

# Bentley Baptist Church Safe Church Manual

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## 1. Bentley's Approach to Safe Church

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Bentley Baptist Church (“BBC”) is an incorporated entity under the *Associations Incorporation Act 2015* (WA) and is affiliated with the Baptist Churches of Western Australia Inc. BBC is a fellowship of Christian believers who worship, fellowship and minister together. The BBC is made up of members, regular Christian attendees, visitors and other participants in our services and activities. BBC is not exclusive and anyone who wishes to attend and participate is welcome to do so. BBC recognises that there are legal and moral obligations that require it to provide a safe place for people to participate. Changes in laws are likely to impose greater obligations on the BBC in relation to workplace safety. Recent revelations in Royal Commissions on Child Sexual Abuse highlight the need for a level of vigilance in relation to the protection of children. Moreover, there is a fundamental obligation to care for those around us and to protect those most vulnerable in our society, namely children and those with disabilities or infirmities.

**Key Point:** We have moral and legal obligations in terms of safety and protection of children and other vulnerable individuals

BBC operates with:

- very few paid staff, currently a Full-time Lead Pastor, a Part-time Youth Pastor, a casual Associate Pastor, and a casual administrator;
- a voluntary Church Council who govern the church; and
- a large number of voluntary leaders who are involved in assisting our community and in undertaking the tasks of worship, fellowship and ministry.

BBC, like many or most other churches, relies on the good will of its congregation to fulfil the tasks necessary to enable worship, fellowship and ministry. We draw on people who are frequently time-poor but who passionately give and care greatly. BBC is not a large corporate entity with lots of paid employees, but a community of people who come together because of a shared commitment to Christ and a desire to express Christ’s love in the community of BBC.

Whilst we accept the responsibility of providing a safe church and strongly desire the safety of our congregation and particularly for the protection of our children, we must adopt a system that is real and workable and appropriate to our community. We do not wish to create such a burden on volunteers that they simply refuse to be involved. We do not wish to set such high standards that no activity is ever undertaken. We do not wish to operate in an environment where people cannot share their journeys, struggles and failures for fear or repercussions. We seek to manage high areas of risk with appropriate responses, keeping in mind that those least able to protect themselves do require greater protection from the church leaders.

**Key Point:** We seek to balance our obligations and the paramount obligation to protect children with the reality of our actual church environment

The Safe Church Program of the Baptist Union of WA is based around the concepts of: (1) Safe Leaders; (2) Safe Programs; and (3) Reporting of Abuse. BBC endorses and adopts those principles and has built its program around it and has modified its material to suit BBC.

**Key point:** We achieve safety through safe leaders, safe programs and an appropriate reporting of suspected abuse.

Much of what is done in BBC is inherently safe and without the need for formal steps to control the activity or the leadership of it (other than in the ordinary course of the control through the Church Council and the Senior Pastor). The greatest focus is, as it should be, in areas where the risk to participants, and specifically children, is higher. BBC also acknowledges that many activities arise through or within the church and are not formal programs of the church (eg: a church family picnic). In these circumstances, people participate in their private and family capacity and do not require church approval processes to undertake it or special checks on leaders – it is community behaving as a community.

BBC is required by the Baptist Churches to formalise some appointments and the Church Council has appointed:

- the Senior Pastor as the Safe Church Reporting Officer (“SCRO”); and
- a Church member as the Church Safety Officer (“CSO”).

BBC recognises that fundamentally the responsibility for a safe church, and the implementation and controls of it, are that of the Senior Pastor. The Church Council operates in its oversight and governance role. The Senior Pastor rightly expects Hub Leaders to work with Ministry leaders to execute this program.

## 2. Safe Church Policy

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### Our Church

Bentley Baptist Church (“BBC”) is a local congregation aligned with the Baptist Churches of Western Australia and the international Baptist Churches, however it is an independent and separately incorporated association. As a church our core role is to be a place of worship, fellowship, service and ministry proclaiming and living the good news of Jesus. Our church members appoint a Council to be the governing body of the church. The members also appoint a Senior Pastor who is to lead and manage the church. Ultimately all paid employees and volunteers who take on roles within the church report to the Senior Pastor.

### Our Church is to be a safe place

BBC is a Christian community committed to living out the teachings of Jesus, spreading the grace of God and to faithfully serve God. Inherent in that commitment is the desire to “love our neighbour as ourselves”. It is therefore paramount that our church is a safe place, where those who attend our church and our programs are safe. We acknowledge that we are all broken people and that we all sin. We are called to love our brothers and sisters, regardless. It is God’s role to judge. However, we have a parallel and equally important foundation and that is to protect the weak, insecure and vulnerable.

Safety goes beyond physical safety but includes emotional and psychological and specifically goes to the protection of vulnerable individuals (specifically children and the disabled or infirm) from abuse (whether physical, sexual, psychological or emotional). Regardless of any rules, programs or policies, each member of BBC and each participant in our services and functions has a role to do no harm to another and to act to prevent harm to others whenever possible. BBC believes that we can achieve being a safe church by: (1) Having Safe Leaders; (2) Running Safe Programs; and (3) Reporting suspected abuse as appropriate.

### We appoint safe leaders

In regard to Safe Leaders:

- BBC requires all leaders in child related activities to hold a current WA Working with Children Check and a National Police Clearance (less than 3 years old) and if not clear, it must be accepted and approved by the Council
- The SCRO is to maintain a register of all leaders in child related activities.
- All ministry leaders, council members and youth team members are to complete the Baptist Churches of WA “Application for Safe Churches Leadership” which is to be assessed by the Senior Pastor, or in the case of the Senior Pastor the Chair of Council.
- The Senior Pastor is to set and maintain appropriate appointment processes for ministry leadership positions.

We are committed to ongoing training of our leaders and to regular monitoring and supervision.

### We run safe programs

BBC has created a Hazard Register which outlines the major hazards of the churches programs and how those hazards are managed. Hub leaders and ministry leaders take responsibility for safe programs including inducting new team members and ensuring the controls in the Hazard Register are implemented and updated. Additional resources for reporting incidents, responding to crisis and, where relevant, documentation to assess risk and determine whether programs proceed are available from the BBC Church Administration Office. Further, our leaders remain committed to providing programs and church interactions that are safe physically, emotionally and psychologically and assess each program accordingly.

### Where appropriate we report suspected abuse

BBC believes that there are certain moral (if not legal) obligations to report abuse in 3 broad areas:

- Where alleged or suspected abuse has occurred within a BBC environment, the matter will be reported to the Baptist Churches of WA, and if relevant to the Police and the Department of Child Protection.
- Where there has been a disclosure or discovery relating to an individual in circumstances where the individual attends BBC, the SCRO will report the to the Baptist Churches of WA along with recommendations and, if necessary, BBC will take preventative actions.
- In the event that a leader becomes aware of abuse of a child and the alleged or suspected perpetrator (the “person of concern”) is not a person who attends BBC, the matter is to be reported to the SCRO who will report the matter to the Baptist Churches of WA.

### **3. Statement on Safe Leaders**

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In a formal sense, BBC is a member driven incorporated association who elects a Council to govern the church. The Council is not responsible for managing the church but to ensure there is an appropriate level of governance and control. The membership also appoints a Senior Pastor to lead and manage the Church. This is all set out in the Church Constitution and established the requirements for membership, Council and church operations. The Senior Pastor is responsible for the leadership and management of all church operations and effectively all employees, volunteers and ministry leaders report to her or him (sometimes through another appointed person). Many church members and participants are also involved in the running and coordinating of the actions of the church and BBC actively encourages everyone to get involved. In establishing a Safe Church, BBC sets the following guides or requirements.

#### **Church Council**

The Church Council appointment process is set in the Church Constitution along with the expected requirements for Council members and their functions. Council members are voted by the Church Membership and this is sufficient to ensure a Safe Church given their role. Church Council is required to regularly review the Safe Church actions and it should be a regular item on its agenda.

#### **Ministry Staff and Youth Team Leaders**

Ministry Staff and Youth/Children Team Leaders are required to:

- (a) have and maintain a current WA Working with Children Check;
- (b) A National Police Clearance less than 3 years old (if not clear – it must be accepted and approved by Council) and
- (c) have completed the Baptist Churches of WA “Application for Safe Churches Leadership” and then have that reviewed and approved prior to appointment by:
  - the Chair of the Church Council for the Senior Pastor; the Senior Pastor for all Ministry positions in the church (although the Senior Pastor may delegate Youth Team Leaders to any Paid Pastoral Staff-member in charge of youth and children

The Senior Pastor is to have and maintain a current register of all people working with children which has a WWCC number and the card has been viewed and/or a copy is on file and a copy of the National Police Clearance. Young people (under 18) do not require a WWCC but must be supervised by an adult at all times when working with children. Each adult working with children must also supply two referees as to their suitability for working with children and these referees should be contacted and a register of referees is to be kept.

These obligations arise in circumstances where a church activity removes the child from the direct supervision of their parents or guardians (or person approved by the parent or guardian). For example, when children head out of the congregation for Kids Church – the teachers are required to have a WWCC. If the parent and child go to the crèche and remain with them but another person is working with the kids in the same room – no WWCC is required by the parent. Where a volunteer only occasionally assists (less than 5 times per year) and others have a WWCC, the occasional volunteer does not need a WWCC.

#### **Other Ministry positions not involving Children**

There are many other people appointed in various roles throughout the church operations. It is the responsibility of the Senior Pastor to establish and maintain appropriate processes for those positions acknowledging that it would be rarely justified in being extensive, formal or detailed.

#### **All Roles**

We remain committed to regular training of our ministry leaders and to their ongoing monitoring and supervision. We don't want them feeling isolated, alone, unsupported or out of their depth. By providing this ongoing support we protect them and our children and vulnerable participants. The Senior Pastor is responsible for ensuring the training, supervision and monitoring is in place.

#### 4. Statement on Safe Programs

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Safety in BBC programs is established through hazard management, planning our programs and being prepared for incidents before they arise.

##### **Hazard Management**

The principal process for ensuring safety in BBC programs is through the operation of BBC's Hazard Register. This contains a list of the hazards (things that can cause harm) identified in our programs, then assesses the risks (likelihood) and consequences to rate each hazard and outlines the controls put into place to effectively manage those risks appropriately. With the controls in place, the risk rating then determines the appropriate actions which are stated in the Register.

BBC's Hazard management is focussed on controlling the hazards that pose the greatest risk and highest consequences and to implement reasonable controls. We recognise the best process for managing hazards is through a formal hazard identification process, followed by assessment and then putting controls in place. We hold the tension of managing actual risks, with the knowledge that our actions occur predominately through volunteers and participants. We seek to implement controls that do not require extensive processes or documentation unless absolutely necessary.

The Church Safety Officer is responsible for maintaining the Hazard Register and periodically checking that the controls are in place.

Any new activity to be conducted that is not covered in the Hazard Register should be assessed and recorded in the Hazard Register. It is the responsibility of the Hub Leaders to ensure this occurs. They are also responsible for ensuring the controls outlined are actually in place.

**Key Point:** BBC has established a Hazard Register that lists our hazards and the controls to be in place for safety.

##### **Planning our programs**

When we conduct our programs, it is expected that the program leader reviews the Hazard Register (see **Appendix A**) and plans according to the controls outlined. If the activity has not been assessed the details should be recorded in the Hazard Register and submitted to the Church Safety Officer before the activity is to proceed.

If the risk rating is:

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|--------|--|
| Green: | no further action is required  |
| Amber: | Matter recorded in the Hazard Register and approved by Church Safety Officer |
| Red:   | Activity cannot proceed until risk rating is reduced to amber.               |

In assessing the hazards of our programs, we not only consider the physical hazards but are conscious of actions or events that damage reputation, standing, finances and property as well. Specifically in relation to children, we acknowledge that requirements to have WWCC and references may not always catch a person who has devious intentions towards children and are conscious of the need to put into place controls so that such a person, as far as possible, unable to act on those intentions. The additional benefit is that these measures should also protect innocent participants from any spurious claims.

In addition to the above, our leaders consider each program and event regularly to assess whether the program is safe in terms of physical safety, emotional safety and psychological safety. We are aware that we hold a duty of care to those who participate in our church activities and seek, at every stage, to uphold that duty.

We recognise individual differences and seek to provide places and experiences that manage these differences in a respectful and positive manner.

We are mindful on individual boundaries (physical, emotional and psychological) and seek to respect an individual's boundaries and commit to preserving boundaries by addressing boundary "wanderers" and "violators".

We see the enormous benefit of teams and team ministry not only for participants but for team members themselves. We promote and build teams and avoid, where possible, ministries and circumstances where a leader is alone in their

ministry. Specifically, around children it is unacceptable for team members to be alone (and away from others or in a different area) with a child.

We expect our leaders to stop and assess their programs prior to starting and then regularly throughout to consider safety.

We are conscious that physical safety is just one aspect of this responsibility and that we must create places where participants are emotional and psychological safety – where they are not bullied, intimidated, threatened, made to feel inferior, unworthy, damaged or broken. All are made in the image of God and worthy of His love and therefore our love.

Our leaders remain committed to keep in mind those who are vulnerable and at risk and to take specific steps for the protection and care of those individuals.

**Key point:** New activities should be assessed in line with the Hazard Register and appropriate controls put into place.

### **Preparation for incidents**

We acknowledge the importance of care for all people in the event that a major incident occurs. Our first priority will be to provide care, support and counselling of those affected by any incident. This will be co-ordinated through the Senior Pastor who may seek external support and assistance as required. Any media interaction is to be through either the Senior Pastor or Chair of Council (or person appointed or delegated by them). Decisions and actions of the church should be managed through the Senior Pastor and Church Council. A copy of the incident response template is held in the church office.

## 5. Statement on Reporting Abuse

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Certain professions in our society have a legal obligation to report to the police and statutory authorities (such as the Department of Child Protection) disclosed or suspected child abuse. These include Police Officers, Medical Practitioners and Teachers. The “Church” and leaders of the Church do not currently have a legal obligation to do so but may do so in the near future. The issue of whether the Church has a moral obligation is vexed to say the least. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has been a damning blight on the Christian Community and the actions of some organisations to deliberately cover up actions that occurred on its watch is repugnant, unjustified and immoral. BBC cannot and will not cover up any allegation of abuse that occurs within its operations or stand by whilst children are at risk.

**Key Point:** Any abuse within church programs will be reported and not covered up.

However, access to God is not restricted to the holy ones amongst us. We are all broken and fallen individuals and some significantly so. The church should be a place where all individuals can find a place of worship and fellowship and in safety. At times some individuals will have confessed to past misdeeds, which raises the question of whether the leadership then has a moral obligation to report that action. Other may disclose that they were a victim of abuse. All people, particularly children have a right to be protected. We value freedom to share our lives within the Christian community, and to be empowered in our own decision making which can impact on how we respond to matters raised.

In any action, BBC seeks to treat people with dignity, respect, fairness and where appropriate empowering adult victims to determine the process. Suspicions and allegations are not always founded and the consequences of false identification can be tragic.

In striking that balance, BBC has established a reporting guide under 3 broad categories:

- Where alleged or suspected abuse has occurred within a BBC environment.
- Where there has been a disclosure or discovery relating to an individual in circumstances where it may pose a risk to vulnerable individuals within BBC.
- In the event that a leader become aware of abuse of a child that is unrelated to the operations of BBC.

**Key Point:** Suspected abuse or disclosure of abuse may result in different reporting outcomes depending on the circumstance and the risk to children.

The Church has appointed the Senior Pastor to be the Safe Church Reporting Officer (“SCRO”) and this position effectively controls these processes.

### **Suspected Abuse in a BBC program or connected to BBC Leaders**

In the event that an allegation of abuse is made, or a disclosure of abuse is given, or a ministry leader has on reasonable grounds a suspicion that abuse is or has occurred to a child while participating in, or in connection with a BBC event or program:

1. The ministry leader must (**mandatory**) report the matter immediately to the SCRO.
2. The SCRO will assess, report the matter to the Baptist Church Office and collectively a decision will be made in regard to reporting the matter to DCP and/or the Police and what further action will be undertaken which is:
  - almost certainly going to involve suspending the individual from any further ministry until the matter is resolved (and may go as far as requesting they suspend attending church and/or have a person(s) appointed to chaperone them while on the premises); and
  - likely to result in further investigations
3. The SCRO is to keep detailed confidential notes on all disclosures and actions that arise from it.
4. As far as possible the individual is to be treated with respect. The matter is not to be publicly disclosed. The matter should be reported to the Church Council under strict confidence. In the event that the Police or DCP commence any formal proceedings, this is the point at which the Church members are to be informed.

This includes any past programs and involves any allegation that related to any past Ministry Team Leaders, Ministry Team Members, Pastor or Council Member, including where the allegation is in areas not within the program or church activity.



**Key Point:** Suspected or disclosed abuse in our programs will be reported and appropriate steps taken for further action including investigations, care for victims and the care for persons alleged of committing abuse.

### **Individuals Who May Pose a threat to children in BBC**

In the event that a member or participant in BBC programs has been provided information that an individual (who is not a ministry leader working with children – for which the prior process will apply) within the church poses a significant threat to the children in the church, then this should be reported immediately to the SCRO and the SCRO will report to the Baptist Churches of WA.

The SCRO must assess the information provided to her or him and assess whether there is any substance to a claim that the individual poses a threat to the children of the church. It is almost certain that this will result in a discussion between the SCRO and the individual prior to any notification.

If the SCRO forms the view that there may be a risk to children, the matter is to be disclosed by the SCRO to the Baptist Churches of WA to report the matter and then determine an appropriate course of action. An example might be that a new person attending church tells a member of the church that he has been recently released from prison having served 5 years for committing a sexual act on a child but that in prison he has become a Christian and now wants to fellowship with BBC would warrant reporting to the SCRO and assessment. Another example may be where a person has sort to interact with young children (not her or his own) and although nothing obvious has or is occurring, the parents request that the person does not continue the interaction, but the person continues to do so.

There may be circumstances where the SCRO does not believe there is any reasonable basis for concluding that there is a risk. For example, where a woman confesses that as a young person of 16 had consensual sex with another person aged 15. Or the disclosure of a 75 year old man that he slept with his girlfriend when he was 18 and she was 15 and whom he was then married when she turned 18 and they have been married ever since is unlikely to require further action. These may result in the SCRO making a report but with a recommendation that no action is required.

The concern here is the protection of children balanced with being a caring and accepting church of broken and fallen individuals. Even a Sunday morning service is uncontrolled in some respect. Concerns may be about the risk of an individual taking a child out of view and offending against the child. An appropriate plan will be devised and implemented by the SCRO in collaboration with the Baptist Churches of WA. This will typically result in an Individual Accountability and Safety Agreement being reached between the person and the SCRO (with agreement of the Baptist Churches of WA). The SCRO is to disclose the plan and circumstances only to those within BBC who need to know to ensure protection of children.

It is not a desired outcome that an individual is told they are not welcome at church or (at a higher level) a Restraining Order issued against that individual precluding them from attending. Reasonable actions may include appointing chaperons to accompany him or her at all times or appointing and managing internal security around all children including areas of risk. However, if it is not possible to appropriately manage the risks, or there is an unwillingness of the person to agree to terms and controls, exclusion from BBC may be necessary.

**Key Point:** We act with a paramount concern for protection of children yet hold that not all bad past behaviour puts individuals at risk.

### **Disclosure or Suspected Abuse where the person of concern is not connected to BBC.**

In walking the journey of life with people who come into contact with BBC, church members and ministry leaders may come across circumstances where abuse (sexual, physical or emotional) is disclosed or suspected. This may have nothing to do with the activities within the church programs but is what is occurring in the private life of people we come into contact with. These interactions may also reveal historic matters by victims who may, or may not, wish for the perpetrator to the “brought to justice”. This disclosure or suspicion does not then impose a legal obligation to report it. We seek to protect all children, but are cautious about becoming a place that pushes away broken people or embeds a behaviour of hiding what is actually occurring or imposing actions on victims before there are ready for matters to become public.

In these circumstances, BBC members and ministry leaders are to report the matter to the SCRO. The general rule is that the SCRO will report the matter to the Baptist Churches of WA and an agreement reaches about appropriate actions.

In making a report, the SCRO should make an assessment of the risk to children and provide clear recommendations as to the process to follow. It is possible that where there has been an “early suspicion” the outcome may be a “watch and monitor” until the level of suspicion is sufficient to act. For example The Youth Pastor sees a 15 year old boy with significant bruising around the face and on asking “how did the other guy fair” the youth tells him that it was his dad who just lost the plot at him for not taking out the rubbish. The father does not attend church and the attendance at youth group is the only interaction by the family with the church. The youth says that nothing like this has ever occurred before and the youth says his father is very sorry and the youth doesn’t want to do anything about it. The Youth Pastor advises the SCRO. The SCRO then advises the Baptist Churches of WA. The SCRO report contains a recommendation that the matter is watched and monitored but that no further action would be required unless there was any further evidence of abuse. In this case the Youth Pastor to keep an eye out for any further signs. No further evidence arises over the next 18 to 24 months and no further action is taken.

Other circumstances to consider are if the matter is already known (for example it arose in a school environment which has been reported or DCP is already known to be involved) or in the case of historic abuse what the desire of the victim is.

**Key Point:** We will act to protect children, and will generally report to BCWA however the outcome may vary.