



Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary (ASJM)
Australia

Safeguarding Children and Adults Policy

October 2021

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1. Glossary of Terms

CONGREGATION TERMS

ASJM Delegate, Australia. The elected leader of the Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary in Australia

ASJM Leadership Team, Australia. The elected leaders of the Congregation's leadership team in Australia, comprising three members

Personnel. All staff, contractors, co-workers and volunteers who work with or for the Congregation, either onsite or in outreach activities

Safeguarding Coordinator. The person appointed to ensure continuous improvement of safeguarding practices and compliance with all relevant Church, statutory and legislative requirements

Sisters. All members of the Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary, Australia as listed in the Congregational Status for the current year. In addition, any Augustinian Sister residing temporarily in Australia is bound by the policy requirements outlined herein.

SAFEGUARDING TERMS

Adult abuse. Means the improper treatment of a person aged 18 years or over that results in the actual and/or likely incidence of physical or emotional harm. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, 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.

NOTE: Within the context of the Catholic Church and faith-based entities, it is also important to recognise spiritual abuse as an additional sub-type of abuse.

Adults at risk. Refers to any person aged 18 years and over who is at increased risk of experiencing abuse, such as people who:

- are elderly
- have a disability
- suffer from mental illness
- have diminished capacity
- have cognitive impairment
- have suffered previous abuse
- are experiencing transient risks (e.g. family violence and homelessness)
- are subject to a power imbalance in receiving a ministry or service

- identify as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- are of diverse sexuality
- are from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- have any other impairment or adversity that makes it difficult for them to protect themselves from abuse.

NOTE: Not all people from these cohorts would consider themselves vulnerable to abuse, notwithstanding evidence which suggests a higher representation.

Allegation. Means a complaint, still to be verified, claiming or asserting that someone has committed an act of abuse against a child or adult. The term is used interchangeably and in combination with 'complaint'

Child. Legally, anyone under the age of 18

Child abuse. Refers to any behaviour or treatment by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents that results in the actual and/or likelihood of causing physical or emotional harm to a child. Such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and can include acts of omission (i.e. neglect) and commission. Child abuse and neglect are commonly divided into five sub-types:

- physical abuse
- emotional/psychological abuse
- neglect
- sexual abuse
- exposure to family violence

Child safety. Encompasses matters related to protecting all children from abuse, managing the risk of abuse, providing support to a child at risk of abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of abuse.

Cultural safety. Refers to the positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination, and more than cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

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 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.

Grooming (child). Refers to a pattern of predatory behaviour aimed at engaging a child as a precursor to sexual abuse. Grooming can include the conditioning of parents and other adults to think that the relationship with the child is 'normal' and positive. The process can take as little as a few days or as long as months or even years.

Mandatory reporter. Refers to person(s) required under legislation to make a report to the appropriate state-based Child Protection reporting authority if they suspect or believe that a child is in need of protection from abuse. In Victoria, mandatory reporters include medical practitioners, family day care providers, registered kindergarten and school teachers, school principals, midwives, registered nurses, dentists, psychologists, psychiatrists, police officers, corrections officers, social workers and ministers of religion.

Reportable conduct. Defined under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.) to mean a sexual offence, sexual misconduct or physical violence committed by a worker/employee

against, with or in the presence of a child/young person.

Safeguarding. Means measures to protect the safety, human rights and wellbeing of individuals, which allow people – in this context *children and adults* –to live free from abuse, harm and neglect.

2. Preamble

2.1 Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary (ASJM)

The Congregation of Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary (ASJM) is an international order of women religious in the Catholic Church, founded by Maria Teresa Spinelli in Frosinone, Italy, 1827. The Congregation lives by the Rule of St Augustine and serves the People of God and the world as a model of a small Church, living the Gospel in a communion of love.

The purpose of all our work is Love.
(Constitution no. 10)

Our first community of Augustinian Sisters arrived in Melbourne in 1957 to support the parish of North Sunshine. Our ministries then expanded to include Catholic parishes in Broken Hill, NSW (1964–1970), Frankston (1970–1982) and now Avondale Heights (since 1986). In all of these parishes, we have been involved in a range of parochial activities, including the education of children.

Currently, our ministry in the Archdiocese of Melbourne involves the education and spiritual growth of adults, pastoral work in parishes and aged care facilities, education support in parish primary schools, and care of our elderly sisters.

2.2 Policy Context

Protecting children and adults from harm is a shared responsibility of families, the general community, community agencies, professionals working with children and adults, faith and school communities, the police and governments. This policy expresses our commitment, as Augustinian Sisters, to live and work in partnership with these groups to promote and support the safeguarding of children and adults, and to prevent harm from occurring.

The policy reflects the values and principles articulated in the Constitution of the Augustinian Sisters and it is fully aligned with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (the Standards) of Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. The policy also supports and complies with the relevant safeguarding legislation of the Victorian Government and the Australian Government (refer [Appendix 2](#)).

Sr Lorraine Testa, ASJM Delegate, Australia, serves as the Congregation's Safeguarding Coordinator and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the Congregation enables and upholds a safe environment for children and adults. Sr Lorraine is supported in the day-to-day safeguarding work of the Congregation by Sr Connie Mamo, a member of the ASJM Leadership Team, Australia.

The Augustinian Sisters, our personnel, and any Augustinian Sister from another region

temporarily residing in Australia, are bound by the requirements of this policy. It should be observed in conjunction with our accompanying documents:

- *Safeguarding Statement of Commitment*
- *Safeguarding Code of Conduct*
- *Safeguarding Risk Management Framework*
- *Complaints Handling Policy.*

3. Policy Statement

It is God's work that you are doing, you serve God, and God uses you.
(Constitution, 1827. Chapter VII)

The Congregation of Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary, Australia, is actively committed to recognising, safeguarding and upholding the dignity and rights of all children and adults. Our commitment is drawn from, and inherent in, the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel.

We believe that every child and adult has the right to be respected, nurtured and protected from any form of abuse, particularly sexual and/or physical abuse. Hence we will work towards ensuring that everyone will have a safe environment when in our care.

We recognise that cultural safety and inclusion serve as protective factors in relation to safeguarding, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults, those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with a disability and people of diverse sexuality. We remain committed to maintaining safe and inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and that are free from any forms of discrimination and abuse.

The active participation of those who work with us is essential in building and maintaining a secure and positive environment for all. Every person within the authority of the Congregation is expected to establish safe and supportive relationships.

Anyone who brings forward to the Congregation a suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child or adult will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner. In line with our lawful obligations, we will share information and report concerns, allegations and incidents to the appropriate authority, as required. Where there is immediate risk of harm, the police will be notified.

4. Policy Implementation

4.1 Leading and Promoting a Safeguarding Culture

The ASJM Delegate, Australia, in an associated role as Safeguarding Coordinator, leads and promotes a safeguarding culture by:

- prominently publishing and displaying the Congregation's Safeguarding Commitment Statement and making sure the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct and Complaints Handling Policy are readily available to personnel and the broader community;

- identifying and taking opportunities to promote awareness of the dignity and rights of children and adults;
- promoting an inclusive, respectful and responsive approach to the diverse needs of children and adults;
- taking all possible steps to ensure that only people who are safe and suitable to have contact with children and adults are engaged by the Congregation;
- empowering all personnel to take responsibility for safeguarding and providing opportunities for them to have input into improving safeguarding practices;
- encouraging people to bring forward concerns or complaints about the safety of children or adults (including disclosures of current or historical abuse) and providing appropriate processes by which to do so, including processes that are suitable for children and adults with diminished capacity and/or cognitive impairment;
- responding to disclosures and complaints in a manner that is transparent, respectful, fair and accountable;
- working with survivor advocacy and support groups, where appropriate, to recognise past wrongs where these have occurred;
- welcoming and facilitating dialogue with and feedback from the community about our safeguarding approach, including when reviewing safeguarding policies and procedures;
- ensuring the Congregation complies with all relevant Church, statutory and legislative requirements;
- ensuring that safety concerns about children or adults (including disclosures of current or historical abuse) are reported to the appropriate authorities;
- maintaining an appropriate risk management culture and framework that identifies and manages risks to the safety of children and adults;
- ensuring continuous improvement of safeguarding practices.

4.2 Upholding Appropriate Standards of Behaviour

The Congregation's **Code of Conduct** outlines the safeguarding standards of conduct expected of all Sisters and personnel engaged in activities or ministries of the Congregation.

All Sisters and personnel are required to comply with this Code of Conduct and to report any concerns or breaches of the Code to the ASJM Delegate, Australia. If the concern/breach relates to the ASJM Delegate Australia, it is to be referred to another member of the ASJM Leadership Team, Australia.

Where a Sister is engaged in a ministry of an external entity, she will be expected to also comply with the relevant Code of Conduct of that entity.

Where a Sister resides for a period in a country outside of Australia, this Code of Conduct applies, as do the relevant policies of the diocese in which she lives and ministers.

Personnel will then be required to review and sign the Code of Conduct regularly and not less than every two years to reaffirm their understanding of their obligations. The ASJM Delegate Australia is responsible for ensuring that this occurs and for maintaining appropriate records.

4.3 Safe and Suitable Personnel

The Congregation is committed to recruiting and engaging people who are suitable to have contact with children and adults. We make all reasonable efforts to ensure that they are appropriately credentialed and have relevant working with children certification as required by legislation.

4.4 Identifying and Managing Risks

The Congregation recognises the importance of maintaining an appropriate risk management culture and of applying logical and systematic processes that identify and manage risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and adults. These processes are documented in our *Risk Management Framework*.

As part of our safeguarding training and briefings (cf. 4.5), our Sisters and personnel are familiarised with the *Risk Management Framework* and their related responsibilities. A consultative approach is used to ensure that all possible safeguarding risks are clearly identified and effectively managed.

The ASJM Delegate Australia has overall responsibility for implementing the *Risk Management Framework* and for ensuring that:

- risk management systems and procedures are consistently monitored and reviewed;
- changes are made as new risks arise and/or in response to effectiveness ratings.

4.5 Safeguarding Training and Briefings

In safeguarding training and briefings, and in any induction programs, our Sisters and personnel are provided with information and equipped with skills to identify safety concerns and potential indicators of abuse or harm to children and adults.

The training and briefings seek to ensure that everyone understands their professional, legal and moral responsibilities, including:

- building their knowledge and understanding of child abuse and child safety risks;
- staying abreast of and meeting legislative requirements to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people;
- maintaining familiarity and compliance with internal policies and the aligned National Catholic Safeguarding Standards;
- continuously reviewing and improving systems and practices to protect children and adults from abuse;
- handling disclosures;
- taking prompt action when allegations of abuse are raised and meeting their internal and external reporting obligations.

The ASJM Delegate Australia has overall responsibility for ensuring that all Sisters and personnel receive adequate training and support regarding their safeguarding responsibilities.

4.6 Responding to Complaints

The Congregation seeks to empower people to communicate their concerns and complaints

without fear of retribution. We understand that speaking up requires courage and will respond with respect and compassion. We are committed to resolving concerns and complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Congregation has a robust system for receiving, recording, managing, resolving and monitoring complaints, including disclosures or allegations of current or historical abuse towards children or adults. These processes are documented in our *Complaints Handling Policy*. We will ensure that the processes are communicated in ways that are appropriate and accessible to the diverse needs of our community, including children and adults with diminished capacity/cognitive impairment.

Where necessary and appropriate, the Congregation will cooperate with other relevant organisations and seek specialist advice in resolving complaints, including but not limited to the police, child protection authorities, and authorities responsible for safeguarding people with disability and/or adults at risk.

As part of their safeguarding training and briefings, and of any induction programs, our Sisters and personnel are familiarised with the Complaints Handling Policy and their related responsibilities.

4.7 Reporting Obligations

NOTE: Contact details of authorities referenced here in 4.7 are provided in Appendix 1 of this policy.

Any Sister or person engaged by the Congregation who becomes aware of a concern about the safety of a child or adult, whether by a direct or indirect disclosure or any other means, must report it as soon as practical to the ASJM Delegate Australia. If the concern relates to the ASJM Delegate Australia, it must be reported to another member of ASJM Leadership Team, Australia. Reporters may also contact the National Executive Director, Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) for advice and guidance.

The report should include all known information, such as the nature of the allegation; when and where it occurred; the subject of the allegation and the alleged victim.

It is not the reporter's role to interview any person or investigate the concern. Under no circumstances should the reporter ask a person for further details or ask leading questions – this has the potential to interfere with the disclosure and may jeopardise any future criminal proceedings that may arise as a result of an investigation. However, the reporter should obtain basic details to assess the person's immediate safety.

Except for the purpose of meeting their reporting obligations, the reporter will treat the matter in strict confidence.

The ASJM Delegate Australia will provide advice and guidance on how the matter should be handled, including whether external authorities need to be notified (see below). The ASJM Delegate Australia may also contact the National Executive Director, CRA for guidance about external reporting obligations.

4.7.1 Reporting children at risk of harm. Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of harm, any person in Victoria who forms this view can seek advice from Child FIRST/The Orange Door, a Referral Service run by a registered community service across local areas of Victoria. If serious harm is suspected, a report is to be made to DHHS Child Protection.

The ASJM Delegate Australia is responsible for providing advice to a Sister or personnel on whether a child protection report is required, and, if so, for ensuring that the report is made to the appropriate authority. However, this responsibility does not prevent a Sister or personnel from immediately making a child protection report.

A 'mandatory reporter' (refer glossary of terms) has a duty to report, as soon as practicable, the name, or a description, of the child and the grounds for suspecting that the child is at risk of harm. A person who is not subject to a mandatory reporting obligation holds professional, moral (and sometimes legal) obligations to report a child abuse incident, disclosure or suspicion.

4.7.2 Notifying reportable conduct. Under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.), the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) must be notified if an allegation of reportable conduct is made against an 'employee' of an organisation. Under this legislation, an employee can include a person engaged by an organisation to provide services, including as a volunteer, contractor, office holder or officer, whether or not the person provides services to children.

Conduct concerns are to be referred to the ASJM Delegate Australia, who is responsible for determining if the conduct constitutes reportable conduct and whether a notification to the CCYP is required. If so, the notification to CCYP must be made within three working days of the ASJM Delegate Australia becoming aware of the allegation. The CCYP will require information about the alleged conduct, the person against whom the allegation is made, whether Victoria Police has been contacted, and the proposed next course of action to be taken by the ASJM Delegate Australia in managing the allegation.

The ASJM Delegate Australia will investigate the allegation and provide a more detailed report to the CCYP within 30 days of the initial notification. The report is to describe the investigation procedures undertaken and whether or not the Congregation proposes to take any disciplinary or other action in relation to the matter (inclusive of the reasons to take, or not to take, that action).

The ASJM Delegate Australia can seek guidance from the National Executive Director, CRA about meeting these reportable conduct obligations.

4.7.3 Historical child abuse allegations. Where the Congregation becomes aware of an allegation of historical child abuse (abuse experienced by a child who is now an adult), the ASJM Delegate Australia will take one or more of the following steps:

- Respond sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner to the complainant's allegation;
- Implement the relevant components of Congregation's Complaints Handling Policy;

- Submit a child protection/risk of harm report to the DHHS Child Protection if there are grounds for suspecting that a child or class of children are at current risk of harm (e.g. because an alleged offender has current access to children);
- Submit a report to Victoria Police, if required, in accordance with legislative requirements;
- As required, seek guidance from the National Executive Director, CRA.

4.7.4 Concerns about adults at risk. The right of adults to make their own choices and decisions, and the circumstances in which they may have diminished capacity to do so, are relevant considerations in discerning whether a concern about the safety of an adult should be reported to an external agency such as the police, a health service or adult safeguarding agency.

The assessment of external reporting obligations will have regard to:

- legislative requirements;
- whether an alleged offender is employed or engaged by the Congregation;
- the views and wishes of the involved adult;
- any diminished capacity on the part of the involved adult to make an informed decision;
- the seriousness of the concerns;
- any potential or actual risks to other children or adults.

The ASJM Delegate Australia is ultimately responsible for discerning the need for external reporting, however, this responsibility does not prevent a Sister or personnel from immediately making a referral or report to the relevant agency. In an emergency, if there is concern that an adult may harm themselves or another person, the police must be notified.

Several cohorts of adults at risk are covered by legislative schemes and regulatory/oversight bodies, such as the Disability Services Commissioner, the Aged Care Quality and Complaints Commission and the Health Complaints Commission. The ASJM Delegate Australia is to ensure that the Sisters and personnel are aware of community-based services, government and Church agencies, and other organisations that can offer information, advice and/or receive referrals.

The reporting process and how concerns are handled will vary, subject to the relevant agency's legislative framework and internal procedures.

4.7.5 Concerns of a criminal nature. Where a safeguarding concern involves a potential criminal offence (e.g. physical or sexual assault) by a person engaged by the Congregation, a report is to be made to the ASJM Delegate Australia and to Victoria Police as soon as possible.

Where the concern involves a potential criminal offence by any other person, the ASJM Delegate Australia will offer to support the alleged victim to report the matter to Victoria Police. In circumstances where the alleged victim has diminished capacity to make an informed decision about whether to report the matter to Victoria Police, the ASJM Delegate Australia will do so on their behalf. The ASJM Delegate Australia is responsible for ensuring that the police report is made.

4.8 Record Keeping

The Congregation is committed to appropriate and lawful record keeping, storage and sharing of information related to children and adults at risk. At a later stage in an investigation, all records, including rough notes, will be passed, on request, to the relevant designated officer of the reporting authority.

The ASJM Delegate Australia is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and lawful record keeping, systems are in place and properly administered.

4.9 Confidentiality, Privacy and Information Sharing

The Congregation maintains current knowledge of, and complies with, our legislative obligations to maintain confidentiality and protect personal information and privacy (refer [Appendix 2](#)).

Information and records relating to incidents, complaints, responses and decisions are treated as confidential, except where the sharing or distribution of information and/or records is mandated by statutory requirements or principles of natural justice. In this regard, if the complaint involves conduct that is serious and/or potentially criminal, any legal obligations to report relevant information to external authorities will over-ride confidentiality.

In certain circumstances the obligation to be fair to the subject of a complaint may completely or partially override confidentiality. The Congregation seeks to balance fairness and confidentiality requirements and, as far as possible, safeguard the interests of all parties.

The ASJM Delegate Australia is responsible for ensuring that confidentiality, privacy and information sharing protocols are properly enacted.

5. Related Internal Policies and Documents

- Safeguarding Statement of Commitment
- Safeguarding Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding Risk Management Framework
- Complaints Handling Policy

6. Policy History and Review

This Safeguarding Policy will be updated as required and reviewed at least every three years.

Approval Authority	ASJM Leadership Team Australia
Policy Owner	ASJM Delegate Australia
Inaugural Policy Approval Date	March 2018
Policy Review/Revision Date(s)	October 2021
Next Policy Review	September 2023

Contact Directory

REPORTING AUTHORITIES

EMERGENCY

Call **000** if a child or adult is in imminent danger

Augustinian Sisters, Servants of Jesus and Mary, Australia
ASMJ Delegate, Australia
E: spinelli@bigpond.net.au

CATHOLIC CHURCH

- Catholic Professional Standards Victoria (excluding Melbourne)
Michael Iacovina, Acting Director of Professional Standards
T: 1800 816 030
- Melbourne Response
Complaints about priests, religious and lay persons in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are made to the Independent Commissioner, Jeff Gleeson QC
T: (03) 9225 6411
- Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL)
T: 1300 603 411
W: <https://www.cpsltd.org.au>
- Catholic Religious Australia
T: (02) 9557 2695
W: <https://www.catholicreligious.org.au>

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

Eastern 1300 360 391	Northern 1300 664 977
Southern 1300 655 795	Western 1800 075 599
Western 1300 664 977	After hours 13 12 78

Child FIRST/The Orange Door Referral Services

Locations and phone numbers listed on The Orange Door website
W: <https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au>

Commission for Children and Young People

T: 1300 78 29 78
W: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au>

POLICE CONTACT

Local Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT)
Locations and phone numbers listed on Victoria Police website
W: <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sexual-offences-and-child-abuse-investigation-teams>

DISABILITY ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Disability Services Commissioner
T: 1800 677 342
W: <https://www.odsc.vic.gov.au>

ELDER ABUSE

Aged Care Quality and Complaints Commission
T: 1800 951 822
W: <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au>

Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)
T: 1800 700 600
Website: <https://opan.org.au>

MENTAL HEALTH

Health Complaints Commission
T: 1800 246 054
Website: <https://hcc.vic.gov.au>

SUPPORT SERVICES

CatholicCare Victoria
T: (03) 5337 8999
W: <https://www.catholiccarevic.org.au>

Sexual Assault Crisis Line
T: 1800 806 292
W: <https://www.sacl.com.au>

Drummond Street Services
Support and recovery for individuals, families, couples, young people and children
T: (03) 9663 6733
W: <https://ds.org.au>

Link Up Victoria
Counselling, healing and culturally appropriate support for Indigenous Australians
T: 1800 687 662
W: <http://linkupvictoria.org.au>

Relationships Australia Victoria
Family, relationship and specialist counselling services
T: 1800 052 674 or 1300 364 277
W: <https://www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au>

Relevant Legislation

Commonwealth

Aged Care Act 1997

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Act 2018

Age Discrimination Act 2004

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

Australian Privacy Principles 2014

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Family Law Act 1975

National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013

Privacy Act 1988

Privacy Amendment (Notifiable Data Breaches) Act 2017

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Intersex Status) Act 2013

Victoria

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012

Crimes Act 1958 (2014 Amendment)

Education and Training Reform Act 2006

Equal Opportunity Act 2010

Family Violence Protection Act 2008

Family Violence Protection Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2017

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

Wrongs Act 1958

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child