

## Remaining alert to the risks of grooming

Sexual assault of children occurs across all areas of society including churches. Within the church, and other community, settings, there is an abundance of opportunities for adults to form special relationships with children. These have the potential to become exploitative.

Although children, parents and the church should be aware of 'stranger danger', most people who sexually abuse children are known to the victim through family, friends, school, sport, church or other community based activities. There is no one 'profile' of a sex offender. They could be a friend, a parent, a grandparent or a person who is well liked and well educated. They can be male or female.

Sexual grooming often begins with what appears to be a legitimate, condoned relationship with a child. Initially, conduct might appear to be innocent—even commendable—and then it progresses over time and escalates.

## Additional information

Synod resources:

- The Safe Church in the Northern Synod website:  
[www.ns.uca.org.au/child-safe-church/](http://www.ns.uca.org.au/child-safe-church/)
- Synod Safe Church Admin Contact:  
email: [safechurch@ns.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@ns.uca.org.au) or  
phone: 08 8982 3400
- Attend Safe Church Training

Government resources:

Northern Territory Ph. 1800 700 250

South Australia Ph. 13 14 78

Western Australia Ph. 1800 273 889



### The United Church in Australia Northern Synod

2 Railway Street  
Parap NT 0821

Phone: 08 8982 3400  
Website: <http://ns.uca.org.au>  
Email: [safechurch@ns.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@ns.uca.org.au)

Version 202207

## The United Church in Australia Northern Synod



## Guide for the prevention of sexual grooming



## Safe Church in the Northern Synod

## Prevention of Grooming

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to safeguarding those with whom we are in relationship. Safeguarding means working with vulnerable people, especially children and young people so they feel and are safe and supported. Leading in ways which ensure the wellbeing of others is the way of the Gospel.

The Uniting Church in Australia, Northern Synod has developed policies to provide a framework for this commitment. This means we have an ethical, moral and legal responsibility to provide safe leaders, safe programs and safe places.

These policies can be downloaded from the Synod website:

[ns.uca.org.au/child-safe-church/](https://ns.uca.org.au/child-safe-church/) or by emailing the Synod Safe Church Admin Contact: [safechurch@ns.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@ns.uca.org.au)

### What is sexual grooming?

This is the process of preparing a person—usually a child or other vulnerable person—for sexual assault. It includes establishing a ‘special’ friendship with the child or vulnerable adult. Sexual grooming can include the conditioning of parents, other adults and church leaders to consider the relationship with the child to be ‘normal’.

## Signs of sexual grooming

Indicators of this behaviour include an adult or, sometimes, an older adolescent doing things such as:

- giving extra praise and attention to a child
- making a child feel special through gifts and treats
- sending text, voice, email, or online messages to a child on a regular basis
- asking a child for personal information
- spending time alone with a child
- talking about sex and sexuality with a child
- sharing secrets with a child.

## Impacts of sexual grooming

People may trust the person who is doing the grooming. The child might like the person who is grooming them, or like certain aspects of the interaction. Over time, the child may become isolated from peers and siblings and become dependent on the groomer.

Once sexual assault has occurred, the child may feel confused, ashamed and at least partly to blame. They might be afraid to speak out due to a fear of not being believed or due to a range of possible consequences upon themselves or the abuser. Some children, due to their developmental stage, might not understand the nature of the abuse or have the language to describe it. It is not uncommon for a range of adverse impacts to take days, months and even years to emerge.

## What can I do if I suspect sexual grooming?

If an adult feels a sense of unease or concern about a person’s interaction with a child they should discuss this with the Minister, Lay Leader or the Safe Church Contact Person.

If a child reports a concern about a person’s interaction with them, or with another child, it is important that adults listen and take the concerns seriously by following the Mandatory Reporting guidelines available from the Synod website or the Safe Church Contact Person.

## Safeguards against grooming

- Implementation of Safe Church policies.
- Screening processes for all leaders and volunteers consistent with the Synod’s Safe Recruitment Process.
- Adoption of Church Council Safe Church Commitment and Leaders and Volunteers Safe Church Commitment documents.
- Attendance at Safe Church Training every two years.
- Requirement that disclosures and suspicions of harm, or potential harm, to a child are reported to the church and to police according to the requirements of relevant State or Territory.