

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN AUSTRALIA

DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse involves a misuse of power and a betrayal by an adult of a child's trust. It may include neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse.

Child sexual abuse is a perversion and generally includes one or more of the following: sexual intercourse with a child; oral or anal sex with a child; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a child; voyeurism of a child; indecent exposure to a child; or soliciting a child for sexual conduct. It may include sexting with a minor or involvement with child pornography.

POLICY STATEMENT

*Children are a sacred trust, an "inheritance from Jehovah."
(Psalm 127:3)*

The care and safeguarding of children and the promotion of their welfare is of the utmost concern and importance to all Christians. This is in harmony with the long-standing and widely published religious principles of Jehovah's Witnesses, as reflected in the articles that are set forth at the end of this Policy.¹

In this document, references to parents apply equally to legal guardians or other persons who hold parental responsibility for a minor.

1

Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse and consider it to be a serious sin and a crime. (Romans 12:9) We do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the secular authorities.—Romans 13:1-4.

2

We believe that parents have the primary responsibility for the protection, safety, and instruction of their children. Therefore, parents who are members of the congregation must be vigilant in exercising their responsibility at all times and are expected to:

- (a) have direct and active involvement in their children's lives;
- (b) appropriately educate themselves and their children about child abuse; and
- (c) encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:3.

3

We do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction.ⁱⁱ (Ephesians 6:4) The congregation does not provide or sponsor such activities as crèches, schools, orphanages, Sunday Schools, hospitals, sports clubs, day-care centres, youth groups, or any other activities which separate children from their parents.

4

Jehovah's Witnesses publish an abundance of Scriptural information to assist parents to fulfil their responsibility to protect their children.

5

Conversations between congregation members and congregation elders relating to spiritual counselling or assistance are confidential. However, in cases of child abuse, the elders will consult with the Australasia branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses and will comply with any relevant secular reporting laws.—Romans 13:1.

6

A victim and his or her parent(s) have the absolute right to report an allegation of child abuse to the secular authorities. (Galatians 6:5) In addition, any congregation member who learns of child abuse may choose to report the matter to the secular authorities.

7

The elders will conduct a Scriptural investigation of every allegation of child sexual abuse that involves a member of the congregation. They will treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. (Colossians 3:12) As spiritual and confidential counsellors, the elders will carefully listen with empathy when a victim desires to express himself or herself to them. (Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 32:1, 2; James 1:19) A victim or his or her family may also choose to consult a mental-health professional.

8

As soon as possible, the elders will ensure that an alleged incident of child abuse is reported to the victim's parent(s). Where the alleged abuser is one of the victim's parents, the elders would report the alleged incident not to the alleged abuser, but to the other parent.

9

If congregation elders learn of an allegation of child abuse in which a child may still be at risk of harm, they will ensure that a report to the police or other appropriate authorities is made immediately.

10

A victim of child abuse is never required to confront his or her alleged abuser. Moreover, if the victim prefers, allegations can be made in the form of a written statement. When congregation elders investigate an allegation, they will meet not with the minor victim, but with the child's parent(s). Adults who were victims of child abuse may be accompanied by a confidant of either gender to provide them with moral support when meeting with the elders. While not required or encouraged, if an adult who was a victim of child abuse wishes to present testimony when a congregation judicial committee meets with an alleged abuser, this is allowed.

11

A member of the congregation who is an unrepentant child abuser is expelled from the congregation and is no longer considered one of Jehovah's Witnesses.—1 Corinthians 5:13.

12

A person who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any privileges or to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation for many years, if ever. ⁱⁱⁱ

13

When a member of the congregation has been found (either by a congregation judicial committee or the secular authorities) to have engaged in child sexual abuse, restrictions will be imposed on the individual's congregation activities. He or she will be specifically admonished not to be alone in the company of children, not to cultivate friendships with children, or display any affection for children other than his or her own when legally entitled to do so. In addition, congregation elders will inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children's interaction with an individual who has engaged in child sexual abuse.

14

This Policy applies to all congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia.

15

This Policy will be monitored for compliance by the Australasia Branch Committee.

16

This Policy will be reviewed by the Australasia Branch Committee at least once every three years.

NOTES

ⁱ Information may be found in the following publications, all published by Jehovah's Witnesses:

The Watchtower, October 1, 1983, "Help for the Victims of Incest."

The Watchtower, January 1, 1997, "Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked."

Awake!, October 8, 1991, "The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse," "The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse," and "A Time to Heal."

Awake!, October 8, 1993, "Your Child Is in Danger!", "How Can We Protect Our Children?", and "Prevention in the Home."

Awake!, October 2007, "A Danger That Concerns Every Parent," "How to Protect Your Children," and "Make Your Family a Safe Haven."

Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work, Volume 1, chapter 32: "How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?"

Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask, Question 8: "What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?"

"We Protect Our Children" (https://tv.jw.org/#en/video/VODStudio/pub-jwban_201507_2_VIDEO)

"Protect Your Children" (https://tv.jw.org/#en/video/VODChildren/pub-pk_17_VIDEO)

ⁱⁱ *Learn From the Great Teacher*, pp. 57-61, 170-171; *The Watchtower*, October 1, 2008, "How to Be a Good Father;" *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2010, "Talk to Your Children About Sex;" "How Can Parents Teach Their Children About Sex?" (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/parents-teach-children-about-sex/>).

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1997, "Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked."

Many publications of Jehovah's Witnesses on this subject can be read or downloaded on the www.jw.org website.