



Pastoral Care

In safe and effective pastoral care, where appropriate boundaries are held in place by the person in a position of authority within the church, people can expect:

- attentive listening and responses, where there is understanding and empathy and the focus remains on the individual's needs and the needs of the person in a position of authority within the church are excluded,
- quality care, where if a conflict of interest arises or if there is an issue outside the expertise of the person in a position of authority within the church, that person will seek outside assistance,
- confidentiality, where the person has control over the information they disclose and it is not communicated in any way to anyone without their consent, and
- no sexual misconduct, where if the person seeks or initiates sexual interest or contact the person in a position of authority within the church explains with care and sensitivity why this is not possible.

Providing pastoral care to a church congregation is a valuable and rewarding ministry. One tool that pastoral carers can use is the PATH principles as a way to identify and assess the safe ministry factors of any ministry activity.

- Preparation** Have we prepared for this ministry activity? (risk management, consent forms, training for leaders, etc.)
- Accountability** How are we staying accountable in this activity? (never alone with children or young people, recording incidents, informing leaders of frequent visits, etc.)
- Transparency** How are we maintaining transparency in our ministry? (interactions with children and young people open to observation by other leaders, clear communication to congregation, etc.)
- Humility** How are we practicing humility in our role? (Acknowledging our limits, getting support from church and CPU, being godly in the way we serve, etc.)

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHURCH

When the church appoints a person into a position of leadership, they are saying, "We trust this person to represent God's church in this way." This privilege is not something to be taken lightly. If someone has a church leadership role, including pastoral care roles, they are considered to be in a **position of authority** within the church. They have a responsibility to protect others from any **abuse** and to notify the CPU as set out in BTS. The church eldership is responsible for supervising and supporting those providing pastoral care and should also be informed if issues arise.



Pastoral care often involves visiting congregation members in their homes or in a public space. These visits are mostly unobservable to church leadership and can present an increased risk of abuse. It is important that people know who has been appointed to provide pastoral care on behalf of the church, acting under the authority of Session. Pastoral carers carry a level of perceived authority, and the Session has oversight of their actions in their role. This is distinct from the care and support that congregation members might give to others in the church as part of informal arrangements.

WISE BOUNDARIES & PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

A person in a **position of authority within the church** must always be concerned about the integrity of their position, likely perceptions of the church and the wider community, and the need to acknowledge the real or perceived power given to them as a result of holding that position. Whenever someone is vulnerable, those in a **position of authority within the church** must actively maintain appropriate boundaries, rather than passively assuming that they are there. Good intentions are not enough. Those providing pastoral support must strive to ensure that appropriate boundaries are always maintained.

These boundaries should:

- create an environment where abuse is difficult to hide and where those in our care are protected,
- protect persons in authority from false, misconceived, malicious or vexatious accusation, and
- ensure as far as possible that proper procedures for dealing with allegations are adhered to at all times.

Clear communication helps prevent abuse because everyone involved is clear on how the ministry operates. When working with children or young people keeping parents informed and providing leaders with information is an important part of making ministry safe. It is better to “over-communicate” than assume other people know what you know. Don’t assume everyone knows how the ministry operates – take the time to communicate this to people you minister to, and in the case of children and young people under 18, their families.

When providing pastoral care to someone of the opposite sex, it is always a good idea for them to have a spouse or trusted friend with them to ensure accountability. If that is not possible, you should meet in a public place where your interaction is observable to other people. Letting your church leadership know who you regularly visit for pastoral care reasons is helpful too as it keeps you accountable in your ministry, and also allows Session to provide support when needed.