and young people at LifeHouse Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other individuals when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, individuals with the following symptoms should NOT be under our direct care:

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1. Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
2. Green or yellow runny nose
3. Eye or skin infections; and/or
4. Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

To prevent the spread of germs, toys and other resources must be cleaned regularly.

4.7 Check-In Medication

Lifesaving medications will be stored in a out of reach box near the sign-in desk. Qualified first aid trainers must only administer medication. Parents and/or guardians must:

- Complete and sign the medication book, located at the sign-in counter
- Clearly label medication with child's name and prescription information and action plan, if required
- Medications requiring refrigeration must be brought in cooler bag

5. Leader Conduct Policy

5.1 Standard of Conduct

Every leader should abide by the following regulations:

- Do not be alone with a child or young person at any time when on or off church grounds. Always stay in sight of other leaders.
- If the need to counsel arises, it is to be done in public view of other adult leaders, yet out of hearing range. Do not take children or young people into a solitary or dark place.
- Do not engage in prolonged private conversations with children or young people on social media or on the phone. Your relationship with the child or young person must be kept public. In the case where no other form of communication was readily available, leaders must report any prolonged conversations that contain sensitive content to their leader (for example: a teenager needing advice or if they intend to harm themselves).
- Do not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with ministry leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.
- Do not kiss a child or coax a child to kiss you.
- Do not engage in extended hugging or tickling/poking. A short side hug is acceptable or keep lower half of your body well away. Only young children (5 years or younger) are permitted on a leaders knee (no lap sitting). We encourage physical contact to be limited.
- Leaders must be easily identifiable by wearing t-shirts or Leaders ID Tag

5.2 Safe Driving Policy

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LifeHouse Church is committed to ensuring the safety and protection of those who attend our church services and events, children's and youth ministries, and for those who volunteer in these ministries. The following policy aims to protect the safety of all drivers and young people before, after, and during LifeHouse events and to ensure peace of mind for parents of these children and young people.

Young drivers are over-represented in car crashes due to various causes including inexperience, risky behaviour, and distractions. This policy aims to protect both young drivers and passengers.

5.2.1 Eligible Drivers and Car Ratios

All drivers must be either fully licenced or on green probationary plates and the car must be insured and roadworthy.

When transporting **young people** to, from, or during LifeHouse events, leaders are **not** allowed to transport young people alone. Leaders must maintain a minimum ratio of 1 leader: 2 children or 2 leaders: 1 child.

*Potential scenario: If you are transporting two young people home, they must be dropped off at the same location, otherwise you will be left alone with the other young person for the remainder of the trip.

Leaders are not permitted to drive a **child** alone to, from or during a LifeHouse Church service or event.

5.2.2 Exceptions

There are exceptions for family members or close relations. For an exemption to be considered, the parent/guardian must provide acceptance via text, email or other verifiable means stating they accept for this person to transport their child and accept for their child to be in the car alone with the driver. Verbal consent presents significant risk of miscommunication, therefore should not be relied upon.

5.2.3 Expectation of Drivers

If an eligible leader, worker or team member is asked to transport a young person to or from a LifeHouse Event or service, that person is representing LifeHouse Church.

We would expect they take extra care in obeying all road rules including but not limited to:

- No speeding;
- No hoon behaviour such as burnouts and dragging;
- No mobile phone use;
- Zero drug or blood alcohol level;
- Seatbelts to be worn by all passengers at all time, no sharing seatbelts;
- No deviating from intended destination

In the event that the driver purposefully disobeys road rules and drives unsafely, they will be asked to no longer drive under 18 year olds to, from or during LifeHouse services and events for a suitable length of time, at the discretion of the relevant Pastor. Reckless driving from employees of

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LifeHouse Church may be subjected to instant dismissal (refer to the Ministerial Code of Conduct for more information).

Any fines or infringements incurred while driving will be at the expense of the driver.

If the driver's health, whether illness or tiredness, is likely to affect their driving ability we would expect them to make alternative transport arrangements for their passengers.

5.2.4 Parental/Guardian Consent

Parents/Guardians must always be made aware of who is driving their child. The driver must contact the parents directly, rather than communicate through the child.

The parent/guardian must provide acceptance via text, email or other verifiable means stating they accept for this person to transport their child. Verbal consent presents significant risk of miscommunication, therefore should not be relied upon.

5.2.5 Non LifeHouse Events

If a driver is providing transport for children or youth as a result of relationship formed through LifeHouse, to an event that is not a LifeHouse service or event, the driver must inform parents of this. Drivers need to remember the trust already have in the driver through their involvement with Youth or Children's ministry at LifeHouse Church. The driver must behave and drive appropriately given the influence they have.

6. Curriculum

LifeHouse Church commits to sharing God's love for all children and young people by adopting a creditable and reliable curriculum and cautiously choosing aural and visual materials, such as videos, films, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics, that reflect an all-inclusive, positive and nurturing experience.

6.1 Appropriate Content

In accordance to the Australian Classification guidelines, any visual content being presented to children and young people aged 15 years and below without parental guidance must have a G rating.

7. Responding to Allegations or Concerns of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – Any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – Emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.

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- **Sexual abuse** – When an adult or someone who is stronger, bigger or older (includes other children) involves a child in a sexual activity by using their power over a child or taking advantage of a child's trust or exposing them to sexual content. Bribes or treats are often used to make them participate in the activity.
- **Neglect** – Depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at LifeHouse Church or during our sponsored programs or activities becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Child Protection Officer: Hollie-anne Tipping for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

It is our duty of care and moral/ethical obligation to ensure that every reasonable step is taken to deal with reports/disclosures consistently and appropriately. Every incident reported will be evaluated and assessed for a response and action.

7.1 Responding to Allegations or Disclosures

It is not the leaders or volunteers role to assess if a child has been abused. A leader needs to report when there are concerns that a child or young person is at risk of being abused based on their **physical appearance**, and/or **someone else discloses** that they know of a child or young person who has been/is at risk of being abused, or when a **child or young person discloses** they have been or are at risk of abuse.

When a disclosure occurs, you must:

- Remain calm and **listen** carefully
- **Reassure** the child they have done the right thing
- **Inform** the child that you need to tell people who can help
- Continue to nurture and minister to the child after the disclosure

Do not:

- Panic
- Start an investigation into the information (or probe the child for more information)
- Promise the child the abuse will stop
- Tell anyone who doesn't need to know

Please note that support is available to you after the disclosure to allow for debriefing.

7.2 Process for Reporting

If you have reasonable suspicion that any form of abuse has occurred or you have received a disclosure, you must report this immediately. To report you must:

1. Report to Safer Churches Officer: Hollie-anne Tipping, or to your Children's or Youth Pastor.
2. Complete an online incident report form. This form can be found at the bottom of the LifeHouse website under 'Policies & Forms', 'Incident Report'. This link is private and all information will go directly to appropriate leadership. The report needs to include: name and age of child, what you have been told, date and time of incident/s, and your name and contact details.
3. You may be followed up for more information if necessary.

In the event that no allegation or disclosure has occurred, yet you have observed unusual or suspicious behaviour, please report this immediately by following the above methods and selecting 'Unusual Behaviour' under 'Type'.

7.2.1 Protection for Those Reporting

If you report an abuse concern, your name will remain confidential from start to finish. The people who will know you have reported are those who receive the report. The issue may be elevated to the Australian Christian Churches State or National office and also to the police or child protection agencies. Your name may not be disclosed but if so you will be notified. This is purely for the purpose to ensure the abuse is investigated properly.