



ALLIANCE CHURCH

WODEN VALLEY



A part of the Christian & Missionary Alliance of Australia

**CHURCH MINISTRY
VOLUNTEER GUIDE**

SAFE PEOPLE, SAFE PROGRAMS, SAFE PLACES

1. Volunteers who work with children and vulnerable people

Woden Valley Alliance Church takes great care in the appointment of volunteers who work with vulnerable people, including children. Being involved in ministry is a major responsibility, and the pastoral staff and elders may consider some people unsuitable for work with vulnerable people.

Who is a vulnerable person?

A *vulnerable person* is a (a) child or (b) an adult who is disadvantaged and accessing a regulated activity in relation to the disadvantage. Examples of disadvantaged adults include people with physical and mental disabilities, people who suffer social or financial hardship and people who cannot communicate or have difficulty communicating in English.

What is a regulated activity?

Regulated activities are defined in ACT Government legislation (The Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking Act 2011)). An activity or service is a regulated activity if it is conducted or provided by a religious organisation or a person acting on behalf of a religious organisation and the activity or service is specifically for or mainly used by children or disadvantaged adults.

Before you commence working with children and vulnerable people

Before you commence working with vulnerable people, you will need to fill out the WVAC '*Volunteer Application Form*'. You will need to give us your contact information, referee details and information about the ministry area/s that you wish to work in. A number of important statements are also listed on the form, to which you must sign your agreement. Once filled in, your form will be treated as confidential.

On the 'Volunteer Application Form', you will be asked for **referees** who can vouch for the integrity of your Christian faith, and your suitability to WWVP and as part of a team. These people include a leader from our church community (not one of the pastoral staff), and a Christian friend (not related to you). Referees will be interviewed or asked for written comments.

If you are over the age of 16 you must be registered to work with vulnerable people. Registration is free for volunteers. You can obtain a WWVP form online at the Office of Regulatory Services; www.ors.act.gov.au/community/working_with_vulnerable_people or apply in person at any ACT Government shop front. You can find out more about the registration process on the Access Canberra website or by searching on-line for "Working with vulnerable people (WWVP) registration". People who have been convicted of certain types of offences related to children or involving violence are unlikely to be deemed suitable for ministry with children by WVAC. Your criminal history check will be considered by WVAC as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The presence of convictions does not automatically mean that your check is unsatisfactory. You will have an opportunity to discuss your suitability for a ministry role with WVAC pastoral staff.

You will also be required to complete the Child Safe Training Program before you can volunteer for any ministry that involves children or vulnerable people.

Appointment

Having applied for ministry, been screened and affirmed as suitable by referees and the pastoral staff, and having read and agreed with the WVAC Code of Practice for Child Safety (*Section 2 of this document*) if you are working with children, you will be appointed as a ministry worker or assistant. An interview may also be included in the process.

2. A Code of Practice for Child Safety

Woden Valley Alliance Church is committed to the safety and well being of all children involved in our programs and will act to ensure a child safe environment is maintained at all times. We also support the well being of our pastoral staff and volunteers and encourage their active participation in building and maintaining a secure environment for participants.

Behaviour and language

Children learn as much from what ministry team members do as from what they say. Behaviour, attitudes and language are as important as what is taught during a program. The way you communicate with children needs to reflect the conviction that Jesus welcomed children (Mark 10:13-16). That means using language and ways of relating that affirm worth, dignity and significance.

Avoid behaviour that gives the impression of favouritism or encourages 'special' relationships with individual children or young people. It is easy to 'love the lovable'. The children who are not easy to love often need more love from us. It is also important to remember that children notice how leaders talk to each other. Negative nicknames, 'put downs', and sexist language reinforce behaviour that children may already see all too often. Where parents or members of the wider community observe leaders at work, they need to see a caring style that demonstrates the credibility of Christianity.

Physical contact

Many children enjoy physical contact with adults and will actively seek opportunities for this through simple expressions of affection and confidence in play. Indeed, there may be occasions where physical contact is necessary. However, some children do not seek or enjoy physical contact. Children should be allowed to choose the degree of physical contact they have with others except in exceptional circumstances. E.g. when needing medical attention.

It is inappropriate to initiate close physical contact; this should come from the child, if at all. As a general rule, open displays of affection initiated by children in the presence of others are acceptable.

Ministry team members need to be aware that consistent contact with the same person may give the impression of favouritism. It is unwise, and may result in others competing for attention or feeling left out.

There will be occasions where displays of affection are natural. Children must not be shunned if they initiate and demonstrate their need for comfort, bearing in mind the age of the child and the circumstances. Care needs to be exercised that such situations don't occur in private. Where private conversations are necessary, the ministry team member and child should remain visible to others in the group.

Physical contact between adults and children may be misconstrued. Any physical activity that is, or may be construed as, sexually stimulating to the adult or child is inappropriate and must be avoided. Children may not be aware of creating such situations. It is your duty to be alert to such circumstances and act accordingly.

On no account must any form of corporal punishment be administered, even in fun. The only form of physical restraint appropriate is to protect children from harm. E.g. reasonable restraint to stop a fight, to stop bullying or to avoid an accident.

It is inappropriate for a ministry team member to pursue a romantic relationship with a participant during a WVAC program. Caution should also be exercised that relationships that grow out of WVAC are appropriate.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity

Ministry team members need to be sensitive to cultures and family traditions different from their own. These cultures and traditions may affect the degree of participation of children in activities and games. No pressure should be applied to children from other cultures and traditions to encourage participation. Ministry team members need to show respect for authority structures in other cultures and traditions. Ministry team members must not make statements about other religions and cultures that reflect ignorance, bias or ridicule.

Types of families and caregivers

Ministry team members need to be sensitive to words they use which make assumptions about any participant's background, family status or principal caregivers. The family has many forms and leaders must respect a participant's support structures.

Program Style

Activities or games that require children to act alone or in pairs, independent of ministry team members, need to be very carefully planned and conducted. If, during an activity, it is possible for children to come into contact with strangers, then great care must be exercised. Any activity needs to have defined boundaries that are easily observed or patrolled. Ministry team members need to avoid situations where it is possible for children to become physically isolated. E.g. certain wide games.

Consideration need to be given to the 'message' given to children by activities and events that are organised. Games or activities that may exploit gender, physical or intellectual differences must be assessed as to whether or not they are appropriate. Don't play games that make children look stupid or cause vulnerable children embarrassment. The way activities are conducted speaks loudly of the value and respect ministry team members have for the children.

It is essential that, in providing fun and enjoyment for children, we do not create situations which, with hindsight, will be deemed as negligent or irresponsible.

Activities need to finish promptly at the advertised time. Care must be exercised in dismissing or handing over children. Responsibility for children must not be passed to adults who are not known to the leaders or the child. Special care is needed with very young children.

Special Needs

People with special needs may include very small children and people with particular intellectual, mental or physical disabilities, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or the elderly. Being inclusive means seeing that each person has both the potential to learn and be loved like all other people. You may require extra help, this will depend on the needs of the particular child or vulnerable person. Privacy and respect are particularly important for those who may require assistance with toileting.

Privacy

As a ministry team member you may, at times, require access to private information about a participant. E.g. medical information. You have an obligation to abide by WVAC's privacy policy in relation to protecting children's right to privacy. The privacy policy is available from the church office. Photographs taken during WVAC programs and personal information obtained from your involvement in WVAC must not be used inappropriately. Appropriate use would be within the context of the WVAC program or uses for which permission has been obtained.

When you are around children during a WVAC program...

DO

- Behave in a manner consistent with your position as a positive role model to children and as a representative of Woden Valley Alliance Church
- Be aware of the safety of children
- Treat all young people with respect and take notice of their reactions to your tone of voice and manner
- Allow children to determine the degree of physical contact they have with you, without showing favouritism.
- Report to your ministry leader allegations or suspicions of abuse
- Alert your ministry leader if you find yourself in a situation where a ministry member of the opposite gender is required.
- Report all concerns, issues and problems to your ministry leader as soon as possible.

DON'T

- Engage in inappropriately rough physical games
- Use any physical means to control or discipline a child, other than restraint by holding to prevent injury
- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch children in an inappropriate and/or culturally insensitive way
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even as a joke
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as going to the toilet or changing clothes
- Enter the sleeping accommodation of members of the opposite gender, except in emergencies or during organised group times. Be aware of situations when children might be changing, showering or using the toilet.
- Spend time alone with a child. Always ensure another adult is within sight when conducting one-to-one coaching, instruction, etc.
- Take a child to your home, or encourage meetings outside the program activity. While WVAC encourages appropriate ongoing contact with participants, this should only occur within strict guidelines.

Ratios

Every program must have a safe number of adult team members in relation to the number of participants. This will differ according to the activity, age and capacity of the participants. The recommended ratio is 1:8 (1 leader for every 8 participants). When young children or people with special needs are present the ratio should be lower.

Ongoing contact with participants

Following-up participants after a WVAC program is a common strategy. We often seek an ongoing relationship with participants. This requires care on your part, ensuring that the family grants permission and that the child welcomes such contact. It would be wise to keep some record of ongoing contact with participants. Communicate with the child in an open manner, keeping in mind what you would be happy for their family to hear or read.

Social Media

The use of Social Media such as Facebook and Twitter can pose serious danger to participants. Participants under 18 should not be “friended” on personal social media sites. Your program may choose to set up an authorised site, which can be used to keep in touch with participants.

3. Child Protection

WVAC is committed to the nurture, protection and safety of all participants, especially children. We have a unique opportunity to stand with children within a culture where abuse is all too common.

It is the responsibility of each one of us to protect children from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and to report any abuse suspected or discovered. We also seek to ensure adequate supervision.

The initial effects and long term consequences of child abuse impact on the individual child, their family and the wider community. Abuse may be a single incident or occur over a period of time. Early identification and effective intervention can lessen the initial and long-term effects of child abuse and promote recovery of the children and families concerned.

Children and Abuse

Children have the right to be safe at all times. Child abuse may be defined as an act that endangers the child's physical or emotional health or development. Children do not generally have the power to stop abuse. They rely on others to help them. The responsibility for making sure that children are safe and that their needs are being met is shared between the family, the community and the State.

WVAC believes that those who care for children must act in their best interests and take all reasonable steps to ensure the child's safety. Our moral responsibility is to report suspected or disclosed child abuse. The focus here is on the prevention of abuse within our programs, and the indicators that a child might need your assistance with an abuse issue.

A significant amount of the abuse in the home environment is perpetrated by parents, carers, relatives and family friends. Unfortunately, there is no single profile of people who may abuse or exploit children

and young people. People who abuse children vary in age, gender, class, race, religion and personality type.

Types of Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse refers to a situation in which a caregiver repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten them. This may involve name-calling, put-downs or continual coldness from the caregiver, to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development.

Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual Abuse refers to a situation in which a person misuses their power, leadership or influence to control, coerce or manipulate a child or vulnerable person for seemingly religious purposes.

Neglect

Neglect refers to a situation in which a caregiver fails to provide the child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse refers to a situation in which a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a caregiver. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be an inadvertent consequence of physical punishment, or aggression. Physical injury and significant harm to a child may also result from neglect by a caregiver. The failure of a caregiver to adequately ensure the safety of a child may expose the child to extremely dangerous or life-threatening situations. This can result in physical injury and significant harm to the child.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse refers to a situation in which a person uses power or authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity. Physical force is sometimes involved. Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of sexual activity. It includes fondling of the child's genitals; masturbation; oral sex; vaginal and anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object; or exposure of the child to pornography.

Witnessing Family Violence

Witnessed family violence is a form of abuse to those who see, hear or are indirectly impacted by it. It can leave emotional scars on children that last a lifetime. They may experience this violence trying to defend a loved one or be forced to witness or even participate in such violence.

Bullying

Bullying is a particular form of abuse and merits special attention. Bullying is a pattern of behaviour that, if allowed to go uncorrected, can have serious consequences for the bully as well as the victim. It may be physical or non physical, direct or indirect, can be short lived or last years and is an abuse of power by those who carry it out. Bullying usually occurs away from responsible adults.

Identifying and Reporting Abuse

Though disclosures of abuse are not necessarily common, it is very important that you are prepared to deal with a situation should one arise. You can help prevent children being harmed by noticing the signs or indicators of harm, and taking appropriate action early.

It is important to be aware of the signs of abuse and procedures for responding to suspicions or disclosure of abuse. Failure to act may result in continued abuse. Abused children carry the trauma associated with their experiences into adulthood, however treatment, assistance and support can significantly reduce the level of trauma. Child abuse rarely stops without intervention occurring and help being offered.

You have a role to play. The following behavioural signs may be indicators of child abuse, but they should not be taken in isolation:

Physical	Unexplained or hidden injuries; lack of medical attention.
Emotional	Reverting to younger behaviour; nervousness; sudden under achievement; attention-seeking; running away; stealing; lying.
Spiritual	Conformist or dogmatic, no opinions or ideas of their own, overly submissive to authority
Sexual	Preoccupation with sexual matters (evident in words, play, drawings); being sexually provocative; disturbed sleep, nightmares, bedwetting; secretive relationships with adults or children.
Neglect	Appearing ill-cared for or unhappy; being withdrawn or aggressive; having injuries or ongoing health problems.
Witnessing Family Violence	Lack of feelings of safety, separation anxiety, self blame, Insomnia, school truancy, delinquency, early sexual activity
Bullying	Unexplained injuries, torn or missing clothing or belongings, anxiety about the place where bullying occurs, depression, sadness, threats of suicide, extra money without good reason, the propensity to be at the centre of fights and being blamed for them even though they may be physically small.

**Any situation involving abuse will require the assistance of the WVAC Pastoral Staff
and Child Safe Coordinator**

Responding to Suspicion and Disclosure

Suspicion of Abuse

If you suspect that abuse has occurred, but the child has not told anyone, you should be aware of the emotional distress that the child may be experiencing.

It is essential you first speak to your ministry leader to express your concern. Then, if agreed, you may approach the child in a caring and sensitive manner to assure them that you are willing to listen and to help if there is a problem. In no instance should you pressure the child into giving details of abuse. Your role is to listen to what the child wants to tell you and not to conduct an investigation. You should be aware that asking direct or leading questions of the child might prejudice any subsequent investigation.

Disclosure of Abuse

When a child informs you that they have been abused, they may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry and powerless. You, in turn, may feel a sense of outrage, disgust, sadness, anger and sometimes disbelief.

However, it is important for you to remain calm and in control of your feelings in order to reassure the child that something will be done to keep them safe. Children should not be pressured to provide details of the abuse. Great sensitivity is required, as the process of disclosure can be a traumatic event for the child.

You should immediately inform your ministry leader of the disclosure. Continue to support the child without pushing them for further information. You should also take care to treat the child with a high degree of normality to avoid re-traumatising them.

Allegations of abuse by a ministry team member

When an allegation is made against a WVAC ministry team member, the same procedure for responding sensitively to the child should be followed. You should immediately inform your ministry leader. If the alleged perpetrator is the ministry leader, then you would need to inform the person next in charge or report directly to the WVAC Pastoral Staff and Child Safe Coordinator

An allegation against a ministry team member requires immediate intervention. This is the responsibility of the ministry leader. Further contact between the ministry team member against whom the allegations have been made and the child should be prevented. Confidentiality is crucial. Only the pastoral staff, ministry team members and volunteers responsible for responding need to know about the allegation in order to ensure safeguards and maintained.

You will be asked to make a written record of the information received and action taken.

Health and First Aid

Helping people stay healthy and responding to first aid issues is a key aspect of a culture of safety and care. If someone becomes sick or injured during the course of your program it is your team leaders responsibility to ensure they receive appropriate care and first aid. Do not try to perform first aid if you don't have the required training or you haven't been given permission. It is the team leaders role to call for emergency response

Serious Medical Conditions

Anaphylaxis—is a severe allergic reaction that can produce shock and be life threatening.

Medications—People of all ages are on medication for various conditions. Misusing either prescription or non prescription medications can lead to harmful side effects. Children and vulnerable people are not always able to administer appropriate medications with assistance. Persons over 18 should be responsible for the correct use of their prescription medication unless their judgement or capacity is impaired. In all cases, medication must be administered in accordance with the directions stated.

Mental Health

Mental health problems are quite common but there can be a stigma attached to them. Witnessing a person exhibiting behaviours driven by poor mental health can be confronting and challenging. Report any concerns you may have to the team leader.

Suicide

Suicide is a complex issue. The loss of a loved one through suicide can devastate families and communities. Possible warning signs are:

- Previous suicide attempts
- Depression, feeling of hopelessness
- Thoughts and talk of death
- Anxiety and tension
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Violent or rebellious behaviour
- Boredom, inability to concentrate
- Tell your team leader if you suspect that a participant is contemplating suicide.

Safe Programs

Managing Safety

We can't just hope for a safe program we have to work towards it. Each activity needs to be safe for all involved.

Potential Risks

Each program will include risks that need managing. This requires thoughtfulness. If in doubt, err on the side of caution.

Training

You must be adequately trained for all programs and activities that you run. Safety management forms need to be completed for each activity you run. Teams that work on this together are more likely to have a safe program.

Safe Places

Toilets and Handwashing

The transfer of germs through unclean toilet use can lead to people getting sick

Food and the Kitchen

We have a responsibility to maintain the highest possible standard of hygiene. Food prepared, even snacks, using poor hygiene can result in people getting sick. If you are unwell, don't participate in the preparation of food. Make sure you wash your hands before preparing food of any kind.

Incidents

An incident is an undesirable event of some significance. This includes all types of accidents as well as near misses, property damage, child protection issues and major disruptions to the program. Most incidents are the result of 3 types of causes, often in combination. These are;

- Unsafe conditions
- Unsafe acts by participants
- Errors of judgement on the part of the Team Leader

No matter how minor an incident might seem, you **MUST** report it to your team leader. If involved, you will be asked to complete an incident report.

Critical Incidents

Some incidents are more serious than others. Critical incidents include

- Serious vehicle accidents
- Death of a participant
- Lost or injured participant
- Natural tragedy (bushfire, flood)
- Sexual Assault
- Significant violence between participants
- Suicide attempt
- Self harm

In the event of a critical incident the Team Leader will call the Emergency Response Team. Your role is to ensure that the children and vulnerable people feel safe, provide for their immediate needs, and reunite them with their families as soon as practical.



Woden Valley Alliance Church—October 2018