



Catholic Archdiocese
of Perth

GUIDELINES



GUIDELINE: Safeguarding - Engaging with Adults at Risk

Approved: [insert date]

Policy Category: Governance

Sub-category: Safety of Children and Adults at Risk



Our guidelines provide additional guidance on best practice relating to policy and procedure

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Name of Guideline:	Safeguarding - Engaging with Adults at Risk
Governing Policy	Safeguarding
Description:	Guideline to ensure adults, especially adults at risk are informed about their rights, empowered to participate in decisions affecting them and are provided appropriate support.
Guideline supports:	All members of the Church Community
Guideline Status:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Guideline, or <input type="checkbox"/> Revision of Existing Guideline
Related Policy Category:	Governance
Related Policy Sub-category:	Safety of Children and Adults at Risk
Approval Authority:	Senior Operations Officer
Governing Authority:	N/A
Responsible Officer:	Director, Safeguarding
Approval Date:	
Date of Guideline review¹:	1 May 2026

Assistance:

Questions related to the *Guideline: Safeguarding Engaging with Adults at Risk* can be directed to Director of Safeguarding by email to: director.safeguarding@perthcatholic.org.au

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, this Guideline will still apply beyond the review date.



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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the Engaging with Adults at Risk guideline is to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for those of diverse needs in the Church Community within the Archdiocese.
- 1.2. Acknowledging and providing support to adults at risk fulfils the Archdiocese's responsibility for encouraging full and active participation and freedom for individuals to make choices in circumstances that are appropriate. This recognises the inherent dignity of all people - made in God's image (Genesis 1:26).
- 1.3. The guideline embodies a 'strengths-based' approach where the human person is respected, rights are recognised and independence and inclusion without barriers enable a person to thrive.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. This guideline applies to:
 - 2.1.1. Clergy, Religious Brothers and Sisters, Seminarians, Employees, Church Workers, Volunteers; and
 - 2.1.2. Contractors and Third-Party Users of Church Property, where necessary.

3. PRINCIPLES

- 3.1. The guiding and essential belief that is at the heart and foundation of the social teaching of the Church is the sacredness and dignity of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27).
- 3.2. Safeguarding the rights and integrity of the most vulnerable in society is guided by the Gospel command of Jesus to love our neighbour (Mark 12:31), to promote the common good and to lead all to the fullness of human life (John 10:10).
- 3.3. The Archdiocese is committed to valuing the diverse circumstances and backgrounds of all adults, especially those:



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- who are elderly
- with a disability
- who suffer from mental illness
- who have diminished capacity
- who have cognitive impairment
- who have suffered previous abuse
- who are experiencing transient risks
- who in receiving a ministry or service are subject to a power imbalance
- who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- who are of diverse sexuality
- who have any other impairment or adversity that makes it difficult for them to protect themselves from abuse.

3.4. The empowerment of adults at risk engaging in activities and services in the Archdiocese is underpinned by a commitment to authentically proclaim the Gospel and sharing the Apostolic faith, which includes a commitment to respect, human dignity, inclusion and responsiveness to diverse needs.

4. STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE

Archdiocesan Agencies, Offices, Organisations, Ministries and Parishes can encourage a 'strength-based' approach to engage with adults at risk in compliance with legislative requirements and Archdiocesan guidelines.

Practices when engaging with adults at risk may include, but are not limited to:

4.1 General

- Listening and valuing the giftedness of adults at risk through inclusion in activities and roles.
- Providing adults at risk (or their carers where appropriate), with information about safe and respectful relationships such as Protective Behaviours education or relevant Safeguarding Program resources.
- Developing a support plan when engaging with people with a disability.
- Assume an adult at risk may have the capacity for decision-making that assists or supports them.



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- Taking a risk-based approach by assessing needs and outcomes when engaging with adults at risk.
- Providing extra time to understand and complete tasks or comprehend the information provided to adults at risk.
- Providing specific training if necessary to support those engaged with adults at risk.
- Integrating and collaborating with other community and/or catholic social services that support adults at risk.
- Understanding your own limitations when engaging with adults at risk and seeking professional support where necessary.

4.2 Conduct

- Ensuring no imbalance of power and or abuse of power is used to take advantage or exploit an adult at risk.
- Ensuring that professional boundaries and behaviour standards are maintained that include no flirtatious comments, inappropriate touching, sexual harassment, no alcohol, or drug use,
- Declaring conflicts of interest to senior leaders.
- Respecting physical, emotional, and sexual boundaries and ensuring the dignity and respect of all.
- Ensuring that pastoral care or meetings occur in open and transparent environments that include but are not exclusive to:
 - Documenting the time, date, location, reason for the meeting and the number of people present.
 - A support person is present where possible.
 - Taking place in a professional setting or office where possible.
 - Discouraged from taking place in the home of the adult at risk and/or that of the Archdiocesan member.
 - Being conducted during normal office hours where possible. This is to avoid 1:1 contact after hours.
 - Avoid 1:1 contact and where possible a 2:1 ratio when meeting with others be adopted.
- Transportation of adults at risk:
 - Occurring with a 2:1 ratio. Either one carer to two adults at risk or two carers to one adult at risk, where possible.
 - Including the recording of the trip time, date, destination, purpose and the number of people present.



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- Ensuring compliance with the Archdiocesan Screening and Monitoring Policy for those engaging or working with adults at risk.
- Providing gender-sensitive personal care to people with a disability only if necessary.
- Ensuring consent is obtained when engaging with adults at risk. Consider their views in decision-making.
- The sacrament of reconciliation should be conducted in an open or visible space where possible or if held in a confessional it is recommended a clear line of sight or clear glass be installed so there is visibility to other people; there be a fixed screen between the penitent and priest so that physical contact is not possible and ensure that the right to anonymity is retained.

4.3 Responding

- Identifying and reporting grooming behaviours such as:
 - Targeting a vulnerable person
 - Gaining the trust of the person, family, and carers
 - Favouritism through gifts, extra attention, affection
 - Seeking out opportunities to be alone with an adult at risk
 - Frequent physical affection or close physical contact that is not welcomed
 - Controlling behaviours that reduce choice, autonomy, or inclusion
 - Maintaining abusive power through shame, blame, guilt, intimidation, belittling, embarrassment, or threats.
- Taking a zero tolerance to abuse and speaking up about circumstances that may increase barriers to disclosing abuse and vulnerability to abuse.
- Responding to abuse by reporting suspected abuse and/or reporting observed or disclosed abuse.

5. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (Edition 2)
- Safeguarding Policy
- Safeguarding Guidelines
- Code of Conduct
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*



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5. DEFINITIONS | GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For the purposes of this Guideline, the definitions contained in the Governing Policy apply. In addition, the following definitions apply to this Guideline:

Abuse of Power means the abuse of position, function, or duty to take advantage of another. This can take many forms and include situations where a person has power over another person by virtue of their relationship (e.g. employer and employee, teacher and student, coach and athlete parent or guardian and child, clergy/religious and parishioner) and uses that power to their advantage.

Adult abuse means the improper treatment of a person that results in the actual and/or likelihood of causing physical or emotional harm. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, neglect, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, exploitation, or other types of aggression.

There are several categories of abuse of adults, such as:

- Sexual abuse*
- Physical abuse*
- Emotional/psychological abuse*
- Neglect*
- Elder abuse*
- Financial abuse*
- Exploitation*

Within the context of the Catholic Church and faith-based entities, it is also important to recognise spiritual abuse* as an additional subtype of abuse. *See separate definitions.

Conflict of Interest means situations (perceived or actual) where a conflict arises between person's official duties and their private interests, which could influence the performance of those official duties. Such conflict generally involves opposing principles or incompatible wishes or needs and may occur when personnel function in multiple roles.

Diminished capacity means if an adult needs to make a decision and is unable to carry out any part of this process (as listed below), they have impaired decision-making capacity.

There are three elements to making a decision:

- understanding the nature and effect of the decision;
- freely and voluntarily deciding; and
- communicating the decision in some way.



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Disability (persons with) means those who have physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (*Article 2, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.*)

Diversity means a range of people who have various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds and various lifestyles, experience, and interests.

Diverse sexuality refers to all the diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientations, and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours, or characteristics that form this plurality.

Elder abuse means a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.

Emotional abuse (adults) is a common form of abuse that occurs in close relationships. Emotional abuse is defined as abuse that occurs when a person is subjected to behaviours or actions aimed at preventing or controlling their behaviour, with the intent to cause them emotional harm or fear, through manipulation, isolation, or intimidation.

Exploitation is the deliberate maltreatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over another person. It is taking advantage of another person or situation usually, but not always, for personal gain.

Financial abuse involves the illegal or improper use or mismanagement of a person's money, property or resources. Stealing, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, forced changes to a will, inappropriate removal of a resident's decision-making powers and misuse of power of attorney are all forms of financial abuse or exploitation.

Grooming (adult) is the predatory act of manoeuvring another individual into a position that makes them more isolated, dependent, likely to trust, and more vulnerable to abusive behaviour.

Institutional abuse means abuse or poor care within an institution or specific care setting. Possible causes of institutional abuse include:

- a "closed" culture within an organisation where transparency is discouraged;
- lack of flexibility and choice for people using the service;
- failure to properly check the backgrounds and interview staff;
- inadequate training;
- lack of safeguarding policies and procedures;
- lack of support of staff by management;
- poor supervision; and
- poor standards of care.

Neglect (adult) is the failure of a carer to provide the necessities of life to a person for whom they are caring.



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Pastoral care means when one person has responsibility for the well-being of another or for a faith community. It includes the provision of spiritual advice and support, education, counselling, medical care, and assistance in times of need. All work involving the supervision or education of children and young people is a work of pastoral care.

Physical abuse is a non-accidental physically aggressive act which results in physical pain or injury, and which may include physical coercion and physical restraint. Physical abuse may be intentional or may be the inadvertent result of physical punishment.

Sexual abuse (adult) Sexual abuse is a form of sexual assault. Sexual abuse includes rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, and sexual interference. Sexual activity with an adult who is incapacitated by a mental or physical condition (such as dementia) that impairs his or her ability to grant informed consent, is defined as sexual assault/abuse. Sexual assault/abuse includes where, by force, threats, or abuse of authority an individual commits a canonical offence or forces someone to perform or submit to sexual acts. Sexual assault is a crime.

Spiritual abuse means abuse of a person that invokes a person's religious beliefs and faith to perpetrate harm. Spiritual abuse can occur as a secondary experience of abuse when abuse is perpetrated by someone in a position of spiritual authority and trust within the Church and can negatively impact a person's spirituality.

Transient Risk means short-term risk, experienced by people at different stages in their life: e.g., when someone is vulnerable due to:

- grief
- bereavement
- relationship breakdown
- homelessness
- unemployment
- financial hardship

7. REVISIONS MADE TO THIS GUIDELINE

Date of approval	Approved by:	Description:

These Guidelines are scheduled for review every three (3) years or more frequently, if appropriate.