RONDEBOSCH UNITED CHURCH
creating circles of dignity

CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Second Edition: November 2025
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PREAMBLE

Policy Statement

Rondebosch United Church (RUC) recognises the importance of safeguarding and protecting children and ensuring that they can experience safety and quality care while interacting with RUC. RUC has put in place guidelines for child safeguarding for the RUC community, including its members, staff, associates and visitors, both adults and children, while they engage in the RUC community and/or represent RUC. This policy and related procedures aim to be aligned with South African legislation and international law, to which we as South Africans are bound, as it pertains to children, and how we work with and for them.

Policy Monitoring and Review

We commit to regularly monitoring the implementation of this policy and related procedures, and to a formal review annually, on the anniversary of its approval.

Scope

This policy and the related procedures apply to all members, staff, associates and visitors, both adults and children, while engaged in RUC community life.

Intent

It is in the interest of RUC to clearly outline the legislative requirements, responsibilities and expectations of both RUC, as a legal entity, and the members, staff, associates and visitors at RUC.

Rondebosch United Church Council of Trustees Approval

Approved By (full name)	
Designation	
Signature	
Date	
Review Date	

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1. Introduction

Who we are
Our church began in 1900 as the Rondebosch Congregational Church and in 1989 we reconstituted ourselves as the Rondebosch United Church (Congregational and Presbyterian).
As we gather around the table we strive towards being inclusive and affirming of all people as children of God, gifted with the dignity of being created in God's image.
We see ourselves on a spiritual journey which involves a three-fold movement of reaching inward, outward and upward. This is reflected in our worship, ministries and projects, all geared towards nurturing our inner relationship with our true selves, our loving and caring relationships with others, and our prayerful connection with God.
RUC is registered as a non-profit organisation in terms of the Nonprofit Organisation Act, 1997, registration number 044-754-NPO.

Breach of this policy
In light of the vulnerability of children and the devastating consequences of the maltreatment of children, any breach of this policy, procedures or code/s of conduct and child discipline guidelines will be taken seriously and may result in a consequence as set out in this policy following investigation.

2. Definition of terms

For the purposes of this Child Safeguarding Policy:

- '*The Children's Act'* refers to the South African Children's Act, 38 of 2005, including its regulations published in April 2010, and the Children's Amendment Act, 41 of 2007. It governs the laws relating to the care and protection of children.
- '*Child*', '*children*', '*young person*', '*young people*', '*adolescent* 'and '*adolescents'* - whether singular or plural – may be used interchangeably and are taken to refer to those under the age of 18 years, in accordance with Section 28 of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution, the Children's Act, 38 of 2005 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Children '*with disabilities*' - include children who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society as an equal basis, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- '*Employees*', '*workers*', '*staff*', and '*volunteers*', may be used interchangeably and are taken to refer to anyone interacting with children on behalf of RUC in an official capacity.
- '*Parents*', '*guardians*' and '*caregivers*', may be used interchangeably and are taken to refer to those adults with parental responsibility for children, or who are responsible for the day-to-day care of children or who are considered parents by the children (step-parents, foster parents etc.) In some cases, they may need to be distinguished when referring to legal responsibility for children.

- '*Safeguarding'* is an overarching term which refers to measures to protect the health, wellbeing and human rights of individuals, which allow people, especially vulnerable groups of people, to live free from abuse, harm and neglect.
- '*Child Safeguarding*' is a term used to describe ways of creating safe environments for children to thrive, and to prevent them from being harmed. It includes Child Protection.
- '*Child Protection*' is a term used to refer to the response to a child being abused, harmed or neglected.
- '*Church'* and '*organisation* 'may be used interchangeably to refer to the Rondebosch United Church, being a local church.
- '*Church Council'* refers to members of the congregation elected as deacons/elders.
- '*Member*' or '*congregant'* refers to a person who is a signed up member of RUC or a person who attends RUC and considers themselves a part of the community.
- *Visitor*' refers to a person who is visiting RUC, taking part in RUC activities or programmes, even regularly, but does not consider themselves a member or a congregant, including guests, contractors, short-term volunteers, partners or once-off or short-term tenants.

3. Need for policy

We acknowledge the alarmingly high rates of abuse, neglect, exploitation of, and violence against children in South Africa, and we acknowledge the long-term negative effects of such abuse on the children themselves, as well as our society.

A child safeguarding policy helps protect:
Children through creating a safe and positive environment and minimising the risk to children from abuse and exploitation.
Members/congregants, volunteers, and staff through standards of behaviour outlined in a Code of Conduct when they are working with or around children and what to do if they notice, or are told about, inappropriate behaviour in others.
RUC as an organisation by helping us move towards best practices in safeguarding children.

4. Roles and responsibilities

We believe that everyone is responsible for safeguarding and it is not something that can or should be delegated to a certain group or individual. However, there are people by virtue of their positions in RUC that carry specific safeguarding roles and responsibilities, which shall be clarified, in order to ensure best practice and the ongoing implementation of our child safeguarding strategy.

The Church Council is responsible for the oversight of church administration and activities, which includes the responsibility for overseeing child safeguarding at RUC.

A **Child Safeguarding Committee** (CSC), with a minimum of one representative from the Church Council, the Minister, the Child Safeguarding Officer/s (CSO/s), as well as additional volunteer members approved by the Church Council, shall be formed to facilitate the implementation of this policy and the continuous growth of a child safeguarding culture within RUC.

The role of the CSC includes:

- Support the CSO/s in responding to child safeguarding concerns reported
- Support the monitoring and review of the implementation of this policy and ensure it is completed within the period of review as stated in this policy
- Being alert to and recognising child safeguarding issues, being sure to challenge poor practice
- Oversee child safeguarding induction and training

A minimum of one designated **Child Safeguarding Officer** (CSO) will be appointed by the Church Council. The role of the CSO/s includes:

- Act as a focal point to receive reports of child safeguarding concerns
- Manage the response to child safeguarding concerns reported, with the guidance and support of the Child Safeguarding Committee/Working Group
- Ensure that all safeguarding concerns reported are followed through to conclusion
- Consult with other agencies that support children
- Make a formal referral to child protection services or other agencies if appropriate
- Keep a confidential record (register) of child safeguarding concerns reported
- Give advice on child safeguarding

Our Child Safeguarding Officer is Michelle Kempster.

5. Policy Principles

We believe that:

1. All children are precious and made in the image of God.
2. Child safeguarding is both an individual and a corporate responsibility.
3. All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation, and institutionalised inequalities should be challenged.
4. All children should be supported and encouraged to fulfil their potential.
5. Everyone must take precautions and responsibility to help create safe spaces for children and support their care and protection. This begins with everyone being well informed and aware of child safeguarding concerns.
6. Openness about concerns relating to child protection and safeguarding matters must be encouraged because child abuse thrives on secrecy.
7. Organisations (including churches) have a duty of care to the children with whom they work and therefore have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of safeguarding for the children in their care.
8. “The best interest of the child” is of paramount importance and will be prioritised in all matters related to child protection and safeguarding.

6. Declaration

RUC is committed to the protection and safeguarding of *every* child so that they can become all that God intends.

As Christians, our profound concern for children at risk flows from God Himself. We affirm that children are created in the image of God and therefore have intrinsic worth. We believe that every child is born equal in God's sight with unique talents. We also acknowledge that Jesus himself showed special concern and care for children as the most vulnerable members of society.

We base these beliefs on the following verses:

Matthew 18:2-6 (children are part of God's Kingdom)
Mark 10:14 (children need love and acceptance)
Psalm 139:14 (children are fearfully and wonderfully made)

We commit ourselves to listen to, believe in, and act for children. We will work with children to find ways to protect them from harm.
We commit ourselves to speak up for children at risk in every possible arena, be that in their local communities, or in the assemblies of the powerful who make decisions that profoundly affect children's lives.
We believe children have the right to speak and be heard and that involving them in their own protection has been demonstrated to be an effective way of bringing about an improvement in their protection. This is the core of the concept of child participation and protective behaviours.
We accept the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa and the Children's Act as a basis for our understanding of children's rights in South Africa. We commit to work towards what is best for every child.
We accept the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child as a basis for our understanding of the rights of children globally.
We commit to obtaining agreement to adhere to this policy, including the Code of Conduct, from our leaders, members and staff associated with RUC. This will be achieved by ensuring that all leaders and staff read, receive orientation in and commit to the implementation of the policy by signing the Personal Commitment to Child Safeguarding Form (Appendix A). This policy will also be made accessible to members and a process of education and engagement on its implementation provided. All members will be invited to sign the Personal Commitment to Child Safeguarding Form in order to demonstrate their support and commitment to child safeguarding.
We commit to documenting our safeguarding strategy and ongoing development of a safeguarding culture within RUC and update this policy according to lessons learnt, up to date legislation and best practice as far as we know it.

7. Definitions of child abuse

All persons acting as representatives of RUC need to be aware of and understand the various types of child abuse.
Child abuse is a general term used to describe where a child may experience harm, either by deliberate harmful acts, but more usually as a result of failure on the part of a parent/carer or organisation/community to ensure a reasonable standard of care and protection for that child, and where that care and protection is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust.
For definitions on specific and relevant types of abuse, please refer to Appendix B.

8. Abuse of power in the broader church

Sadly, abuse of children and other vulnerable groups occurs in the broader church environment in South Africa and globally, even to the point of being institutionalised. Abuse has been perpetrated by church leaders and/or staff, who took advantage of their positions of power or spiritual authority that they hold in their communities. In addition, churches can be slow to recognise that child abuse may be occurring in their environment and neglecting to do the due diligence required to ensure they are proactive in child safeguarding.
We acknowledge the added vulnerability of children in a spiritual or religious environment, where the use of fear has been widespread and corporal punishment is still being justified on the basis of the bible. This motivates us to be proactive in doing what we can to promote transparency and provide a safe environment for children and to address and prevent harmful practices or behaviour in our church.

9. RUC children

The children in our RUC community are mostly children of families that belong to or attend our church. On occasion, children participate in RUC programmes or activities without the involvement of their parents or caregivers, for example, when visiting with friends who are regular attendees at RUC. Children fostered by RUC families are wards of the state are we recognise in some circumstances they should be afforded additional protection. Children may also come to RUC as part of an organisation that is visiting to participate in Sunday worship, or attend other events such as market days or carnivals at RUC.
We acknowledge the importance of knowing where all the children that interact with RUC are coming from so that we can manage any risk or vulnerability associated with their circumstances.

10. Risk assessment

In addition to the common types of abuse experienced by children in our community, in the interests of safeguarding, we need to be aware of the potential risk of harm to the children when they interact with RUC. This includes risks while interacting with members and staff and the greater community of RUC, taking part in programmes and activities run by RUC, and being on the RUC premises.
RUC will conduct an annual risk assessment and keep a risk register reflecting identified risks of harm to children, their level of risk and the actions listed to mitigate the risk. This information will be used in the annual review of this policy.

The following areas will be assessed for risk of harm at RUC:

- People: Staff, congregants, visitors, contractors.
- Programmes/activities: Holy Circus, Confirmation classes, Community groups, Sunday worship services.
- Physical and virtual environment: Our church property at 18 Belmont Road, Rondebosch, Cape Town, RUC website, social media, newsletter, email, virtual meetings, computers

11. Legal provision for children in South Africa

South African law provides protection measures for children as well as requirements and guidelines for people and organisations working with children. This child safeguarding policy provides guidelines for ensuring RUC adheres to the minimum requirements of the law.

The following South African legislation and/or international treaties are considered in this policy:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- The Children's Act, 38 of 2005 and the Children's Amendment Act, 41 of 2007
- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007
- The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act, 7 of 2013
- The Occupational Health & Safety Act, 85 of 1993
- The Protection of Personal Information Act, 4 of 2013
- The Films and Publications Act, 65 of 1996 and the Films and Publications Amendment Act, 11 of 2019
- The Non-Profit Organisation Act, 71 of 1997
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

12. Data and record protection

The use and sharing of personal information (biographical data/identifying details/visual images) has become extremely sensitive, considering the implications of the Protection of Personal Information Act, 4 of 2013 (POPIA). Essentially the purpose of the POPIA is to protect people from harm by protecting their personal information. For children, it is necessary to protect their right to privacy, as well as to protect them from abuse should any information about them be used by a perpetrator to gain access to them, or for the purposes of exploitation.

Storage of data and information of children guidelines

- Any personal information of children obtained by RUC should be essential for the services provided, and no superfluous information will be sought
- Personal information will be sourced only from children themselves (with the consent of their parent or guardian), directly from their parent or guardian
- No personal information of a child will be shared with anyone who does not require it to perform their duties, or anyone who is not working directly with the child, or anyone outside the organisation, unless it is necessary for making a referral to a designated child protection organisation or the police or it is with the consent of the parent or guardian (and with the consent of the child where age-appropriate)
- No unnecessary personal information or records of a child will be kept
- All computer devices or networks with any personal information of children stored on them will be password protected
- RUC's computer devices and networks will be fitted with sufficient firewall protection to prevent hacking
- Children should only appear in the official RUC communications with the required consent and following the required guidelines

13. Communication about children

We endeavour to respect the privacy and dignity of every child appearing in any form of communications for and in RUC. The following communication guidelines clarify what constitutes

appropriate and inappropriate use of written, visual and verbal information relating to children, and to ensure that everybody understands the importance of protecting and respecting the dignity and privacy of children.

These guidelines aim to protect children from being identified by those who may wish to harm them. They also enable RUC to control confidential information regarding children, to control the dissemination of data, information and visual images and to prevent the presentation of degrading images of children through publications, website, or via social media platforms.
Communication guidelines also allow children to know what rights they have regarding the use of information that relates to them, to introduce them to the concept of 'informed consent ' regarding such information, and when to speak out if they feel uncomfortable.

The communication guidelines for RUC are as follows:

Website

- All RUC website content must comply with this child safeguarding policy. Any communication that involves children, whether written or recorded, must be screened by the designated staff member before it is shared.
- It is assumed that all information on our website is available in the public domain unless secured by a password
- Images of children may only be used on the RUC website in accordance with the guidelines on the use of visual images Appendix C.
- The source of all photographs of children should be identified or referenced
- No identifying details should ever be published with the photographs of children
- Any suspicious request for sensitive information about children received through the website should be reported to the CSO
- The street address/es of any programmes should be protected where possible

Visual Images (Photographs/Videos)

- No photographs or videos should be taken of any child by an adult without the prior consent of their parent or legal guardian
- Nobody shall be entitled to create, produce, download, gather, store, use or disseminate any visual image that:
    - does not respect the dignity and self-worth of the child
    - is exploitative or manipulative as far as the child is concerned (e.g. by asking the child to cry for the camera)
    - misleads the viewer of the visual image as to the actual situation of the subject of the image
    - distorts reality and / or does not accurately reflect or portray reality, either deliberately or implicitly
    - is dishonourable to a child (uses sexualised images of a child, could be harmful to the child)
    - is distasteful or indecent, contains gratuitous images of extreme suffering, nakedness or death
    - Discloses personal information about the child or family or family circumstances
    - Shows a child in a swimming costume, partly dressed, posing provocatively or making inappropriate gestures
    - Is taken of a child who is in the protection of a court
- RUC will appoint a designated photographer/s, trained in the guidelines of this policy, to take photographs and videos of RUC related activities for the use of RUC which include children.

- Where possible, group photos of children will be used rather than individual photos
- No close-up visual image of any child at RUC should reveal the identity of the child, but should be taken at an angle which protects the identity of the child, unless express consent is given by the child's parents or guardian
- All such consent should be written

14. Code of conduct

RUC expects anyone interacting with children on our behalf to abide by our Code of Conduct.
RUC expects anyone interacting with children on our behalf or on our property to abide by its Code of Conduct.
Our Code of Conduct applies to members, staff, volunteers, council members and visitors, all of whom are expected to treat children with respect and dignity. All staff, council members, and volunteers shall be required to sign that they have read, understood, and accepted the policy and all members shall be encouraged to do so. A summary of our code of conduct will be displayed in a common area for all to see.
Anyone representing RUC must avoid acting of behaving in ways that could:

a) Be construed as poor practice
b) Put a child at risk or
c) Be potentially abusive

RUC's Code of Conduct guides our behaviour the following way:
You should:

- Report any child abuse (suspected/witnessed or disclosed) immediately
- Act within the boundaries of your job description or role/position at all times
- Be visible to other adults when talking with children unless you are required to supervise a child to the bathrooms as part of your job description or on the request of the parent or guardian
- Avoid questionable behaviour which could be misinterpreted
- Treat children with dignity at all times, using age-appropriate language that is encouraging and respectful
- Be aware that children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances when they need medical attention
- Any touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child, rather than the adult
- Respect each child's boundaries and their right to privacy and if in the position to do so, help children to develop their own sense of their rights as well as helping them to know what they can do if they feel that there is a problem
- Create and maintain an open and safe culture where children feel safe to raise issues or concerns, children who raise concerns are taken seriously and they feel that they are heard
- Be accountable to each other so that any potentially abusive behaviour can be challenged
- Develop a culture where children can talk about their contact with adults and other children openly
- Always have at least two adults when talking with a group of children
- Only discipline a child if specifically part of your job description with pre-obtained consent from their parents or guardians and according to the child discipline guidelines
- Do everything you can to ensure that your visitors conduct themselves within the guidelines of this Code of Conduct.

You should never:

- Act in ways that are abusive or place children at risk of abuse
- Hit or otherwise physically abuse children, or use corporal (physical) punishment including hitting, pinching, slapping and beating, or verbally abuse a child including shouting or swearing
- Use words intended to shame, humiliate or threaten children
- Have a child or children with whom you are working visit or stay overnight where you are staying
- Touch children in a manner that is inappropriate.
- Engage in physical activity that is sexually provocative, inappropriate, offensive or exploitative or could be interpreted as assault or abuse.
- Develop physical or sexual relationships with children, or use sexual innuendo to exploit or abuse them
- Expose children to sexually explicit pornographic materials such as pornographic or sexually explicit materials
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice, which is inappropriate, flirtatious, offensive or abusive
- Do things for children of a personal nature that the children can do for themselves
- Excuse, or participate in behaviour with children which is illegal, unsafe or harmful
- Act in ways that are intended to shame or humiliate (bullying)
- Discriminate against, show different treatment to, or favour particular children while excluding others
- Spend time alone with children (unless this is specifically part of your job description such as counselling, and with the consent of a parent or guardian)
- Be the only adult in contact with children on any social media
- Name children or share any personal details that may enable anyone to locate a child (e.g. email addresses, schools, locations etc.) when communicating about children
- Engage in rough or physical contact with a child, unless it is permitted within the rules of the game or activity
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive
- Discuss personal issues about a child or their family with other people except a designated Child Safeguarding Officer of RUC or designated authorities
- Keep reports or suspicions of abuse a secret

Child discipline guidelines

It is important to define what RUC means by the concept of discipline, since some traditional forms of discipline have been hurtful to children and are no longer allowed by law.

While discipline of children is primarily the responsibility of parents or guardians, when children are in the care of RUC staff or volunteers, it may be reasonable and appropriate for RUC staff to discipline children. Before children are accepted into any RUC programme or activity, the prior consent of the parent or guardian will be sought for staff to discipline their children following the guidelines below:

- Discipline comes from the Latin word 'to teach'
- Discipline is an ongoing educative process that encourages development of self-control and respect for others
- Discipline builds a culture of respect, tolerance and dignity
- Discipline should be age-appropriate
- Adults and children decide together on rules and consequences
- Discipline should never take the form of physical or corporal punishment

RUC will provide all staff and volunteers with training on the Code of conduct and the use of discipline methods acceptable in RUC where it is part of their job description to do so.

15. Tenants

RUC will notify all RUC tenants of the Child Safeguarding policy. Only tenants who acknowledge they have read, understand and accept the policy will be accepted as tenants. This applies to both long-term and once-off tenants.

16. Recruitment and screening

RUC is committed to our duty of care in screening any people who hold a position in RUC, whether paid or unpaid, and most importantly those who interact with children in our care or as part of their job description. People will only be appointed or allowed access to children after specific information has been gathered and judged upon.

The following legislation explains who is deemed unsuitable to work with or have access to children in their employment or voluntary work and guide the screening of people who work with or have access to children in order to protect them from all forms of abuse and exploitation:

1. The Children's Act, 38 of 2005 provides for the mandatory screening of any person working with or with access to children against Part B of the National Child Protection Register (NCPR). RUC can submit a Form 29 enquiry to the National Department of Social Development for someone's name against the NCPR.
2. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007 provides for mandatory screening of any person working with children against the National Register for Sex Offenders (NRSO).

In addition, because of the high levels of criminality in South Africa, and in order to offer the children in our care the highest possible standard of protection, a Police Clearance will be mandatory for all staff (employees and volunteers), office bearers as well as any other person working with children in RUC.

It is acknowledged that the actual processes to gain the clearance against the NCPR takes longer than stipulated by the issuing authority, and that most prospective staff of volunteers will not, as a rule, have up to date clearance certificates on application for their position. RUC has therefore put practical steps in place to ensure that people, who are considered to be suitable for the position, can still be employed or volunteer while waiting for important clearances, while at the same time ensuring children are not put at risk. The burden of cost for a police clearance will be carried by RUC.
Clearance certificates shall be updated every two years.

The following screening procedures will be followed and applies for all staff and volunteers working with or who will have contact with children as part of their duties:
On application for any position (employment or voluntary), the applicant will:

- provide consent for RUC to seek clearance certificates as per this Safeguarding Policy

- be required to read the organisation's Child Safeguarding Policy and declare their agreement to sign the personal commitment form (Appendix A) should their application be successful
- be required to provide two references, at least being from a recent former employer if applicable

No person with a criminal conviction against a child or who appears on the NCPR will be able to be employed or volunteer at RUC.

17. Education and training of this policy

We are committed to ensuring that our members and staff of RUC understand the importance of child safeguarding, and that they have the ability to implement this policy and procedures. Importantly we are also committed to ensuring children know how best to protect themselves and make use of the relevant aspects of this policy and procedures.
We will do this by:

- Appointing a child safeguarding working group to develop and drive a RUC safeguarding strategy
- Conducting basic child safeguarding training for staff, volunteers and office bearers so that they can lead and role model good safeguarding practice and manage the implementation of this policy within six months of the approval of this policy
- Ensuring all members are informed of and all staff and volunteers are orientated on this policy

18. Reporting

RUC endeavours to ensure that all members and staff know what to do if they suspect a child is being abused, neglected, or if a child discloses abuse to them, be it by someone within RUC or within the child's home or community. Once abuse is suspected, the following reporting guidelines are to be followed.

18.1 Internal Reporting Steps

WHEN to report a concern

- A child discloses to you that they are being abused
- Someone makes an allegation to you of child abuse
- An allegation or incident of misconduct or breaking the behaviour protocols of the organisation towards a child
- You suspect a child is being abused, neglected or in need of care or protection

These concerns should be reported immediately, in order that a child's safety and best interests can be protected as far as possible.
WHO to report to:

- The Child Safeguarding Officer of RUC
- The Minister, if the designated child safeguarding officer is not available or if the CSO is implicated.
- The Council Secretary, if the Minister is implicated

Children are strongly encouraged to report any safeguarding concerns, and we endeavour to make the reporting procedure child-friendly and accessible to children too. We do this by:

- Displaying posters explaining the importance of child protection/safeguarding and our reporting procedures in the entrance hall of our organisation
- Addressing safeguarding and reporting in the Holy Circus classes and with parents
- Encouraging parents to discuss safeguarding with their children and to raise any concerns at any time
- Clearly communicating our position on child safeguarding on various platforms

18.2 Reporting to the authorities

Reporting to the authorities is guided by chapter 7, Section 110 of the Children's Amendment Act, 41 of 2007. It outlines the guidelines for reporting of an abused or neglected child or child in need of care and protection. It makes provision for two categories of people, a list of professionals who *must* report if they reasonably believe a child is being abused or neglected, as well as any person who *may* report, if they believe a child is in need of care and protection. They are obliged to report to the Department of Social Development, any other Designated Child Protection Organisation (DCPO) or a police official. In contrast, the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act, 7 of 2013, Chapter 4, Section 18 provides for mandatory reporting by *any person* who reasonably believes a child is a victim of trafficking, to a police official.

In the context of RUC, any person who has reasonable concerns as per the above should report this to the CSO, who will, in consultation with the CSC, assess the report and confirming facts, before reporting to the authorities if agreed by the CSC.

RUC commits to building our referral network and effective working relationships with our local police, Department of Social Development social services office, and designated child protection organisations in order to best serve our children.

We will do this by ensuring:

- Referral information is accessible to the CSO and the Minister
- Referral information includes contact name, position, referral procedure, contact details
- Referral forms for authorities are accessible to the CSO

19. Responding to allegations of abuse

A child who makes a disclosure of abuse is in a particularly vulnerable position. We provide the following guideline to any person who receives a disclosure of abuse by a child at RUC:

- Remain calm
- As soon as it is obvious that a child wants to or is disclosing serious abuse, particularly abuse that is considered a crime, gently ask them to stop and suggest they wait to speak to a professional. Professionals are able to contain the abuse survivor and provide possible evidence should the survivor wish to pursue a legal case against the perpetrator
- Believe the child, and show them acceptance, care and respect
- Tell the child you will need to let someone else know – never promise complete confidentiality – be honest
- Do not push the child for more information than is necessary to take your next step, as this can further traumatise the child
- Be aware that the child may have been threatened or bribed not to tell anyone
- Do not judge the child
- Do not lay blame – even if the child has broken a rule, they are not to blame for the abuse
- Listen to what you are told, even if it is difficult to believe

- Never push for information – avoid leading questions and asking them to repeat or elaborate. Leave this to a professional. If the child decides not to tell you after all, then accept that and let them know that you are always ready to listen.
- Ask just enough to clarify your understanding of what is being said, so that you can pass the information on
- Ensure the child is safe and out of danger (to the extent that you can - you do not have the authority to 'remove 'a child from their parent or guardian, or from any other place outside the organisation)
- If they need urgent medical attention, make sure that the doctors, or medical staff, know that it is a child protection issue
- Report immediately to the designated Child Protection Officer
- Complete the 'Child Abuse Incident Report Form 'as soon as possible, or make a written record as soon as possible thereafter (preferably within the hour)
- Keep confidentiality and only share information with the designated Child Protection Officer
- Do not investigate the disclosure yourself
- Do not deal with or question the alleged perpetrator/s
- Do not contact parents or guardians until advice and guidance has been sought from the Child Safeguarding Officer

On receiving a report of abuse, the CSO, in consultation with the CSC will:

- In consultation with the reporter, should the child be assessed as being in immediate danger or life threatening, report *immediately* to the relevant designated Child Protection Organisation and/or the Police, using a DSD Form 22 "Reporting of Abuse or Deliberate Neglect of Child" (the assigned designated (or statutory social worker) at the designated child protection organisation or a police official will complete a DSD Form 36 for removal to a place of safety if deemed necessary)
- Ensure the child receives medical attention immediately if in an emergency (check with the child's parent/s or guardian/s for any important medical information and parental consent)
- Inform the child's parent or guardian, as long as they are not implicated, as soon as possible
- In the case of child abuse, neglect or a child in need of care or protection, report *within 24 hours* to the relevant designated Child Protection Organisation and/or the Police, using a DSD Form 22 "Reporting of Abuse or Deliberate Neglect of Child"
- For any other concerns, take action *within 48 hours*
- Record the incident in the Incident Register alongside the Child Protection Incident Report Form
- Inform the CSC as soon as possible on receiving any report of an incident/concern
- For concerns implicating a member of staff, refer *immediately* to the CRC, or if the Minister is implicated, refer to the Secretary of the Council, for follow up with implicated staff member
- Follow up on any referral with an external authority and continue to work together with the designated Social Worker who has responsibility for the referral where possible
- Assess and investigate all other concerns in order to determine next steps
- Refer to other support systems (e.g. counselling, social worker etc.)
- Follow up on any referral in order to ensure child is supported
- Ensure that the child is provided with support in the organisation without disclosing confidential information

Following a child abuse report concerning an RUC staff member or member the CSC will:

- As soon as possible, explain to the person that an allegation of abuse has been made against them and explain the procedure going forward
- Always treat the person against whom an allegation has been made with dignity and respect
- Respect the need for the protection of the child concerned as the typically more vulnerable person and keep the identify of the child confidential
- Ensure there is no possible contact between the person against whom an allegation has been made and the child concerned, which may include temporary suspension of a staff member on full pay while an investigation can take place
- Liaise with any authority to whom a referral was made
- If sufficient evidence points to misconduct for an employee, a disciplinary hearing will be held
- In cases where the person is not covered by the authority of RUC's disciplinary procedures, the minister, in consultation with the Council, can cease RUC's relationship with that person, whether temporarily or permanently, depending on the strength of the evidence of misconduct

The safety of the child is the paramount consideration at all times.

20. Confidentiality

RUC is committed to protecting the privacy and dignity of its staff and children we work with. However, as discussed above, total confidentiality cannot be promised to a child when concerns over their safety are raised. In this instance, some necessary personal details will be required for reporting to the CSO, and if necessary, in order to refer to a designated child protection organisation or the police. Such personal information recorded in any referral forms will be kept confidentially under lock and key.

21. Monitoring and review

Because of the importance of child safeguarding, this policy will be reviewed annually in order that it remain relevant, up to date and effective. The CSO will be responsible for coordinating the monitoring and review processes of this policy.

The following will be monitored on a regular basis and reviewed in full annually:

- All child safeguarding incident reports to identify trends and gaps in procedures
- Feedback from staff, management, council and children on the use and effectiveness of the policy to identify any necessary changes
- Relevant legislation to identify any changes in the requirements of the law
- Risk assessment register to identify any changes in the risk profile