

SALT CHURCH – INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCESS

PURPOSE

This Incident Response Process provides further detail to the Salt Church Safe Ministry Policy. It details the minimum steps Salt Church will take to ensure it follows appropriate legal processes and acts in accordance with Insurance requirements. Other steps would also be taken on a case by case basis that are not detailed here.

CONTEXT

As per the Salt Church Safe Ministry Policy, if volunteer leaders or staff observe signs of abuse or inappropriate behaviour by a volunteer or staff, they will immediately contact one of the Salt Church Safe Ministry Supervisors (SMSs). The SMS will listen to the report and be responsible for carrying out the following steps depending on the incident and claim.

STEPS:

Step 1: Receive and Record Incident Details (and take immediate action if needed)

When a SMS is contacted with a report of harm, or inappropriate leader behaviour, they will:

1. In the event of an emergency, contact emergency services immediately.
2. Write a record of the report (this could be done with email)
3. Share the report with the other SMS(s).
4. Share the report with the Insurance Provider if the allegation includes any suggestion of serious wrongdoing by a church leader, elder, volunteer or the church itself.
5. If there is a child (under 18 years) involved in the report the SMS will use the NSW Government Online Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG). They will use the online guide to:
 - a. Keep a record of their choices and the advised response.
 - b. Carry out the steps advised by the MRG.

This may include contacting police, the Dept. of Community Services or other organisations. There may also be need for the initial Reporter to provide statements to authorities.

The MRG may recommend no further action be taken with the Victim and/or the Accused, in which case this will end the Incident Response Process.
6. Continue to Step 2.

Step 2: Review and determine the risk of significant harm and/or inappropriate leader behaviour of the reported incident.

Once all SMSs have received the report, they will:

1. **Independently assess** if there is or was risk of significant harm and/or inappropriate leader behaviour.

This allows SMSs to dismiss overzealous observations as signs of abuse (e.g. a child with a runny nose, a boy who loves climbing trees has everyday bruises on his legs, a case of clear misunderstandings between people are all signs that could be reported to a SMS but should not go any further to avoid undue stress on individuals or the organisation).

- a. **Note** on Risk of Significant Harm:

A person was at risk of significant harm if the circumstances that are causing concern for the safety, welfare or wellbeing of person were present to a significant extent.

What is meant by "significant" in the phrase "to a significant extent" is that which is sufficiently serious to warrant a response by a statutory authority, irrespective of a family's consent.

What **is significant** is not minor or trivial, and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the person's safety, welfare, or wellbeing.

- b. **Note** On Inappropriate Leader Behaviour:

Inappropriate leader behaviour is any action, plan or communication from a leader or volunteer that is not inline with the appropriate leader behaviours as set out in the Safe Ministry Training Policy and Associated Notes.

2. If ALL the SMSs deem the report to be too minor for action, one of the SMSs will communicate this decision to the initial reporter (and the Insurance provider if necessary). This will be the end of the process for this incident.
3. If ANY of the SMSs (or the Insurance provider) deems there is or was risk of significant harm and/or inappropriate leader behaviour, one of the SMSs will take the lead, and continue the Incident Response Process at Step 3.

Step 3: Determine if the Report includes an “Accused Leader”

A report includes an Accused Leader when the person (or persons) who are thought to have caused the reported incident were in a position of leadership during the alleged incident. An Accused Leader can include a person who was representing Salt Church in a voluntary capacity.

There may not be a victim (e.g. when a leader acts inappropriately, but no-one is hurt).

In the case where the Accused was not in a volunteer or leadership role

If the Accused was not acting on behalf of Salt Church in the alleged incident, the SMS will:

1. Share the report with the Senior Leaders of [Church Name] and, with them, determine appropriate steps to take on a case by case basis. This may include contacting external services (e.g. Police).
2. This will be the end of the process for this incident.

In the case where there is an Accused Leader AND a Victim

If the Report includes an Alleged Victim and an Accused Leader, the SMS and the Senior Leadership of Salt Church will:

1. Appoint an Independent Ministry Investigator (IMI) to examine allegations (unless Australian Authorities instruct Salt Church otherwise).
2. An appropriate IMI will be:
 - a. Independent (they should not attend Salt Church);
 - b. Qualified (they should have appropriate skills to perform the task); and
 - c. Experienced (they should have some level of understanding of the processes and consequences)
3. Once an IMI has been appointed
 - a. the SMS will:
 - i. Inform the Alleged Victim and the Alleged Accused that an IMI has been appointed; and
 - ii. provide the IMI with contact details for both the Alleged Victim and the Alleged Accused.
 - b. The IMI will:
 - i. if authorities have been contacted, liaise with and submit to the authority's direction;

- ii. contact both the Alleged Victim and the Alleged Accused to clarify the incident and the circumstances in which it allegedly happened. (The IMI may determine that there was no serious incident); and
- iii. present a formal report to the Senior Leadership of present a formal report to the Senior Leadership of Salt Church with:
 - 1. An opinion on the validity and severity of the alleged incident.
 - 2. Recommendations (if any) on:
 - a. How to avoid such an incident in the future;
 - b. What steps should be taken for the Accused (and associates); and
 - c. What steps should be taken for the Victim (and associated).
- c. The Senior Leadership will:
 - i. Determine what actions they will implement;
 - ii. Provide a report to the Insurance Provider.

In the case there is an Accused Leader but NO Victim

If there is an Accused Leader, but NO VICTIM, the SMSs will;

- 1. Examine the validity of the alleged behaviour
- 2. Determine the severity of the behaviour according to the table below, and
- 3. Carry out the related steps (outlined below).

If a Leader has been accused twice or more in the space of 6 months, the SMS Action Steps will be determined by the sum of the severity of each case in that time span (rather than by the individual case). For example, if Bob behaved with Severity 1 in March and then with Severity 2 in May, the SMS would impose the step described in Severity 3 (1+2).
- 4. This will be the end of the process for this incident.

NOTES:

- It is not the job of the SMS or the IMI to counsel either the Alleged Victim or Alleged Accused, the SMS and IMI are a liaison and referrer only.
- Either party has a right at all times to have a support person present.
 - A responsible parent/guardian must be present when speaking to someone under 18.

Severity of behaviour	Explanation of Severity	Action steps
1. Minor	The alleged inappropriate behaviour is minor when the behaviour is obviously without malice and there was little to no chance of severe injury or abuse.	The SMS will remind the Accused Leader of the appropriate behaviour policy.
2. Mild	The alleged inappropriate behaviour is minor when the Leader thought there was circumstantial grounds for the behaviour and some caution was taken, even if it was not due practice.	The SMS will remind the Accused Leader of the appropriate behaviour policy and discuss with them other options to take if the circumstances arise again.
3. Substantial	The alleged inappropriate behaviour is substantial when the behaviour was known to be inappropriate but obviously done without reasonable thought or in haste.	The SMS will remind the Accused Leader of the appropriate behaviour policy and warn them about their behaviour.
4. Severe	The alleged inappropriate behaviour is severe when the behaviour was done in malice or hostility, and brought significant danger of harm or abuse to others.	The SMS will arrange (with the Church leaders) to immediately remove the Accused Leader from their role until they are able to show reasonable grounds for their reappointment.