NEW LIFE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP NARRABRI INC.

SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT MANUAL

What is "Risk Management"?

"Risk Management" is a term which refers to all aspects of ensuring the safety of staff, members and material possessions of an organisation.

While we may want to believe that God will take care of His own people, it is also true that He expects us to act prudently and in accordance with the laws of the land.

We live in an era where everyone, including some Christians, believe that if anything ever happens in their life which is damaging or unpleasant then they are entitled to some form of compensation. This aspect of our culture has been emphasised by recent tendencies of some law firms to advertise "no win no fee" deals.

In the last few years, New South Wales has become the most litigious (i.e. likely to take legal action) state in the world, even overtaking California. As well as this general trend in our society, churches are becoming increasingly subject to legal action by aggrieved people. Churches are seen as "easy" targets and the old days of people being reluctant to sue churches are well and truly gone.

The result of these trends is that insurance policies for Public Liability cover are becoming more and more expensive and some organisations are finding it impossible to get cover at any price.

This means that as a church we must become more aware of our legal and ethical responsibilities to care for the welfare of the people who are members of our church or who use our facilities, ministries or activities.

This booklet is an attempt to set out policies and procedures which will help to keep people safe and to minimise the possibility of the church being sued for negligence.

2. Two Concepts

a. Compliance
This basically means that we must obey the law. There are legal requirements regarding Occupational Health and Safety, Electricity, Child Protection etc.

We live in a very complex legal environment and we are required to comply with laws whether or not we think we should, or whether we think the laws are reasonable.

b. Duty Of Care
Under the law, we have an absolute duty to ensure the safety of every person who enters our property or who encounters this organisation in any way. No excuses are allowed- if anyone is injured in any way, it is our fault. The only exception is if a reasonable person could not have foreseen an event.

We therefore have a responsibility to look at **every** aspect of what we do with the eyes of the "reasonable person" looking for a potential danger and then change what we do to minimise the danger.

For example, a number of churches around the world (including a couple in Australia) have been sued following accidents in prayer lines. Both prayer recipients and catchers have been injured because of poorly conducted prayer ministry. Since this is a well-known issue, courts will now rule that a "reasonable person" could foresee a risk to all participants in prayer ministry and churches MUST act to remove the dangers of injury due to falling.

Another well-known example of failures in churches relates to sexual molestation of children. Only one insurer in Australia will now provide insurance against these claims, and that may change over the next year or so. Churches need to have in place strategies to minimise the likelihood that known pedophiles can insert themselves into children's ministries, to reduce the chances of false accusations and to take action in the event of a claim being made.

If we lived in a perfect world none of these things would be necessary. However we live in a fallen world and must act to protect those to whom we minister and those who would seek to minister the love of God.

3. Fire Security

Fire extinguishers are installed at various locations around the building. These must be inspected regularly by an authorised person. Emergency lighting must also be checked regularly. This is the responsibility of the Senior Pastor or someone delegated by him.

When the building is in use, all doors must be left unlocked, and preferably open (if weather conditions allow).

In the event that a smoke detector or other fire alarm is heard, all people must move immediately to the exits at either end of the building.

Leadership Team members are responsible for alerting the Fire Brigade if necessary or extinguishing the fire if possible.

Cell Group leaders are to ensure that there is an orderly evacuation of the building, and that all people, including young children leave promptly.

A fire drill should be conducted regularly to ensure that all who attend our church are familiar with procedures.

4. Personal Safety

By law we are required to ensure the safety of all people who have legitimate reasons to be on our property. This includes those who use our facilities and those maintain or work on the property.

Where contractors are employed, we will use only those who have appropriate insurance cover.

Where voluntary workers are involved, normal standards of Occupational Health and Safety will be applied.

The Leadership Team will appoint a Safety Officer to:

- advise on safe working procedures
- advise the Leadership Team about potentially unsafe equipment and procedures.
- Train volunteers and members about safe working procedures.

Urns and Hot Water. These are a major problem area in church buildings. Urns must always be located on a stable surface out of the reach of young children. Leads must be located so that they cannot be caught and pull the urn over.

Floor Coverings Any worn or loose floor coverings must be remedied as soon as possible to prevent the risk of tripping.

Damaged Chairs Any chair which becomes unstable or in any way dangerous must be removed from use immediately until it can be repaired.

Ladders Safety directions on ladders must be followed at all times. Ladders must be in good working order and be appropriate for the particular task.

Working At Heights Where work is required in the ceiling or on the roof of the building, only those people who have been authorised by the Safety Officer may go into the ceiling or on the roof. The Safety Officer will only authorise people after giving appropriate training. Appropriate safety equipment (e.g. harnesses) shall be used at all times to prevent a fall.

Prayer Lines In situations where people are receiving prayer, it is recommended that the person being prayed for sits or kneels, especially in a prayer line where long waits may occur. Where prayers are offered with people standing, there must be sufficient catchers for this to happen safely. The person praying will conduct prayer ministry in an orderly manner. The Senior Pastor or person leading the meeting will be responsible to see that prayer lines operate safely.

5. Accident Procedure

Where an injury occurs at any event conducted by New Life Christian Fellowship (including Cell Group meetings or other activities conducted away from the property), or on the premises of New Life Christian Fellowship, the Senior Pastor is to be informed as soon as practicable.

An incident report form (available at http://www.new-life.org.au/files/Incident-Hazard%20Report.pdf) is to be completed as soon as possible after an incident occurs that leads to an injury or could have potentially led to an injury. The completed form is to be given to the Senior Pastor who will discuss furrther action with the Safety Officer.

If there is any possibility of a claim being made against the church, the Senior Pastor must advise the insurance company immediately.

No official of New Life Christian Fellowship should admit liability for any injury. However, we must always be compassionate to those who are distressed.

Note: the above procedures should be followed even if it is a meeting in a private home. Wherever there is an official meeting of New life Christian Fellowship (or a meeting which a reasonable person might expect is an official meeting) we are responsible for people's safety.

6. Supervision of Children & Youth

Supervision of children and youth raises particular issues relating to their safety and protection. There have been many cases highlighted in the media lately where allegations of child abuse have been made against ministers, priests, youth workers and teachers in church schools. It is to be hoped that this situation never arises in this church, but we have a responsibility to both children and leaders in our care.

In general, we assume that all people in positions of leadership (Share Group leaders, Leadership Team, Pastors etc.) will at some stage find themselves relating to children or youth in some way.

The following policies will be implemented in respect of all children and youth groups and activities:

- All groups will be supervised by two adults on all occasions.
- As far as possible no leader will be left alone with a group of children.
- NSW legislation requires all people who may have access to children to obtain a Working With Children Check and to disclose their WWCC Number to an employer. New Life Christian Fellowship requires all Cell Leaders, SRE Teacher and Family Input presenters to have a current WWCC.
- Only members of New Life Christian Fellowship Narrabri Inc. are permitted to lead Cell Groups, and then only by appointment by the Leadership Team.
- People must be known to the leadership of this church for at least 12 months prior to being appointed to leadership positions.
- Generally speaking, those leading youth and children's ministries must have a level of maturity that exceeds those they are supervising, and sufficient life experience to anticipate potential outcomes in various situations.
- Whilst we encourage all people of all ages to exercise the leadership and ministry skills that God had given them, we will not allow people under 20 to lead youth groups (i.e. High School age) without direct supervision from an older person nor people under 15 to lead children without direct supervision.

7. Policy on Allegations of Sexual Misconduct

New Life Christian Fellowship Narrabri Inc. recognises that sexuality is a gift from God when exercised in accordance with His plans for marriage. We also recognise that when misused, sexuality can become a cause of great hurt and distress.

We recognise that people in a position of leadership have a level of authority and power which makes any sexual misconduct particularly dangerous.

We also recognise that false claims of misconduct can be damaging of reputations.

We will not tolerate any form of sexual abuse or harassment by leaders or members.

The procedure below is to be followed when someone makes an allegation of sexual misconduct against a person in leadership in this church:

- all complaints will be treated seriously
- all complaints must be brought to the attention of the Senior Pastor immediately. Where a person makes a complaint to another person in leadership, they must advise the person to take the complaint to the Senior Pastor.
- Where a complaint is made against the Senior Pastor, a member of the Leadership Team will be required to make the investigation.
- The Senior Pastor will record the details of the complaint and investigate the truth or otherwise. If it is thought appropriate, an outside person may be asked to investigate the complaint.
- Where person in Leadership has a complaint made against them, they must stand down from their position until the matter is decided.
- Within two weeks, if possible, the person investigating will report to the Leadership Team on the complaint and the outcome of the investigation.

- The Leadership Team will then make a decision on any disciplinary action needed to be taken.
- If it is believed that a criminal act may have taken place or an act of abuse against a child may have occurred then a report will be made to the Police or to DOCS. The procedures laid out in the Child Safe Policy are to be followed.
- The person making the complaint and the person against whom the complaint is made will be offered counselling or other appropriate help.
- All complaints brought before the Leadership Team or Senior Pastor will be kept confidential.

8. Health And Hygiene Issues

Hygiene is an important aspect of personal safety. There are a number of diseases in our community which are potentially life-threatening and which may be transmitted through poor hygiene. This is especially true in places where people gather in large numbers and share food or drinks. We have a responsibility to ensure that no users of our facilities become ill through taking part in our meetings.

The building is to be kept clean and tidy at all times. All users of the building must ensure that the floor and kitchen benches are clear of rubbish.

Garbage bins must be emptied as they become full. All leaders are to take responsibility for emptying rubbish bins.

It is generally recognised that washing up by hand does not kill disease organisms and that use of tea towels is an effective way of transferring organisms from one person to another. Where possible, all washing up will be done by the use of the dish washing machine. Items such as pots which are too bulky to fit in the machine may be washed by hand as these items will not normally have been used directly for eating.

The presence of food scraps will attract mice, cockroaches and other creatures. Whenever food is consumed in the building, food scraps must be removed before leaving.

When serving food, appropriate utensils such as tongs must be provided and used. A separate implement must be used for each food item to prevent spread of bacteria from one item to another.

Food must be stored in the refrigerator or in pest-proof containers in the cupboards.

References:

Food Handling Policy
Infectious Disease Control Policy
Child Safety Policy

Revisions and Changes

Adopted by Leadership Team: 01/01/2015
Reviewed: August 2025. Edited to reflect changes in legislation and the current practices of the church.
Reviewed July 2026