



Brigidine Southern Cross Community Australia

Safeguarding Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' – 1 Cor 12:26. 'A population that does not take care of the elderly, and of children and the young has no future, because it abuses both its memory and its promise' – Pope Francis.¹

The Brigidine Congregation, founded in Tullow Ireland in 1807, is inspired by the transformative vision and spirit of the Gospel, our Founder Bishop Daniel Delany, our patroness St Brigid, a woman of vision and courage, who actively challenged the social, political, and cultural structures of her time, and our rich Brigidine story and traditions.

Brigidine Sisters understand that we hold a privileged position of trust in the community. We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment which respects and upholds the human rights and dignity of all people, as detailed in this safeguarding policy.

Brigidine Sisters acknowledge that we are well placed to recognise people of all ages in our community who may be particularly at risk and in need of care and support. We welcome them into our community.

2. SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENT STATEMENT

As a Congregation, the Brigidine Sisters we follow the example of the Gospel in the service of others and in doing so value the right of every person to dignity and respect.

We have zero tolerance to abuse and exploitation and committed to promoting and maintaining safe and supportive environments in which the protection of children and adults at risk is paramount.

3. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

¹ <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=10334>

The purpose of this policy is to set out the approach the Brigidine Southern Cross Community (also referred to as “the Church authority”) take to safeguarding children and adults at risk. It outlines how we, the members of Brigidine Southern Cross Community, aim to prevent, identify, and respond to concerns about abuse that may arise within our operations in Australia. This policy applies to our sisters, employees, volunteers, and any contractors providing a service to children or adults at risk, in any location in Australia.

The policy complies with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (the Standards), which outline requirements for Catholic entities across Australia to promote the safety of children and adults at risk through implementing policies and strategies to prevent, respond to and report concerns regarding abuse and harm.² The policy also applies the relevant legislation in the various Australian states as applicable.

4. DEFINITIONS (see Glossary)

5. LEADING AND PROMOTING A SAFEGUARDING CULTURE

Congregational Leader and Team of the Brigidine Sisters has delegated the authority for handling child protection and adult safeguarding matters in Australia, to the Leader and Team of the Brigidine Southern Cross Community. Collaboration across Brigidine Community leadership occurs to ensure standardisation of best practice approaches to safeguarding, consistent with the Standards.

The Brigidine Southern Cross Community Leadership Team (BSCCLT) is responsible for ensuring that Brigidine Sisters’ communities and workplaces are safe environments, including places where we have legal shared Partnerships.

All agencies and ministries remain directly accountable to the Brigidine Congregational Leader’s Representative for their implementation of the Standards.

The Brigidine Sisters Congregational Leadership established the Brigidine Safeguarding Reference Group Australia (BSRGA) in accordance with the requirements of the Standards, comprising of experts in current safeguarding legislation, legal experience, policy development and procedures, together with knowledge and experience in Brigidine mission, values, culture, and story.³

The day-to-day safeguarding work of the Brigidine Sisters is led and managed by the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Leader, who acts as the ‘Safeguarding Coordinator’⁴ as required by Standard 1.

² The Standards are based on the child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, but include additional ‘core components.’

³ NCSS second edition, the Safeguarding Committee means a committee established to advise and support the Church Authority on all matters relating to safeguarding, including the development and implementation of a Safeguarding Implementation Plan and coordination of annual self-audits at a local level. Committee members need relevant and varied professional expertise in relation to safeguarding, child protection, organisational culture and structure, policy development, etc and include lay women and men.

⁴ See ‘Glossary.’

The BSCCLT will lead and promote a safeguarding culture by:

- Personally, upholding and modelling a standard of behaviour consistent with relevant Church documents
- Prominently publishing and displaying the Safeguarding Commitment Statement and making sure the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct and Complaint Handling Policy is readily available to personnel and the broader community as required
- Identifying and taking opportunities to promote whole of community awareness of the dignity and rights of children and adults at risk, and to champion and model safeguarding within the Brigidine community and more broadly
- Promoting an inclusive, respectful, and responsive approach to the diverse needs of children and adults at risk
- Paying particular attention to the needs of children and adults who may be at increased risk of abuse, discrimination, or exploitation
- Taking all possible steps to ensure that only people who are safe and suitable to have contact with children and adults at risk are engaged by the Brigidine Sisters Leadership
- Empowering all personnel to take responsibility for safeguarding and providing opportunities for them to have input into improving safeguarding practices, as appropriate
- Encouraging people to bring forward concerns or complaints about the safety of children or adults at risk (including disclosures of current or historical abuse) and providing processes by which to do so
- Responding to disclosures and complaints in a manner that is transparent, respectful, fair, and accountable
- Complying with all relevant statutory and legislative requirements
- Actively monitoring compliance with the Safeguarding Policy and ensuring continuous improvement of safeguarding practices

The Safeguarding Commitment Statement, Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct and Complaint Handling Policy are published on the Brigidine Sisters website. At least every two years, the documents will be proactively communicated to all personnel involved in the Brigidine Sisters community.

6. SAFEGUARDING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The BSCCLT will monitor compliance with the Safeguarding Policy and continual improvement of its safeguarding practices through the Safeguarding Implementation Plan,⁵ constituted by the following:

- a. Safeguarding will be a standing agenda item of the BSCCLT to ensure regular discussion of the following:
 - Opportunities to promote safeguarding within the organisation
 - Relevant legislative or statutory changes

⁵ See 'Glossary.'

- Reviewing/updating the Safeguarding Policy and/or related documents
- Safeguarding training and support for personnel
- Compliance matters
- Trends in complaints about the safety of children or adults at risk (without breaching privacy or jeopardising ongoing complaints)
- Any other relevant matters related to safeguarding

- b. The BSCCLT is responsible for the following:
- Working with the BSRGA to maintain knowledge of current legislation, statutory and other guidance in relation to safeguarding and ensuring that these are reflected in the Safeguarding Policy and related documents
 - Ensuring there is a suitable contact person nominated for anyone in the Brigidine Southern Cross Community who has questions about safeguarding or concerns about the safety of children or adults at risk
 - Monitoring the currency of Working with Children Checks and other required background checks
 - Monitoring participation of personnel in safeguarding training according to the designated schedule
 - Regularly reviewing complaints to identify systemic issues related to safeguarding, and improving policies and practices as needed
 - Engaging with other relevant organisations and seeking specialist advice about safeguarding good practice, as necessary, and
 - Obtaining the advice and support of the BSRGA on all the above.

It is the responsibility of the Brigidine Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) and the BSCCLT to ensure the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Risk Management Strategy and Complaint Handling Policy are reviewed regularly according to the specified timeframes in each document.

7. IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING RISKS

The Brigidine Southern Cross Community has appropriate processes in place to identify and manage risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and adults at risk. These processes are documented in the Safeguarding Risk Management Strategy.

As part of their initial safeguarding induction and refresher training, personnel will be familiarised with the Safeguarding Risk Management Strategy and their related responsibilities. The BSCCLT has overall responsibility for ensuring implementation and compliance with the Safeguarding Risk Management Strategy.

8. RECRUITMENT OF EMPLOYEES

The Brigidine Sisters are committed to recruiting and engaging people who are suited to having contact with children and adults at risk. This commitment extends to ensuring that employees and volunteers understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

The processes in place to support safe recruitment and engagement of personnel are documented in the Safeguarding Risk Management Strategy document.

9. PROVIDING SAFEGUARDING TRAINING AND SUPPORT

As part of their induction, and as soon as possible after commencement, all personnel will participate in the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards Introductory Session,

delivered by an individual with relevant expertise. Such training will provide guidelines to assist in the implementation of safeguarding responsibilities. At a minimum, this will cover the Brigidine Southern Cross Community:

- Code of Conduct
- Risk Management Strategy
- Complaint Handling Policy & Procedures for Safeguarding Matters
- Safeguarding Policy

Refresher safeguarding information and/or training will be provided to personnel at least every three years, as appropriate to their role. Further information, in respect of training and support, is documented in the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Risk Management Strategy. A Ministry Register is maintained by the BSCCLT which documents the information and training provided to personnel.

10. REQUIRING AND UPHOLDING APPROPRIATE STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

All personnel must comply with the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Code of Conduct. The Code provides clear information about the kinds of conduct towards all persons, including children and adults at risk, that are not acceptable. It also provides information about conduct that is encouraged with children and adults.

11. IDENTIFYING, RECEIVING AND RESPONDING TO CONCERNS OF ABUSE

The Brigidine Sisters strive to effectively identify and respond to concerns about the safety of children or adults at risk at the earliest opportunity and are committed to a fair and proper process in responding to allegations or complaints of abuse.

When responding to any safeguarding concerns raised, a risk assessment approach is applied. At all times, the safety of children and adults at risk is a paramount interest.

Details of abuse indicators, the process for responding to concerns and receiving disclosures are set out in the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Complaint Handling Policy.

12. REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

Any concern reported to the Brigidine Southern Cross Community will be progressed as set out in this policy and/or the Complaint Handling Policy.

The matter will be managed confidentially and should only be disclosed further to any other person as part of a reporting or professional obligation.

The relevant Brigidine Leader is responsible for managing the process, including any reports required to an external authority in the relevant state or territory. This may include:

- Reporting criminal allegations to police

- Reporting a child at risk to the relevant child protection authorities
- Reporting allegations of reportable conduct relating to a child to the relevant reportable conduct scheme in the state or territory.
- Reporting concerns about the safety or abuse of an adult at risk to relevant external agencies

Where the concerns involve a potential criminal offence committed by personnel or any other person, a report will be made to police as soon as possible.

The Brigidine Southern Cross Community Leader may obtain advice and guidance from the BSRGA or obtain legal advice if required.

Nothing within this section, or elsewhere in this policy, restricts an individual person from making a report directly to a relevant external authority, such as police or child protection authorities, at any time.

Further details about the process for managing complaints and reporting obligations are set out in the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Complaint Handling Policy.

13. RECORD KEEPING AND INFORMATION SHARING

The BSCCLT is committed to appropriate and lawful record keeping, storage and sharing of information related to children and adults at risk. Record keeping and information sharing is a key risk management strategy, and further information is available in the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Risk Management Strategy.

14. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

The BSCCLT complies with the relevant legislative obligations to maintain confidentiality and protect personal information and privacy.

Information and records relating to incidents, complaints, responses, and decisions will be treated as confidential, except where the sharing or distribution of information and/or records is mandated by statutory requirements, principles of natural justice or require disclosure to protect a child or adult at risk.

When determining what information to release relating to a complaint record, the Brigidine Southern Cross Community Leader will be mindful of privacy and confidentiality obligations.

15. REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

The Safeguarding Policy and related documents will be updated as required and reviewed at least every three years. The BSRGA will consult stakeholders, as part of the review process. The BSCCLT is responsible for ensuring the review is completed.

16. OTHER RELEVANT POLICIES

Together with this policy, the documents below form the Brigidine Sisters' Safeguarding framework, providing additional guidance including procedural checklists and templates:

- Code of Conduct
- Risk Management Strategy
- Complaint Handling Policy & Procedures for Safeguarding Matters

Nothing in this policy affects the expectations outlined in other congregational documents.