



## **Risk Assessment for a Person of Concern in the Presbyterian Church of Victoria**

### **Introduction**

For the definition of a 'Person of Concern' please see the 'Person of Concern' Procedure document.

There are two main elements for assessing the risk posed by having a 'Person of Concern' (POC) in a Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) church or organisation:

- 1) The individual's personal risk indicators of offending
- 2). The severity and impact of an offence if it were to occur

In addition, a specific POC may be rated a higher risk depending on the capacity of the individual congregation or organisation to manage the individual.

For instance, a Church without a Session, or a Session made up primarily of Assessor Elders that do not regularly attend the Church, would be less able to oversee an individual POC. This would raise their risk profile.

It is essential to undertake risk assessment when working through a situation with a POC to be able to put in place appropriate measures to reduce their risk of offending in the PCV environment.

The Safe Church Unit (SCU) works with the leadership of the congregation or organisation to assist in establishing an indication of risk – low, medium or high.

When assessing risk it is important to be as evidence based as possible so that personal preferences or opinions do not influence the assessment. A degree of subjectivity is, however, inevitable.

For this reason it is important that the assessment is done by a person with a certain amount of distance or detachment from the individual being assessed.

Kooyoora can work with the Session and/or Minister to complete the relevant risk assessments.

This approach assists the Church in arriving at a responsible, informed, objective, research-based and defensible position in terms of fairness and consistency in working with a POC in the PCV.

### **Sources of Information on Risk**

Any or all of the following sources of information may be used in risk assessment:

- A formal risk assessment provided by an external Psychologist or Psychiatrist who is a recognised specialist in the treatment and assessment of people who sexually offend

- Sentencing Remarks available from the relevant Court Authority
- Reports/assessments/references from a credible treatment programme
- Information gleaned from completing the PCV POC 'Personal Risk Assessment' and the 'Congregation/Organisation Risk Assessment'
- Additional information provided by others, including Church leaders
- Church/organisation demographics, ministries, activities and Safe Church practices

## **Assessing the likelihood of offending**

An assessment of the likelihood of a POC to offend should not be based on an affirmation of faith or a belief in their repentance.

It should instead be based on factors such as whether they have offended before, how many times they have offended and how long ago.

Their recent behaviour towards others should also be taken into account.

Any grooming behaviour or similar types of behaviour should increase the risk assessment.

## **Assessing the impact of a possible offence**

If the POC is likely to offend against children this will raise the impact of an offence if it occurs.

If an offence is likely to be sexual or violent in nature this will also raise the potential impact.

The past behaviour and offences of the POC are important to take into account for this assessment.

If previous offences exist, for instance, then the actual known impact on the victim of the offence should be considered as a guide for future impact.

## **Beliefs about Spirituality and Transformation of Character**

This risk assessment approach does not assess, nor seek to assess, a POC's spirituality, transformation in character or Christian growth.

The POC's spiritual life will no doubt influence and affect their understanding of their own situation, life and participation in the Church.

Wise Church leaders and monitors along with realistic but gentle pastoral carers are well-placed to encourage the POC in their spiritual walk and these things sit alongside whatever safety measures are put in place.

It is important to note that while a risk does not ever end entirely, as Christians the Church seeks to surround the POC by providing circles of support and accountability, recognising the belief in the possibility of change and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

The risk assessment process seeks to balance the following competing rights, values and considerations:

- Protecting children and the vulnerable in the PCV (their right to be safe)
- Affirming the role of repentance and Christian growth (forgiveness)
- Ensuring adequate strategies are in place in the PCV (identification and acknowledgement of

risks)

- Avoiding over-regulation of individuals or church environments (doing too much just for the sake of it)
- Combating complacency (doing too little through ignorance or resistance)
- The legal requirements placed upon the Church to protect those people within the PCV from abuse and known risks of abuse (including the 'Failure to Protect' legislation)

Finally...

By working through the PCV POC 'Personal Risk Assessment' and the 'Congregation/Organisation Risk Assessment' material this allows the Church to come to an appropriate response to the situation posed by the presence of a POC in a congregation/organisation.

## **Working with a 'Person of Concern' in the Church –**

### **"Red Flag" Behaviours & Key Messages for Leaders**

"Red Flags" are static and dynamic risk factors present in a 'Person of Concern' [i.e. an offender/risky person], evidenced in their behaviour. "Red Flag" behaviours indicate a higher risk level to the safety of others, including children, from criminal sexual offences, sexual abuse and/or sexual harassment/inappropriate sexual behaviour to others.

- Denies committing the sexual abuse/harassment OR minimises their sexual abuse/harassment behaviour
- Changes their story about they did or what occurred
- Fails to acknowledge their behaviour and adds layer upon layer of justification for their offending/behaviour
- Refuses to accept responsibility for their actions
- Blames others for their abusive behaviour, including blaming the victim or others – often the victim becomes the problem, even the perpetrator, against the offender and their rights and well-being
- Blames other circumstances [including health, employment or relationship status] for their abusive behaviour and uses this to excuse their behaviour, or claim they cannot change it, or be held accountable for it. This makes the person able to repeat behaviour in a church setting and be confident there will be no protective measures taken by the leadership or consequences for the person if they do so
- Over-emphasises that the victim "seems fine" or is "happy now" – says there is no need for Church leaders to set boundaries for the person's participation in the Church
- States that the victim has never pressed charges and says they never will, so therefore there is no need for Church leaders to set boundaries for the person's participation in the church – in other words, only the victim has the ability to set limits on the person's participation in the church. This demonstrates a complete inability to accept that Church leaders have the legal and moral right and duty to exercise boundaries for the participation of an individual in the Church who is a known risk to the safety of others from people-related injury

- Fights the process and/or draws out the process
- Seeks to control the process and set conditions on the leaders as to what they can and can't do and expect from the offender
- Positions themselves as the victim – and particularly a victim of the Church leaders or process
- Attacks any church leader(s) who seeks to bring accountability measures into place and may even personally attack that person or persons
- Exhibits entitlement behaviour – “it’s my right to be in the Church/hold these roles”
- Demands to be forgiven
- Focuses solely on their status as “forgiven in God’s eyes” and arguing that this means there is no biblical justification for consequences or reasonable safety measures being exercised by Church leaders so they can be a part of the Church
- Accuses Church leaders as being “unChristian” or “unbiblical” for engaging in the process, let alone any kind of accountability or boundaries for the offender/risky person – and might use/twist multiple Bible verses to do this
- Demands to have unlimited participation in the Church or demands that no boundaries be placed upon their participation
- Demonstrates “technical” rule breaking – testing the boundaries set for them and seeking to expand them or even break them.  
When confronted about this denies the boundary breaking has occurred and lashes out at those holding them accountable
- Looks for opportunities to build profile, trust and goes out of their way to be helpful.  
Sometimes even goes to quite extreme efforts to assist, and especially in relation to Church leaders, in particular the minister(s), his family and other key “influencers” in the Church
- Has a “lobby group” in the Church community who agitate for the offender and resist Church leaders actions to limit the participation of the offender in the Church Key Messages for Church Leaders
- Offenders/risky people actively infiltrate churches to offend against children and vulnerable adults and women
- Offenders/risky people are patient
- Offenders/risky people are intentional and calculated yet skilled at appearing otherwise
- Offenders/risky people understand the particular vulnerabilities of Christian leaders and exploit these to their advantage
- Offenders/risky people look for churches where there may be policies in place but they are not fully implemented – this breeds a false sense of security for parents and leaders and they will be more easily groomed by the offender
- What police and the victim do or decide is out of the control of Church leaders – what happens in

the Church is in their control – and their responsibility

- Parents of children in the Church do not know what the leaders know about the offender.  
Parents have high trust levels in Church leaders, believing that leaders will prioritise the safety of children from sexual abuse/harassment above the personal feelings or wants of an offender and the discomfort of leaders.  
The same is true for vulnerable adults and women
- When it comes to working with an offender/risky person Church leaders must take strong leadership and drive the process and the outcomes
- Church leaders will get criticism from some in the congregation (and maybe even outside it) for their risk management of the offender, where they are interacting with a high risk offender who displays some or all of the “red flag”behaviour
- Church leaders must enforce a Safety Agreement as offenders look for “slackness” as this creates an easier place for them to sexually offend against a child/vulnerable person
- It is always a risk to have an offender/risky person in the Church.  
If the Church leaders are willing to accept the risk and are committed to actively managing the risk they may choose to offer a Safety Agreement, if they are in a position to do so