



The Lakes Church

ABN: 40 227 130 382

We seek to engage personally with everyone in our community to help them start following Jesus, connect with his people, grow in knowing Jesus and serve in love.

Domestic Violence Policy

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RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)

Family Law Legislation Amendment Act 2011 (Cth)

REFERENCE

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032

The Lakes Church is committed to embracing Jesus' commands to make and grow disciples. As part of this, we want to promote healthy relationships for our church community both at church and in our homes. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ('AIHW') identifies family, domestic and sexual violence as a major health and welfare issue in Australia which affects all ages and demographics, with women and children most impacted. This policy supports our efforts to prevent, deter and address domestic violence within our church community, recognising that effective action requires collaboration with local professionals and services.

1. TERMINOLOGY/DEFINITIONS

Domestic violence is defined as any behaviour that is violent, threatening, or controlling, and which occurs in a domestic or family relationship. This can include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse, psychological abuse and coercive control. It includes behaviour that is threatening, controlling, dominating, intimidating, and stalking. It can be perpetrated by a partner, family member, or someone with whom the victim has an intimate or familial relationship. The Lakes Church acknowledges and upholds NSW law which recognises that domestic violence is a crime (Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007).

Coercive control is a form of domestic abuse that involves patterns of behaviour which have the cumulative effect of denying victim-survivors their autonomy and independence. This abuse can include physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse. A recent law passed by the NSW Parliament outlaws coercive control in intimate partner relationships (Crimes Legislation Amendment (Coercive Control) Act 2022).

Sexual violence can include rape; sexual abuse; unwanted sexual advances or harassment and intimidation at work and elsewhere; being forced to watch or engage in pornography; sexual coercion; having sexual intercourse out of fear of what your partner might do; forced prostitution; and trafficking (as defined by AIHW, 2019).

Family violence refers to violence between family members, typically where the perpetrator exercises power and control over another person. Family violence is the preferred term for violence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as it covers the extended family and kinship relationships in which violence may occur (as defined by AIHW, 2019).

Victim/Survivor: An individual directly impacted by domestic violence.

Perpetrator: An individual responsible for committing domestic violence.

For the purpose of this Policy the term 'domestic violence' will be used to refer to all forms and acts of abuse, control and violence.

2. HOW PREVALENT IS IT?

AIHW reports that 1 in 6 women and 1 in 16 men experience physical or sexual violence from a cohabiting partner. Each year, over 3,500 people are hospitalized due to partner assaults, and on average, one woman is murdered by an intimate partner every week. Research by the Benevolent Society reveals that more than half of women who experience partner violence during their lifetime are also caring for children at the time

The Australian government has developed a National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032, with a 10-year strategy (with active support and endorsement from each State and Territory government) to address and prevent violence against women and children. The plan includes six priority areas:

1. Prevention and early intervention,
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,
3. Frontline services,
4. Justice,
5. Perpetrator interventions, and
6. National leadership and coordination.

3. INTRODUCTION

The Lakes Church is committed to caring for all members of its church community. As we seek to honour our God and his Son Jesus, so we are committed to rejecting all forms of abuse.

- God despises those who commit violence without cause (Psalm 11:5).
- Abuse and violence should not be kept secret (Proverbs 10:11-12).
- God will call to account anyone who abuses children and vulnerable people (Matthew 18:5-6)
- God will call to account husbands who abuse their wives (Malachi 2:15-16)
- God will call to account church leaders who abuse (Ezekiel 34:1-10)

4. PURPOSE

In line with biblical principles, the Lakes Church leadership is committed to caring for all members of its church community. We acknowledge that all individuals have the right to live free from fear and violence. The prevention and rejection of all forms of abuse is a Christian imperative.

The purpose of this Policy is to protect and promote the safety and well-being of all who participate in the activities of the Lakes Church. This Policy applies to all staff, workers, members, volunteers, youth, and children. It is designed to prevent and respond to domestic violence, in accordance with Australian and NSW state laws.

5. SCOPE

This Policy applies to all members, attendees, staff, and volunteers of The Lakes Church. It outlines the church's role in addressing domestic violence, supporting victims, and engaging in effective partnerships with local community services and professionals.

6. HEALTHY CULTURE AND VALUES AT THE LAKES

Partners and staff of the Lakes Church can play a crucial role in the implementation of the national plan to end violence against women and children by implementing the following steps:

- Educate themselves:** taking the time to learn about the issues surrounding violence against women and children, the dynamics of power and control in abusive relationships, and the signs of abuse. This can help them better understand the problem and how they can help.
- Speak out against violence:** using their voices to speak out against violence, calling out abusive behaviour when they see it and challenging harmful attitudes and beliefs. It is important to not isolate those who use violence as this can lead to the issue being avoided which reduces accountability and the opportunity for change.
- Model healthy behaviour:** modelling healthy, respectful behaviour in their own relationships, and in their interactions with women and children in the church and community. This can help set an example for others to follow.
- Support survivors:** offering support and assistance to survivors of violence, such as by listening to their stories, believing them, and encouraging and helping them access resources and services.
- Advocate for change:** advocating for policy and social changes that support survivors and work to prevent violence from occurring in the first place.
- Work together:** working together to create a culture that values equality and respect, and rejects violence against women and children.

7. INCIDENT REPORTING

All disclosed incidents of domestic violence should be reported to The Lakes Church Safe Ministries Working Group, who will follow the Incident Management Procedure. The victim's safety is paramount, and appropriate support and referrals must be offered. Support will be provided in communication with, and agreement of the victim. It is important to recognise that domestic violence is a criminal activity, and counsel from professional services within the community should be sourced. Where necessary, incidents may also need to be reported to regulators. For example, if a form of child abuse, it would need to be reported to the Department of Communities and Justice.

8. OUTCOMES FOR VICTIMS AND FAMILIES

The Lakes Church is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for victims of domestic violence and their families. We will work with relevant authorities and community organisations to ensure that victims have access to appropriate services and support. We will also provide pastoral care and support to those affected by domestic violence.

9. TRAINING PROGRAMS

To prevent and respond to domestic violence, we will provide churchwide training for leaders, volunteers, and partners. This training will equip them to identify, manage, and respond to domestic violence with sensitivity and respect.

Pastoral staff will be trained to recognise and address domestic violence, ensuring a safe church environment for victims. The Senior Pastor is responsible for this training, which will also be offered to key church members, including pastoral staff spouses, growth group leaders, MTS apprentices, and ministry volunteers.

The training programs will cover topics such as:

- Understanding the nature and dynamics of domestic violence
- Recognising the signs and symptoms of domestic violence
- Responding to disclosures of domestic violence
- Supporting victims of domestic violence
- Understanding the legal and regulatory requirements for reporting incidents of domestic violence
- Creating a safe and supportive environment for victims of domestic violence
- Recognising the need to restrict information to those who need to know and to ensure systems that will keep records secure
- Domestic violence is not a women's issue. Although most often victims, women should not be left alone to deal with this. Men must willingly accept a role in deterrence, prevention and remediation.

We will ensure that all staff participate in these training programs on a regular basis, in order to maintain a high level of awareness and understanding of domestic violence.

10. POLICY ISSUES

The Lakes Church is committed to promoting healthy marriages and families, recognizing that they are the foundation of a vibrant church community. We are dedicated to providing a safe, supportive environment for all involved in church life.

We believe that domestic violence is never justified and goes against the conduct expected of disciples of Jesus Christ. Domestic violence is a serious issue that affects many families, and we are committed to upholding the dignity and worth of every individual, especially the vulnerable.

We do not tolerate, condone, or conceal any form of domestic violence within our church families. We acknowledge that domestic violence is complex and requires a sensitive, supportive response.

Church leaders, including pastoral staff, growth group leaders, and volunteers, are expected to model and promote a culture that supports healthy marriages and families and to be accountable in this responsibility.

11. PRINCIPLES TO BE APPLIED IN DEALING WITH INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

a. Awareness and Education

Provide training for staff, volunteers, and leaders to recognise signs of domestic violence and respond appropriately. Offer regular educational programs and resources to promote healthy relationships.

b. Support for Victims

Create a safe, confidential space for victims to share their experiences and seek support. This assistance will not be limited to the pastoral care channels that exist at church. The principle of empowering the victim will be maintained.

Connect victims with local services, including counseling, housing support, legal advice and reporting the abuse to the relevant authorities.

Ensure pastoral care staff are trained and equipped in such circumstances.

c. Handling Disclosures

Treat all disclosures with strict confidentiality, except where mandatory reporting applies (e.g., cases involving children).

Encourage individuals who disclose domestic violence to seek professional assistance and make referrals to specialised support services when necessary.

d. Partnerships with Community Services

Collaborate with local domestic violence organisations, legal services, and healthcare providers to ensure a comprehensive support network.

Establish referral pathways to trusted local services specialising in domestic and family violence.

e. Accountability for Perpetrators

Encourage perpetrators to take responsibility and seek professional help for their actions and advise that the relevant legal authorities will be notified

Denounce any attempts to justify or minimise abusive behavior.

As outlined in the The Lakes Church Code of Conduct, appropriate disciplinary actions will be undertaken if the person holds a pastoral role or other leadership position. This is not independent of any disciplinary actions that are taken by any relevant legal authority towards such a perpetrator.

f. Response in Cases Involving Children

Fulfill mandatory reporting obligations in line with NSW law for any cases of domestic violence involving children.

Ensure the safety and well-being of children remain a top priority in all domestic violence situations.

12. PROCEDURES

The Lakes Church acknowledges that while both men and women may experience incidents of interpersonal violence or abuse, women and children are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of domestic violence. When a report relating to violence or abuse is received, the following procedures apply for both women and men.

A. Procedural Fairness

It is not the role of any member of the Lakes Church to investigate or rule on an incident of alleged domestic violence. This is a matter for the legal authorities. Instead, the recipient of that report is to ensure the utmost support is provided to the reporting party.

B. Listen Without Judging

Listen empathetically without judgment. Victims may fear they will not be believed, especially if their abuser is well-respected. Avoid minimising their experience or blaming them. Be patient, and do not rush them to leave the relationship. Allow them to make decisions on their own time. Focus on how they're feeling and coping with the situation. Ask questions like, "How have you been managing? How is the behavior affecting you?"

C. Support

Recognise the courage it takes for someone to share their experience of abuse. Reassure them that the abuse is not their fault, and they deserve support and respect. Help them build confidence and emphasise their strengths. Victims may have internalized negative beliefs from the abuser; offer emotional support to counteract these harmful messages and help them see their own worth.

D. Freedom to make decisions

Encourage the victim to make choices, even if it means staying with the abuser for now. This autonomy is an important first step toward freedom. Do not withdraw support if they leave and then return to the abuser. Leaving an abusive relationship can be extremely difficult, and it is important to remain supportive.

E. Domestic violence support services

Provide information on local domestic violence services, such as the Domestic Violence Helpline or 1800RESPECT, which offer 24/7 support. Let the victim know they are not alone, and that help is available.

(Exerts used from the NSW Health website, 2023)

13. POLICY REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE

This policy aligns with NSW domestic violence laws and will be reviewed annually or as needed to reflect legislative updates and best practices in supporting those affected by domestic violence. It will be published on our website, alongside resources for professional assistance.

The Lakes Church Safe Ministry Working Group is responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring this policy. The group will report to the Church Council regularly and provide an annual update on any necessary amendments or improvements.

14. KEY CONTACTS

1800 Respect National Helpline 24-hour national number for sexual assault, family violence counselling and advice	1800 737 723 1800respect.org.au
Daisy App Connects people who may experience family violence or abuse to support services in their local area	Free to download from iPhone App Store & Android Google Play
Child Protection Helpline When a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse	NSW: 13 21 11
Lifeline 24-hour telephone crisis line	131 114 lifeline.org.au/get-help
No To Violence: Men’s Referral Service Telephone counselling, information and referral service for men using violence in families, male victims, and for friends/relatives	1300 766 491 ntv.org.au
Police 24-hour emergency line	000
Safe Ministry Committee This working group is responsible for ensuring that we are a safe church	geoff.hynd@thelakes.net.au
The Church Council The Church Council is responsible for receiving and considering complaints regarding the conduct of pastors, volunteers and employees.	secretary@thelakes.net.au