Armadale Baptist Church Community

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

The Armadale Baptist Church Community comprises the Armadale Baptist Church Fellowship, the Armadale Baptist Church Community Arts Hub, the Armadale Baptist Church Community Garden, Armadale Baptist Missional Communities and attendees of the Armadale Baptist Church sessions presented on zoom. The Armadale Baptist Community is made up of people of all ages and backgrounds, including babies, children and youth, who engage in a broad range of activities.

The Armadale Baptist Community acknowledges that we meet on the Traditional Lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples of the East Kulin Nations and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge their living connection to Country, relationship with the land and all living things extending back tens of thousands of years.

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates the strong commitment of the leadership, staff, community participants and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our community keeps children and vulnerable adults safe from harm, including child abuse.

Commitment to child safety

All children and vulnerable adults who come to Armadale Baptist Church, for whatever reason, have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority and we have a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. We aim to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and have fun while participating in the various activities offered by the Armadale Baptist Church Community.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how the Armadale Baptist Church Community prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, community participants, children and other individuals who are part of the Armadale Baptist Community. This policy applies to all activities of the Armadale Baptist Church Community.

Definitions

Leadership means the pastor and diaconate

*Members (of the Armadale Baptist Church Community)* mean those who lead community activities

Child abuse means:

a sexual offence committed against a child

an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming

physical violence against a child

causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child

serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to the Armadale Baptist Church related to one or more of the following:

our services or dealings with individuals

allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with the Armadale Baptist Church Community

disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person

the conduct of a child or young person at Armadale Baptist Church

the inadequate handling of a prior concern

general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Role of the Leadership

The Armadale Baptist Church Leadership (“the leadership”) has the role of making sure the Armadale Baptist Community prioritises children’s safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children’s safety.

The leadership will champion and model a child safe culture in the Armadale Baptist Church Community. We encourage anyone involved with the Armadale Baptist Church Community to report a child safety concern. The leadership will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

Everyone in the Armadale Baptist Church Community has a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm. The leadership will make sure that staff and volunteers are conducting risk assessments and taking action to manage risks in accordance with this policy. They will also ensure that appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed.

The leadership will conduct an annual review of how effectively the Armadale Baptist Church Community is delivering child safety and wellbeing. The input of people involved with the Armadale Baptist Church Community will be sought as part of this review at AGM.

Children’s empowerment and participation

Armadale Baptist Church is a child-centred community. We actively seek to include children’s views and ideas in our organisational planning, delivery of services and management of facilities.

We want children to develop new friends through the Armadale Baptist Church Community and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights including the right to be safe at Armadale Baptist Church. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our community. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

Armadale Baptist Church Community values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families and supports children’s participation in the following ways:

Regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.

Consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing. Children’s views are collected by staff, provided to management and considered in the decision-making process.

Information provided to children and families about the Armadale Baptist Church Community activities, staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children.

Families and communities

The Armadale Baptist Church Community recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

At the annual general meeting each year, we elect the deacons and all community members are invited to share their thoughts on the direction of the Armadale Baptist Church Community for the next year.

Armadale Baptist Church Community provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website

including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures, in our bi monthly communications.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

Armadale Baptist Church Community is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included.

Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

an Acknowledgement of Country at all events

consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices in the Armadale Baptist Church Community programs

providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including through performance and during Armadale Baptist Church Community activities

supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal organisations

providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children

seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families and communities on their experience at Armadale Baptist Church Community, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

provide training for the leadership, staff and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety

welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families

offer students and families through our enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs

have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified

deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our students, their interests and cultures

strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in leadership, staff and members – we are committed to consulting with, and appointing representatives of the prominent ethnic groups in our community

acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our activities

have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity

commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Code of Conduct

Armadale Baptist Church Community has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, volunteers and the leadership must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person’s involvement in the community.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

Recruiting staff and volunteers

Armadale Baptist Church Community puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers as outlined in the recruitment and screening policy. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the leadership must also be screened.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children’s personal information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. Members of the leadership must hold a valid Working with Children Check and a national Police Check is required.

Supporting staff and volunteers

Armadale Baptist Church Community is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. Armadale Baptist Church Community assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

All Armadale Baptist Church Community leaders, staff and volunteers are required to complete child safety training. Training will be recorded in the Child Safety Training Action Plan.

Staff and volunteers will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for compliance with our Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with our Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Armadale Baptist Church Community has a complaint handling policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet will be provided for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at Armadale Baptist Church Community must report it in accordance with the complaint handling policy. Armadale Baptist Church Community staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children’s safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation

having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at Armadale Baptist Church Community

not allowing unsupervised contact with children at Armadale Baptist Church Community

removing their access to the Armadale Baptist Church Community IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to secretary@armadalebaptistchurch.org or you can speak with Jolinda Watson, the Child Safety Person for the congregation or Jude Waldron, the Child Safety person for the Armadale Community Arts Hub.

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Child Safety Person

Armadale Baptist Church Community has one trained child safety person with responsibility for responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns.

Child safety persons are introduced to children so they know and understand who the appointed officers are, and how and when they may contact them. Photos and names of the child safety persons are displayed on our noticeboard and in our newsletters.

If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a child safety person, they may report their concern to Jude Waldron.

Record keeping

Armadale Baptist Church Community is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by Armadale Baptist Church Community for at least 45 years.

Information sharing

Armadale Baptist Church Community may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Armadale Baptist Church Community will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

Risk management

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Armadale Baptist Church Community.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm in the Armadale Baptist Church Community. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in the Armadale Baptist Church Community. The Leadership is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a member of staff while working with us to ensure child safety. See also Code of Conduct above.

**Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct**

Armadale Baptist Church Community will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other child safety and wellbeing policies (see list below). Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action. More information can be found in our disciplinary policy.

Review

Armadale Baptist Church Community will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or ‘near miss’. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our community at AGM and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the Leadership and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

Supporting documents – Armadale Baptist Church Community child safety and wellbeing system

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across all of our activities:

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Code of Conduct

complaint handling policy

recruitment and screening policy

disciplinary policy

risk management plan

child safe training plan.

Supporting legislation

*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* *(Vic)* (including Child Safe Standards)

*Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* *(Vic)* (including reporting to Child Protection)

*Crimes Act 1958* *(Vic)* (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)

Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)