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## **ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY AND SAFE BOUNDARIES**

Approved by: Diocesan Council

23 November 2016

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### **PREAMBLE**

In our response to reducing the risk of child sexual abuse and sexual misconduct, it has been strongly recommended that touching within Parishes cease.

However, a better approach would be greater awareness about boundaries and modifying behaviours to ensure that any touching is respectful, appropriate and safe.

The key to understanding appropriate boundaries is understanding the person on the receiving end of our good intentions. Dependent on the personal histories of each person determines their reaction to those intentions. We must consider the appropriateness and impact of words and actions and ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained at all times.

This Policy applies to Clergy, Church workers, Employees, Volunteers and Parishioners.

The following guidelines outline acceptable behaviours within the Anglican Diocese of Perth.

To minimise the risk of being accused of or engaging in misconduct, particularly when in a social setting, parish environment or while providing pastoral care, carefully consider the following with regard to physical contact (this would also apply for the 'Greeting of the Peace').

- 1 If the person is particularly vulnerable and whether touch of any kind is appropriate;
- 2 The person's cultural background and what may or may not be considered appropriate in that culture;
- 3 Whether someone wants to be touched. One's own needs in a similar situation should not be considered;
- 4 Seek the permission with whom physical contact is intended; For example, "I can see you are distressed. Would you mind if I put my arm around you?"  
**NB:** When providing comfort to the bereaved or at a Funeral service, it is generally acceptable to offer a hug.
- 5 Use an open hand in the centre of someone's back to comfort or provide support at the elbow;
- 6 If someone needs to be touched for medical, instructional or safety reasons, advise then beforehand;
- 7 If a particular activity involves touch, for example at a youth group activity where a particular game or activity needs to be demonstrated, ask for a volunteer.
- 8 If someone declines affection or physical contact, respect their wishes;
- 9 No-one should be pressured into responding to physical contact or affection;

### **INAPPROPRIATE TOUCH**

The following would be considered inappropriate:

Kissing on the mouth

Any touching near the breasts or genital areas;

Sitting on knees;

Placing hands on thigh area;



### **PASTORAL CARE / MEETINGS / INTERVIEWS**

Personal safety is paramount and caution should be exercised when providing pastoral care to the following:

- 1 those affected by drugs and alcohol
- 2 those with significant mental health issues;
- 3 those who are known to have anger management and domestic violence histories.

In these situations:

- 1 Avoid meeting alone;
- 2 Advise someone of your whereabouts;
- 3 Ensure there is mobile phone coverage or access to a landline telephone.

The following should be considered when meeting with, providing pastoral care or conducting interviews:

- 1 The location of the meeting;
- 2 Whether the physical location for privacy of conversation while still maintaining the opportunity for supervision (for example, doors to meeting rooms, if closed, should not be locked);
- 3 Seating arrangements and the physical distance between those in attendance to maintain both hospitality and respect;
- 4 Whether the circumstances would suggest a social interaction;
- 5 The attire of the person;
- 6 The circumstances of the meeting / interview especially at night;
- 7 Establishing at the outset the purpose of the meeting and setting the boundaries with respect to the subject matter, confidentiality and its duration;
- 8 The appropriateness of initiating or receiving any physical contact, such as gestures of comfort, that may be unwanted or misinterpreted; and
- 9 Whether the presence of a child's parent, guardian or another person chosen by the child is appropriate; Refer to Policy 40.1 for further information for meeting with a child.
- 10 If in the context of a meeting reference is made to or advice is sought around topics of a sexual nature, be aware that they may have motives or needs that are not understood. It is advisable to terminate the meeting and refer the person to the Director or some other suitable professional person who can assist with the situation.

Any matters of concern should be documented and a copy provided to the Director or the Parish Priest.

### **ESTABLISHING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

It is inevitable that in workplaces and Parish friendships will develop. However, it is important that Clergy, leaders and those in authority can remain objective and unbiased and can recognise the difference between a professional and casual relationship at all times.

Things to consider are:

- Nomination of friends to Boards, Committees and Councils;
- Perceived favouritism to a particular individual or group of people;
- Paying attention to and wanting to spend time with a particular person or group of Parishioners / people which may make others feel inadequate or neglected;
- Praising and rewarding an individual or group of people and disregarding the opinions or advice from others.



This blurring of boundaries can create divisions within the Parish or workplace and can impact morale.

**CHANGES IN PASTORAL OR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

It is also possible that pastoral and professional relationships can become personal and intimate. When this occurs, Clergy should no longer provide pastoral care and support to the person concerned and ask a colleague to assist. The Archbishop should also be advised of changes in pastoral relationships.

**BOUNDARIES SPECIFIC TO THE ROLE**

Every person who has a role within the Parish or the Organisation has a responsibility to be conversant with the specific requirements of that role.

Paid employees should familiarise themselves with their Position Descriptions and operate within the confines of the outlined criteria.