



# Information Sheet

## Mandatory Reporting

### Ministers of Religion

Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse in Western Australia is governed by the [Children and Community Services Act 2004](#) (the Act). In October 2021 the Western Australian Parliament passed the [Children and Community Services Amendment Act 2021](#) to introduce new mandatory reporter groups, including 'ministers of religion'.

The legal obligation for ministers of religion to report child sexual abuse will commence on **1 November 2022**.

### Ministers of Religion - definition

A person whose role falls within the definition of a 'minister of religion' in section 124A of the Act (below) will be a mandatory reporter.

#### Extract from Section 124A - Terms used

"minister of religion –

- (a) means a person who is recognised in accordance with the practices of a faith or religion as a person who is authorised to conduct services or ceremonies in accordance with the tenets of the faith and religion; and
- (b) includes such a person regardless of how the person's position or title is described (for example, member of the clergy, priest, minister, imam, rabbi or pastor)"

### Key points to note:

- The definition is intended to apply to relevant persons in all faiths and religions of any denomination or belief system in Western Australia.
- Faiths or religions have different ways of recognising and authorising persons to carry out key roles.
- The title given to a role does not determine whether a person is a minister of religion under the mandatory reporting law.

- It does not matter if a person's role as a minister of religion is paid or unpaid – both are captured.

## How can faiths or religions work out who is included?

Answering the following questions may help identify who, in your faith or religion, the new law applies to.

### What services or ceremonies form a core part of the faith or religion?

For example, ceremonies initiating or inducting a person into the faith or religion, joining persons in marriage, conducting funerals or other services that mark key events for the faith or religion.

### Who is recognised, in accordance with the faith or religion, to conduct or carry out the ceremonies and/or services?

Some faiths and religions have formal structures where only persons holding certain positions are authorised to conduct or carry out these ceremonies or services. Other faiths and religions may recognise and allow many of their members to fulfil these roles. These persons, recognised by their faith or religion as authorised to conduct or carry out ceremonies and services, are included as mandatory reporters.

## When must a minister of religion make a mandatory report?

From 1 November 2022, a minister of religion must make a report to the Department of Communities' Mandatory Reporting Service if they:

- form a **belief** that a **child** is, or has been, the subject of **sexual abuse** that occurred on or after 1 November 2022; and
- the belief is based on **reasonable grounds**; and
- the belief is formed, on or after 1 November 2022, **in the course of their** paid or unpaid work **as a minister of religion**.

### A minister of religion is not excused from making a report if:

- he/she forms that belief based on information disclosed to the minister during a religious confession; or
- disclosing that belief, or the information on which the belief is based, would be contrary to the tenets of his/her faith or religion.

## Will ministers of religion have to report child sexual abuse they knew of before they became mandatory reporters?

Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse is intended to protect children from sexual abuse that may be occurring now. The duty to make a report applies if the reporter forms the belief on or after commencement day (which is the day they became a mandatory reporter), and the belief relates to sexual abuse that occurred on or after the commencement day or is still occurring. For ministers of religion, this is on or after 1 November 2022.

Where there is ongoing concern for the safety of children arising from historical abuse (which may have occurred when a person who is now an adult was a child) a person may contact Communities' Central Intake Team on 1800 CPDUTY (1800 273 889), or by submitting a [Child Protection Concern Referral Form](#).

Historical abuse may also be reported to Police for investigation and potential prosecution (if the victim is over 18 years of age you should seek their views before doing this).

## Who do I make a mandatory report to and when does it need to be made?

The Department of Communities' Mandatory Reporting Service receives and responds to mandatory reports of child sexual abuse. The best way of making a mandatory report is through the [Mandatory Reporting website](#). Reports can be made 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

A mandatory report must be made as soon as practicable after the reporter forms their belief regarding the sexual abuse of a child.

An initial report can be made in writing or orally; however, if an oral report is made, it must be followed by a written report as soon as practicable after making the oral report (ideally within 24 hours). Failure to submit a written report as soon as practicable after submitting an oral report is an offence that carries a maximum penalty of \$3,000.

## What has to be included in a mandatory report?

Under section 124C of the Act, a mandatory report must contain the following information:

- the reporter's name and contact details;
- the name of the child, or, if this cannot be obtained after reasonable inquiries, a description of the child; and

- the grounds on which the reporter believes that the child has been the subject of sexual abuse or is the subject of ongoing sexual abuse.

The following information must also be provided to the extent that it is known:

- the child's date of birth;
- where the child lives;
- the names of the child's parents or other appropriate persons (e.g. adult relative or person who the child usually lives with); and
- the name of the person alleged responsible, their contact details and their relationship to the child.

## What if I don't make a mandatory report?

Failure to make a mandatory report is an offence with a maximum penalty of \$6,000.

A minister of religion is not excused from criminal responsibility for failing to make a report on the grounds that their belief is based on information disclosed during a religious confession, or any disclosure of the belief or information on which it is based is otherwise contrary to the tenets of the faith or religion.

If a person is charged with the offence of failing to make a mandatory report, there is a defence under section 124B(3) of the Act if the person can prove that he or she honestly and reasonably believed that a report had already been made to the Department of Communities or that the Department of Communities had already made inquiries or taken action in relation to the child's wellbeing.

## How will my identity be protected if I make a mandatory report?

Section 124F of the Act has strict provisions about the confidentiality of the identity of a mandatory reporter. Anyone who becomes aware of the identity of a mandatory reporter must not disclose identifying information to another person unless an exception under that section applies. The maximum penalty is a fine of \$24,000 and imprisonment for two years.

## How will I be protected from liability if I make a mandatory report?

Section 129(2) of the Act provides protection for mandatory reporters from liability. This section provides that mandatory reporters who make a report under section 124B(1) in good faith:

- do not incur any civil or criminal liability; and
- are not to be taken as having breached any duty of confidentiality; and
- are taken to have not breached any professional conduct principles.

## Where can I find more information?

Further information about mandatory reporting laws is available in the mandatory reporting online training, which can be accessed through the [Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse webpage](#).

## What if I have concerns about a child's wellbeing due to physical, emotional abuse or neglect?

If you are mandatory reporter of child sexual abuse but have concerns about a child due to physical, or emotional abuse or neglect, including exposure to family and domestic violence, you can and should notify the Department of Communities. This will enable a professional assessment of the circumstances and action to be taken to protect the child and other children where necessary.

If you are concerned about a child's wellbeing, but are not making a mandatory report, please contact the Central Intake Team on 1800 273 889 or submit a [Child Protection Concern Referral Form](#).

Please note that the Department of Communities is unable to provide tailored legal advice in response to enquiries from faiths or religions about who may be a mandatory reporter under the Act. Some faiths and religions may choose to get legal advice to assist them.