

Document:	Safeguarding Complaints Management Policy
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Date of next review:	October 2022

Policy

Inspired by its mission and values, MML is committed to responding to disclosures, complaints, allegations, or suspicions of child abuse respectfully, actively and in a timely manner, in accordance with its lawful obligations and its own policies and procedures. This includes contacting police immediately where there may be risk of imminent harm.

MML will maintain the confidentiality of any complaints made and will provide access to complaints records following our Privacy Policy.

The MML CEO will consult with the ISMAPNG Safeguarding Officer regarding the handling of all Safeguarding issues concerning children. Allegations of historical abuse (prior to 17/10/2013) will be referred to the ISMAPNG Safeguarding Unit for management.

Scope

This policy applies to all sisters, staff, board members, volunteers and long-term contractors engaged with the work of MML.

Conflict of Interest

It is important that safeguarding matters are managed in a way that ensure impartiality and objectivity and that MML ensures that its processes are free from any actual or perceived conflict of interest. Therefore, any person who is involved in receiving, investigating, or advising on a complaint on professional standards matters must not be involved in a matter if that person:

- Is the subject of the complaint
- Was at the time the Congregational Leader or other office holder in the Congregation to which the matter relates, or
- Has or had a close personal or working relationship with the person to whom the matter relates such that their judgement would or could be affected by the relationship and they would be placed in a position of actual or potential conflict.

Guiding Principles for managing child safety complaints/allegations.

1. Where a disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse or harm is made, the priority in responding is always the safety and wellbeing of the child. To ensure this, on receipt of a

complaint, the MML CEO in consultation with the ISMAPNG Safeguarding Unit, conducts an immediate assessment to identify and minimize any risk to children or vulnerable adults.

Where a complaint is plausible and there is a risk that the alleged perpetrator might come into contact with children or vulnerable adults, that person is stood down from their role or ministry while the complaint is investigated.

2. Everyone engaged with MML has a moral obligation to report any disclosure, complaint, allegation or suspicion of child abuse or harm to the MML CEO (or to the MML Board Chair if the complaint is against the MML CEO) within 24 hours of becoming aware of it. Where a child is in imminent danger, a report must be made to police immediately.
3. All incidents of abuse are to be viewed as damaging to children. Forms of child abuse include physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, cultural/spiritual abuse, on-line abuse, grooming.
4. Complaints occurring within MML are reported to the appropriate statutory authority regardless of whether the reporting is mandated or not.
5. All relevant reporting, privacy and employment obligations are met.
6. MML personnel cooperate with law enforcement procedures and directives.
7. Complainants are responded to promptly and are kept informed of the progress of the complaint.

Handling Disclosures/Complaints

1. Disclosure by a child.

If a child discloses abuse of themselves or another:

- Listen to the child without interrupting or expressing shock or alarm. Be aware of the child's circumstances, especially those that increase the child's vulnerability.
- Do not ask questions except to clarify your general understanding of what the child is saying. Do not dismiss the incident even if you are unsure whether the child is making a disclosure or not. Any concern about possible risk to a child must be reported to the CEO.
- Explain to the child that you cannot keep it a secret.
- Let the child know what you will do next, including with whom you need to share the information.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.

- As soon as possible, record the conversation including the date, time, and details of the disclosure. Avoid doing this in front of the child.
- Ring 000 immediately if you believe the child is in imminent danger and report your concerns to the police.
- Within 24 hours, inform the MML CEO, who will manage the situation, including assisting you with mandatory reporting if required.
- Observe strict confidentiality within the process.

2. Disclosure by an adult.

If an adult discloses abuse of themselves or another or if you suspect or witness abuse or are abused yourself in an MML context:

- Acknowledge the person's pain.
- Respectfully discourage the person from disclosing in detail to you; explain that such a serious matter needs to be handled by someone who is experienced in this area.
- Explain that if a person discloses abuse to you, you must report it to the MML CEO or to the MML Board Chair if the complaint is against the MML CEO.
- Offer the person the contact details of the MML CEO if they would like to report it themselves (phone: 02 9564 2089) mmlsafeguarding@ismapng.org.au. If the complaint is against the CEO, ask them to email the ISMAPNG Safeguarding Officer via the ISMAPNG website www.institute.mercy.org.au.
- Reassure the person that the complaint will be followed up and that someone will contact them. Ask them for their preferred contact details including whether a message can be left.
- Make a written record of the conversation as soon as possible.
- Report the alleged abuse to the MML CEO within 24 hours (or to the MML Board Chair if the abuse is against the MML CEO).
- Observe strict confidentiality within the process.

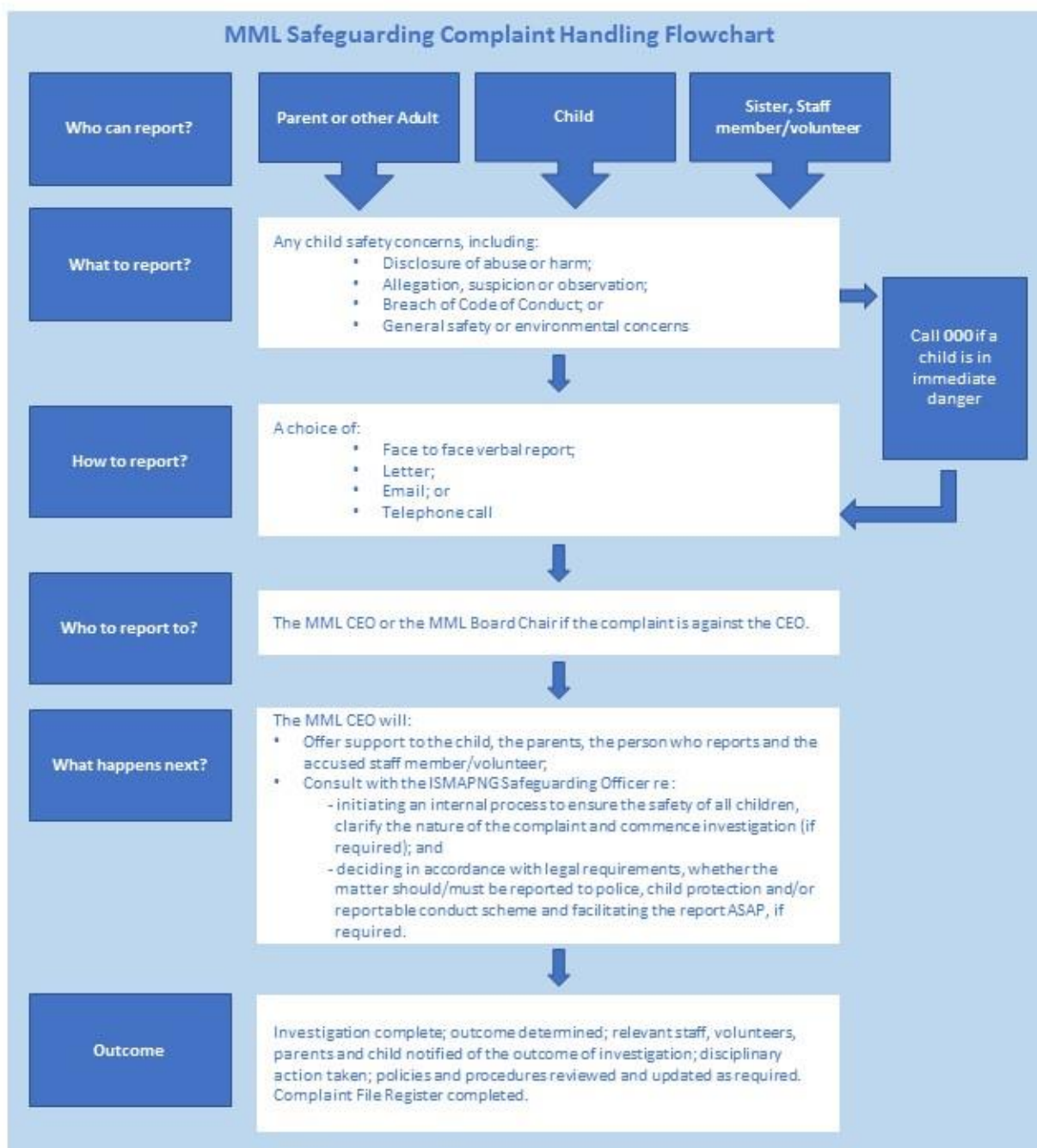
3. If an allegation of abuse is made against you.

Sisters: contact the MML CEO or your Community Leader or the Institute Leader immediately.

Staff and volunteers: contact the MML CEO immediately.

Pastoral support and counselling will be offered to all people affected by safeguarding matters.

Responsibilities and Obligations



Adapted from A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organization. CCYP.

Definitions

“**Child**” means any person under the age of 18 years.

“**ISMAPNG**” means Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, a religious institute of pontifical right and a public juridic person within the Catholic Church.

Supporting Documents

Code of Conduct

Safeguarding Complaints Management Procedure

Privacy Policy

Safeguarding Governance: Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding Information and Record Keeping Policy

Safeguarding Investigation Procedure

Safe Use of Technology Policy

CFCA Resource: Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect www.aifs.gov.au

Version Control

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