



CFC CHURCHES POLICY	CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY
POLICY AREA	Governance
VERSION	CFC.GOV.5.1
EFFECTIVE DATE	12 December 2022
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CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

CFC Churches are committed to responding to critical incidents biblically and effectively, and in a manner that is professional and compassionate.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN (CIRP)

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is an event or series of events that is sudden, overwhelming, threatening or prolonged. A critical incident has the potential to impact the church sufficiently enough to affect the day-to-day operations of the church or cause a traumatic reaction.

Examples of critical incidents include, but are not limited to:

- An emergency on church property such as a fire or gas leak, natural disaster (or threat of an imminent disaster), robbery/theft, significant damage, bomb threat, hostage situation, etc.
- Physical/sexual harm or risk of harm (or allegations) involving employees or volunteers (current or previous).
- Actual or alleged unlawful conduct by a staff member (including theft, fraud or mismanagement of CFC Churches finances).
- Health epidemics/pandemics.
- Being witness to an event that caused harm.
- A serious or life-threatening event/illness of a member of the church, including suicide.
- Hospitalisation, natural disaster, evacuation, ransom/extortion, detention or kidnapping, etc. involving any CFC Churches team member on the mission field.
- Media reports or treatment that is detrimental to the church.

Documentation

A Board member plus a Lead Pastor or one of their local leadership team, together will document the process and outcomes of the Critical Incident Response Plan along with any supporting information. This will be securely stored in accordance with the CFC Churches

Privacy Policy. The extent of documentation will be dependent on the incident, severity and/or duration.

Critical Incident Response Plan (CIRP)

1. In the event of a critical incident where there is imminent threat to safety, emergency procedures will be followed relevant to the incident (e.g., evacuation).
2. Following notice of a critical incident, a CFC Lead Pastor or Leadership Team Member must be informed as soon as possible (who will then inform the CFC Churches Board).
3. In a timely manner, the Board will develop a Critical Incident Response Plan by:
 - a) Discussing the situation and identifying current and potential risks.
 - b) Planning and implementing a strategy.
 - c) Appointing a Crisis Communication Team to liaise with relevant parties, including the media if required. Notification to relevant parties will also be included in the CIRP (e.g., police, SafeWork SA, insurance company, CFC Churches Advisory Council, CRC National Executive, etc.).
 - d) Assigning other responsibilities to appropriate persons.
 - e) Continually reviewing the effectiveness of, compliance with and implementation of the CIRP. The universal factor governing all crisis management strategies is that they need to be detailed and continually updated.

Please note that details of each CIRP are dependent on the nature of the critical incident.

Critical Incident Initial Response Form

A Critical Incident Initial Response Form is a helpful tool to conduct an initial assessment of the situation (to be completed by a CFC Churches Board member or CFC Lead Pastor or a member of his or her Leadership Team).

Critical Incident Stress Management

Critical incident stress management aims to help employees and volunteers deal with emotional reactions that may result from involvement in, or exposure to, unusual workplace incidents. Where appropriate, a stress management strategy will be included in the CIRP.

Review Following Completion of the CIRP

Once the CIRP has been finalised, the Board and senior leadership will conduct a review to consider what worked well and areas for improvement for future critical incidents. Results of the review will be documented. Any immediate required action will be set with a timeframe/s for completion (and follow up to occur to ensure completion). The review and required action will also be documented.

ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD HARM/RISK OF HARM

In addition to the CIRP information and process above, in the event of allegations of child harm/risk of harm, we will abide by *CFC Churches Child Safe Policy*. This includes reporting to the relevant authorities and complying with legal obligations. The authorities must also be notified of reasonable suspicion of other victims at the church.

As every situation is different, it is advisable to seek advice from the reporting authorities. There may be times when it is also helpful to seek legal advice.

Confidentiality

As required by law, confidentiality will be maintained. Confidentiality for the alleged victim/s is vitally important, and dignity, care and ongoing protection for them and other children is paramount. This includes the identity of the alleged victim/s (or anything that may identify the victim/s).

Confidentiality, fair process and assumption of innocence until proven guilty applies to any accused minor or adult who is suspended, under investigation and/or who have been charged/going through court proceedings. The name of the accused person can be published only after certain events have occurred. A Suppression Order may have been made that prohibits the disclosure of information about a legal case. It is an offence to disobey a Suppression Order.

A suitable neutral answer may be provided should staff/volunteers ask why a suspended person is no longer at church. For example, *“The team member has been suspended. I am sorry I cannot give you any further information at this stage. As soon as I am in a position to do so, I will let you have more information.”*

Although confidentiality must be upheld, some information may need to be communicated to certain people on a needs-to-know basis. The Crisis Communication Team, as part of the CIRP, will seek further advice and be guided by relevant authorities regarding what information will need to be communicated – by whom, to whom and in what format/setting:

- Where an allegation of risk of harm or harm has been received and a suspension is in place
- During an investigation
- Where someone is charged
- Where someone is convicted and sentenced, or found not guilty and exonerated.

This will include how, when and what to communicate to staff, parents/carers and the wider church community so that child safety and confidentiality can be appropriately upheld.

Avoid Defamation

When allegations of harm/risk of harm have been made, care must be taken to avoid stating *anything* that may defame the person against whom the allegations have been made. Until a guilty verdict has been made by the court, they remain allegations.

Documentation

It is crucial for staff/team members to record the date/s, time/s, and if possible, the name/s of persons spoken to in authority such as SAPOL, CARL, etc. If there is a crime, request and record the report number as soon as possible after each interaction. Documentation must be factual and legible as any notes taken can be subpoenaed in a court of law.

All documentation related to the critical incident (including the date the document was recorded) must be given to the CFC Board secretary who will store it securely.

Inform CFC Churches Advisory Council and CRC National Executive

CFC Churches Advisory Council members and CRC National Executive members may be consulted at any time for advice and support in managing allegations of harm/risk of harm.

If the allegations involve a CRC State Credentialed pastor, the State Executive must be notified as soon as possible. If the allegations involve a member of the State Executive or a Nationally Credentialed pastor, the National Executive should be notified. If notification is made by phone, it should be confirmed by email. There may be implications for the State and/or National Executive that will also need to be managed well.

Employment/Ongoing Involvement of the Accused Person

As per *CFC Churches Child Safe Policy*, “Employees and volunteers who are under investigation for committing sexual abuse will be automatically suspended from work or other duties within CFC Churches. Automatic termination of employment or involvement within CFC Churches will occur if found guilty of committing sexual abuse.”

A Letter of Suspension will be issued to the accused employee/volunteer in a timely manner. In the event of the charges being withdrawn or in the event of acquittal, the Board will decide what is to occur regarding future employment/volunteer status of the accused. Acquittal does not guarantee that the previously accused person will be restored to the original position/role they held.

The accused employee or volunteer should not be permitted to attend church services or church related events/programs, or be on church property until the Board determine otherwise following charges being dropped or acquittal.

If there is insufficient evidence to complete the police investigation or judicial process, the CFC Churches Board must take all necessary precautions to continue to protect the children under the church's care. This may result in precluding someone from attending the church, being restored to their original position, or working with children at the church in the future.

Pastoral Coaching

The offer of pastoral coaching for the victim and their family should be made and referral to a qualified psychologist or professional counsellor with experience in assisting victims of child harm/risk of harm may be recommended. The person who made the notification to the authorities may require support and the alleged perpetrator may also need some pastoral guidance.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS & CRISIS COMMUNICATION

These are the ONLY persons authorised to speak with the media at CFC Churches or on behalf of CFC Churches:

1. Ps Bill Vasilakis - Senior Minister, CFC Churches
2. Ps Tim Lochens - Deputy Senior Minister, CFC Churches

Or, a person delegated by them.

INTERVIEWS

Question = Answer + 1

Answer the question but add the message you want to get across. Our message must be presented even if the question is not asked. Keep repeating our key message throughout the interview. Any crisis can be viewed as a potential disaster or an opportunity to tell the 'rest of the story'.

What to do when a reporter calls? Ask the following questions:

- What is the interview topic?
- What do you already know?
- Who have you talked to?
- Who are you planning on talking to?
- Take down their name and phone number. Let them know you will call them back in a set time (15-30 mins) and make sure you do. Never do an interview on the spot;

always take time to prepare.

Prepare

- Answers to possible nice and nasty questions. All answers need to reflect a positive angle.
- What is the message we want to convey (even if it is unrelated to the interview topic)?
- Use metaphors/word pictures to convey difficult concepts. This helps people to understand and relate to the issue.

General Information

- Never repeat a negative phrase from a reporter (they may try to put negative words in your mouth). For example – if a reporter says, ‘this must be embarrassing for CFC Churches don’t say, ‘No, it’s not embarrassing for CFC Churches because the media can use that ‘grab’ and it now includes a negative term from your mouth. Say, ‘On the contrary...’ or ‘No, not at all’ and then go on to say something positive like, ‘On the contrary, we...’
- If a reporter fires rapid questions at you without allowing you to respond in between, say to the reporter, “If you’ll just let me answer/explain”.
- There may be times when a journalist calls you for a favour, e.g., to ask for a comment on a story that is not directly about you but they see you as an expert in the area and that your comment will support their story. You need to help out where you are able to in these instances to build/maintain your relationship.
- If the media can get the facts in your story wrong, they probably will. Complete accuracy is an elusive ideal.
- The media will always be attracted to controversial and sensational issues.
- People who do well in interviews weren’t born with the skill. They were trained to use techniques that produce success and reduce the reporter’s tendency to get the facts wrong. They treat media encounters as opportunities to communicate their message, not something to dread.

Crisis Communications

- Do not bury your head in the sand. In a crisis, often avoidance or ‘no comment’ will indicate that you or the organisation has something to hide. The avoidance of an issue when confronted leads to public distrust and lack of support for you or your organisation. If you don’t communicate quickly, you lose your greatest opportunity to control events.
- If you tell it and tell it fast, there is nothing left for anyone to assume (helps reduce rumours).
- If there is a problem:
 - Admit it
 - Present the facts
 - Apologise if needed
 - Be compassionate
 - Explain what you are going to do to minimise risk of it happening again.
- Commenting in a crisis takes careful preparation, the ability to remain calm and focused, and to be able to offset the criticism, attack or crisis with a positive point.

- A positive point can be action being taken to rectify the situation, preventative measures being put in place, or compensation being offered, etc.
- Prepare responses:
 - Firstly, a list of ‘cleared’ responses that can be offered as answers to the reporter.
 - Secondly, a list of ‘cleared’ responses (normally factual) that are listed under an area called, only if directly asked.
- A reporter may repeat questions in different ways to gain information you may not want to give. Don’t let a reporter wear you down.
- Do not offer more information than is necessary. If you do, you may be offering more than the journalist knows about the situation. Offer only a little, then wait! If necessary, offer a little more, then wait! Only continue if pushed and even then, there will be a stopping point.
- Never talk off the record.
- Always finish an interview on a positive upswing.
- Reporters and photographers onsite – only if accompanied/escorted. Never leave them alone to wander through buildings or grounds.

REFERENCES

- CFC Churches Child Safe Policy
- [CRC Churches Duty of Care & Child Protection Requirements](#)
- <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/workplace-safety-coping-with-a-critical-incident>

VERSION	EFFECTIVE DATE	FULL OR PARTIAL REVIEW	APPROVED
1	12.12.22	FULL	CFC Churches Board

AGREEMENT

I have read and understood the Critical Incident Management Policy and agree to abide by the conditions.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: ____/____/____