

Child Protection & Safety Checks for Parish Workers & Volunteers

The Children's Act 2014 brought in new child protection obligations on groups who work with children and young people including safety checking regulations for the children's workforce which came into force on 1 July 2015. These regulations require people who work with children to be safety checked. This includes a police check, information gathering to confirm identity, interviews, referee checking and consideration and management of risk. Under the Children's Act people who have been convicted of serious offences are prohibited from being employed as a children's worker. These offences are specified in the Act.

The Children's Act divides people working with children into two groups:

- Core workers – these are workers who are working in fully or partially state funded enterprises or organisations. These include doctors, teachers, nurses, youth counsellors and social workers.
- Non-core worker – is a children's worker who is not a core worker and includes workers in churches and organisations that are not funded by the state.

The Children's Act brought in a timeline to have the safety checks completed by:

- 1 July 2018 – all existing core workers must have been safety checked by this date, and these need to be updated every three years.
- 1 July 2019 – all existing non-core workers must have been safety checked by this date.

The Children's Act makes it an offence if organisations employ, engage or continue to employ or engage a person as a children's worker beyond the relevant dates without ensuring that the required checking is done, are liable upon conviction for a fine of up to \$10,000 per infraction.

In addition, the Methodist Church brought in a policy that requires all active presbyters, deacons, stationed lay ministers, and volunteers and paid lay workers over the age of 17, who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults to be safety checked. These checks must be updated every five years. The full policy and process is available on the Mission Resourcing website.

http://www.missionresourcing.org.nz/uploads/7/5/2/4/7524531/police_vetting_policy_process_for_lay_workers_and_volunteers.pdf

The website also has a guide to completing the NZ Police vetting request and consent form, a parish checklist and the Police vetting form.

If your parish provides an early childhood education programme, the workers in that programme would be classed as core workers and need to be safety checked, and these checks need to be updated every three years.

If your parish provides a programme for children, young people or vulnerable adults then all the workers and volunteer staff for these programmes must be safety checked and have a police check if they are over the age of 17 years. And these checks must be completed by 1 July 2019, or the parish may be liable for a fine of up to \$10,000.

So check on when the police checks were done previously and schedule them at five yearly intervals.

Also check that you have done safety checks on all staff – both employed and volunteers that are working with children, young people and vulnerable adults in your parish. If they have not been safety checked, start this process immediately.

Oranga Tamariki encourages all organisations to have a child protection policy to help build a strong culture of child protection by encouraging early identification and referral of vulnerable children.

Child Protection Policy

The MCNZ has drafted the attached Child Protection Policy to provide synods, parishes, and presbyters with guidance about the steps required regarding child protection. This recognises the parish's duty of care for children, young people, and vulnerable adults when providing a service.

All parishes are strongly encouraged to implement the Child Protection Policy.

There are a number of best practice steps that parishes can take to minimise opportunities for harm to take place which are included in the policy.

All those involved with children, young people and vulnerable adults should be made aware of the policy and the steps to report suspected or actual child abuse.

The draft policy defines different types of abuse, lists indicators of abuse, provides guidelines for how to respond to appropriately to concerns of abuse and neglect, and to provide understanding of the role of parishes in keeping children, young people and vulnerable adults safe. It places an obligation on the parish to train their voluntary and employed workers to recognise signs of abuse and to act when abuse is identified. Teachers, medical staff, social workers, and some non-government workers will have training as part of their employment. These people will be useful resources in your parish to assist you in implementing the child protection policy.

You will need to replace the ??? with the name of your parish in the policy and discuss it at your Parish Council, to see if the process correctly describes what would be appropriate for your parish.