

PACIFIC CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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1. Introduction

The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), in strengthening its mechanisms for the protection of affected populations we work with, has adopted this Child Safeguarding Policy to minimize the risk of harm to children who come into contact with PCC activities and those working with or associated with PCC member churches.

PCC believes that all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation are an affront to children’s dignity as human beings. We believe that all children have a right to be safe at all times, and that all children have equal rights to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, regardless of their gender, nationality, age, religious or political beliefs, family background, economic status, legal status, ability, physical or mental health or criminal background, and that any form of child abuse or exploitation is unacceptable.

The PCC recognizes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has been ratified by 194 countries including all Pacific Island nations. The UNCRC is the main international human rights convention for children. A majority of the 52 articles within the UNCRC are concerned with children’s rights to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Two foundation principles of the UNCRC are the best interests of the child and participation. This means that any decision or action taken will always be done in the best interests of the child, and that children will be consulted and their views taken into account on all matters involving them.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is therefore to:

- Outline PCC’s commitment to child safeguarding;
- To guide the creation and maintenance of protective environments for children in delivery of PCC activities or PCC-funded activities;
- Guide PCC member churches on their child safeguarding obligations and in the development of their organizational child safeguarding policies and practices.

1.2 Scope and Application of this Policy

This policy applies to all PCC workers, volunteers, and partnering organisations. This policy applies to those individuals at all times and no distinction is made between their personal lives and professional lives.

The PCC, when entering into agreements or partnerships with external organisations, charities, associations and faith based organisations will, as a pre-condition to engagement, require the organisation to abide by this Policy and Code of Conduct. Partner organisations engaged in programmes

and activities that involve contact with children will be required to demonstrate that they have adequate child safeguarding policies and procedures in place.

2. Child Safeguarding Principles

PCC's approach to child safeguarding is guided by the following principles:

- a) Zero tolerance of child abuse:** Child abuse in any form and by anyone is never acceptable, and PCC has zero tolerance to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. PCC member churches are expected to take the same approach when developing their Child Safeguarding policy and procedures. Child abuse committed by PCC personnel will attract appropriate disciplinary and criminal sanctions.
- b) Best interest of the child:** In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.
- c) The safety and wellbeing of children is a shared responsibility:** All individuals have both a moral and legal duty of care towards children. Protecting children from harm and effectively managing risks to children requires commitment, support and cooperation of everyone involved in PCC programmes, services and activities. All personnel and partners must adhere to this Policy and will be held accountable through employee contracts, partner agreements and/or memorandum of understanding.
- d) Assessment and management of child safeguarding risks:** PCC recognises there are a number of potential risks associated with delivering its services to vulnerable children. PCC is committed to identifying and mitigating risks of harm to children that may be associated with the delivery of any of its programme, services and activities that involve contact with children or working with children. The PCC expects each Member Church to commit to undertaking a review of their current programs to assess any risks to children and develop mitigation strategies. The PCC also expects each member to commit to mainstreaming child protection into existing church programs where relevant, and conducting periodic reviews for any new or emerging child protection risks.
- e) Non-Discrimination:** All children are valued, and all children, without exception, have the right to freedom from abuse as set down in the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. It is also recognized that children from vulnerable groups and children with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and may require an increased level of care and support.
- f) Child participation:** PCC is committed to promoting children's participation, giving children a voice, and empowering children to protect themselves. PCC respects children's right to participate in any decision affecting them, and to have their views heard and acted upon. PCC will take steps to ensure

that all children know how to protect themselves, know what behaviour to expect from personnel and from each other, and know when and to whom to speak out if they feel uncomfortable or at risk.

3. Standards of Conduct Towards Children

PCC expects all personnel and partners to maintain a high standard of personal conduct in all their interactions with children. In both their work and personal life, they will conduct themselves in a manner that respects children's rights, protects children from harm, and reinforces the PCC's commitment to being child-safe.

The standards of conduct PCC expects of all personnel and partners is set out in the PCC Professional Conduct Policy and PCC Code of Conduct and all personnel and partners will be provided a copy of this Policy and must sign a declaration stating that they have read, understand and agree to comply with this Policy, PCC Professional Conduct Policy and the PCC Code of Conduct. In addition, in affirmation of PCC's commitment to Child Protection, all personnel and partners will be required to sign the Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct (See Appendix A).

4. Child Safe Recruitment & Human Resource Practices

PCC is committed to ensuring that all of its personnel are child-safe and will not engage anyone – directly or indirectly, paid or volunteer - in a position that involves contact with children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children. Child safeguarding will be incorporated into all personnel recruitment, training and human resource functions.

PCC will take all steps necessary to ensure that staff who are employed and volunteers who are engaged are appropriately screened for any potential risks they may pose to children. At a minimum, this should include conducting two verbal reference checks, one from the current or most recent employer, behavioural-based questions for staff who will be working with children, and a signed disclosure that a staff member has not been charged with child abuse or exploitation offenses. Ideally it will also include a criminal background check. If a criminal background check is not possible, alternative measures can be taken.

All contracts will contain provisions to warn, suspend, transfer to other duties, or to terminate an employee / volunteer or partner agreement in the event of a violation of the Child Safeguarding Policy or Codes of Conduct.

5. Training and Awareness on Child Safeguarding

PCC will ensure that this Policy and the Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct are widely publicised and fully understood by all personnel and partners through the following measures:

- The Policy and Code of Conduct will be posted in public areas of PCC offices.

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- Print copies of the Policy and Code of Conduct will be provided to all personnel and partners.
- All new personnel will be fully briefed on the Policy and Code of Conduct as part of the induction process; refresher training will be undertaken quarterly.
- All contractors, sub-contractors and partners will be briefed on the Policy and Code of Conduct as part of the contract / MOU development process.
- Personnel in position that involve working with children should receive in-depth, periodic training on child safeguarding, including recognizing signs of child abuse and how to respond.

6. Media and Communications

PCC personnel and partners must ensure that all depictions of children in their media, communications, reports and other publications are respectful of children, protect their privacy and dignity, and do no harm:

- All communications will portray children in a dignified and respectful manner and not as helpless victims;
- Children must be adequately clothed, in accordance with the context and local customs, and not depicted in a sexually suggestive manner;
- Informed consent from the child (subject to the child's age, maturity and development) and the child's parent/caregiver must be obtained before photographing or videoing a child. An explanation of how the photograph or video will be used must be provided. Legitimate consent must be obtained in writing, wherever possible;
- Vulnerable, homeless or at risk children should not have their images used or taken without permission, and if there is no guardian present (such as in the case of an abandoned child), consent must be obtained from the Director of Social Welfare for the use of their image.
- The image, personal details, location or other information that might identify a child survivor must not be published in any form.

7. Reporting & Response Procedures

PCC takes all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children very seriously. Child abuse in all its forms is a serious offence under Fijian law and threatens the well-being of the child and our communities. It is mandatory for all personnel to report immediately any suspected or alleged violation of this Policy or Code of Conduct, or any concerns they have for the safety or wellbeing of a child. Personnel who knowingly fail to report a violation of the Code of Conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

7.1 Reporting and response to conduct of PCC personnel and partners

Where a PCC staff reasonably suspects or receives an allegation of child abuse or a violation of the Code of Conduct by its personnel, the staff member must take appropriate action. PCC will:

- Develop an internal reporting mechanism
- Report any allegations or complaints to management and/or authorities as appropriate, depending on the nature and severity of the case.
- All information about child protection concerns and reports is to be kept confidential, discussed only with the Child Safeguarding Focal Point, and any other parties designated by them according to reporting requirements.

If the allegation involves child abuse or risk of harm to a child, the relevant manager or supervisor must immediately notify the Department of Social Welfare in accordance with the Inter-Agency Guidelines on Child Care and Protection so that appropriate steps can be taken to provide support and protection to the child, parallel to the disciplinary process. The Child Service Unit within the Ministry can be contacted by phone at 355 6056.

7.2 Reporting and response to child abuse by non-personnel

Through the course of their work with children, families and communities, PCC personnel and partners may become aware of an incident of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation of a child perpetrated by a family or community member. Religious leaders occupy a position of trust within the community, and have an obligation to speak up and ensure that any child who is being abused receives the support and protection they need.

Anyone who has concerns about the care or well-being of a child should immediately contact the TOLL-FREE NATIONAL CHILD HELPLINE (1325). It provides 24-hour, 7 day a week counselling support, case triage and referral.

In line with the Fiji Inter-Agency Guidelines on Child Care and Protection, NGOs and FBOs should:

- All personnel who receive a disclosure of child abuse, observe child abuse or have concerns that a child is at risk of or has been harmed are required to report immediately to the Department of Social Welfare or the nearest welfare officer.
- As a first point of contact, it may also be necessary to provide first line crisis support; accompany the child to seek medical treatment; ensure the child is safe and accompanied by an adult until the police / child welfare officer can take over.

Appendix A: Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct

All individuals engaged by the PCC (as employees, consultants or volunteers) are required to read, understand and comply with this Code of Conduct when interacting with children. This Code of Conduct is designed to protect children and also to protect individuals from false accusations of inappropriate behaviour or abuse.

I, _____ [insert name], acknowledge that I have read and understand the PCC Child Safeguarding Policy, and agree that:

I will:

- Treat all children with dignity, respect and compassion;
- Treat all children equally and without discrimination, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, disability, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, birth or other status;
- Conduct myself in a manner appropriate with my position in all my dealings with children;
- Be aware of cultural sensitivities as well as different practices and routines used by families of varying culture;
- Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working with or in the proximity of children (using a buddy or support system so that there are always at least two workers present);
- Respect children’s privacy and maintain confidentiality;
- Immediately report any breach of this Policy and Code of Conduct or any other concerns about a child’s safety or well-being (including becoming aware of a child self-harming) in accordance with the Child Welfare Act, this Policy and other applicable policies or procedures;
- Disclose any investigation, charges, or convictions for an offence that occurred prior to or during my employment / contractual obligations with the Government, or that are related to the safety or wellbeing of children;
- Comply with all Fijian laws relating to the care and protection of children.

And I will not:

- Use inappropriate language – whether of an offensive, demeaning, abusive, threatening or sexual nature – when speaking with or whilst in the presence of a child;
- Show preference or favouritism towards a particular child during the course of my work;
- Act in any way that embarrasses, shames, humiliates, or degrades a child, or otherwise emotionally abuse a child;
- Physically abuse a child or use any form of corporal punishment;
- Engage children in any form of activity that is demeaning, offensive, sexually provocative, abusive or culturally inappropriate or insensitive;

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- Hold, kiss, or touch a child in an inappropriate, unwelcome, or culturally insensitive way;
- Engage in any form of sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with a child;
- Sexually exploit a child, including paying for sexual services of a child, or facilitating or profiting from child prostitution;
- Sleep close to unsupervised children unless absolutely necessary, in which case I must obtain my supervisor's permission, and ensure that another adult is present if possible (noting that this does not apply to my own children);
- Do things of a personal nature that a child could (given their age and circumstances) do for themselves, including dressing, bathing and grooming;
- Invite unaccompanied children into my home without the permission of their parent or legal guardian, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger (and appropriate reporting procedures have been followed);
- Engage children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or development stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreation activities, or which is contrary to the Employment Regulations Promulgation 2007;
- Access, possess, create or distribute child pornography through any medium;
- Use computers, mobile phones or any other technology to harass, exploit or groom a child;
- Photograph or video a child without the written consent of the child and his/her parent or guardian;
- Share or place images of children taken in the course of my work through messaging services or personal social media, or otherwise use images of children contrary to the guidelines the National Child Safeguarding Policy;
- Give drugs, alcohol or other harmful substances to children.

By signing this document:

- I acknowledge that I have read and understood this Code of Conduct;
- I agree to comply with this Code of Conduct;
- I understand that a breach of this Code of Conduct will be taken very seriously and may lead to disciplinary action, including termination of services.
- I also understand that breach of this Code of Conduct could result in criminal prosecution; and
- I understand that the responsibility is on me to avoid actions or behaviours that are or could be construed as abusive to children.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Definitions

Term	Definition
Child	Every person under the age of 18.
Child abuse	Refers to all forms of child abuse, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical abuse; • emotional abuse; • neglect; • exploitation • sexual abuse; and • Exposure to family violence.
Child pornography	Photographs, audio, video, drawings or any other representation of a child which shows the child in a sexually suggestive way, including naked or semi-naked, or engaged in sexual acts.
Child safeguarding	Refers to the policies and procedures that organisations put in place to ensure its activities do not expose children to harm, including the risk of child abuse, and that any concerns about children’s safety within their organization or the communities where they work are appropriately reported.
Contact with Children	Work on any activity or in a position that involves or may involve contact with children, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment.
Emotional abuse	Any action that is not physical but that has a negative effect on the child’s health or physical, mental, moral, social, intellectual or emotional development. This can include name-calling, threatening, belittling, ridiculing, intimidating, isolating, ignoring or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment towards the child. It may also involve telling a child that they are worthless and unloved. These acts are within the control of the caregiver and are likely to impact or damage a child’s physical and social development or mental, emotional, or spiritual health.
Child exploitation	When a child is used in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child labour: Any work by a child which deprives children of their childhood and is negatively affecting their health, education, physical, mental, or social development. • Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: sexual abuse of a child where cash, gifts or other benefits are provided to the child or another person in exchange for sexual acts. The child is treated as a sexual and commercial object. This includes child prostitution, sex tourism, producing child pornography for money, and trafficking a child for sexual purposes.
Contractors	Refers to individuals or business enterprises who are engaged to supply or provide goods and or services.
Exposure to family or domestic violence	Child is exposed to domestic violence in the home by hearing, seeing, or experiencing the after-effects of the violence, but is not directly targeted by it.
Grooming	Acts intended to befriend and establish a relationship or emotional connection with a child to gain their trust, fear, or secrecy, with the intent to then sexually

	abuse, traffic, prostitute, or gain pornographic images of, the child. These acts can include giving gifts or special attention and can be done in person or online.
Neglect	Failure or refusal of caregivers to meet a child’s physical, developmental, social or emotional needs when they have the resources, money, knowledge or access to do so. This includes any special needs in relation to disability.
Partner organisation	Refers to any private sector or non-government organization that is working in partnership or in alignment with the PCC, including any organisation that receives funding from, or undertakes projects in conjunction with, the PCC.
Personnel	Personnel are people who employed by the PCC, engaged on a contract basis, or engaged on a voluntary or unpaid basis. This includes public officials, paid staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers and interns, whether paid or unpaid, temporary or permanent, full-time or part-time.
Physical abuse	Any physical act, including violence and maltreatment, which causes actual or likely harm or injury to the child, whether happening on an ongoing basis or as a single incident. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, pinching, burning, shoving, grabbing, throwing, scalding, suffocating, drowning, poisoning or overdosing on prescribed or otherwise medications, forced ingestion or choosing not to assist a child when a situation is causing them physical pain.
Sexual abuse	The involvement of a child in a sexual activity which he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give consent to, or is in violation of the laws of Fiji (most notably the <i>Crimes Decree 2009</i>). This can include the fondling of genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exposing the child to or involving the child in pornography.
Volunteers	Individuals who are providing services to private business, agencies, organisations, churches for little or no remuneration. This includes international volunteers and those who participate in organized programs as well as those who are here in their own individual capacity.
Working with children	Means being engaged in an activity or a position where contact with children would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity/position, and the contact is not incidental to the activity. Working includes volunteering or other unpaid works.