

First Annual Report by Jehovah's Witnesses in Response to the Royal Commission's Final Report – Recommendation 17.3

Background and contextual information:

History of Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia: Jehovah's Witnesses have been active in Australia since 1896. At present there are 798 congregations in Australia with over 67,700 Jehovah's Witnesses.

The activities of the 798 congregations in Australia are coordinated from the Branch Office of Jehovah's Witnesses based in Sydney.

Each congregation is cared for by a group of scripturally qualified individuals known as the body of elders. The majority of elders are family men and maintain secular employment to support their families. Jehovah's Witnesses do not have a salaried clergy nor any employees.

Making Institutions Child Safe:

Jehovah's Witnesses are fully compliant with each of these recommendations. Every elder and ministerial servant has a Working With Children clearance in those states where this is legislated.

Every one of Jehovah's Witnesses has free access to elders who will investigate every complaint received.

The position of Jehovah's Witnesses is clearly explained in more detail in Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection which can be found at the end of this report. (This is a public document and is available on the website www.jw.org.)

Children's Voices:

Parents have the primary responsibility to protect and teach their children. To assist, for decades, *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* journals and other Bible-based publications have featured articles designed to educate both Jehovah's Witnesses and the general public on how to protect children from sexual abuse and to be alert to any inappropriate behaviour directed towards children. In recent years, our religion's official website, jw.org, has also made such resources accessible to a wider audience. Some of our website content is now available in 986 languages including many indigenous and island community languages. These resources include advice for parents on how to initiate an age-appropriate conversation with each child concerning what to do if confronted by any inappropriate behaviour. Also there are animated videos so that parents can directly show their children what the child can do when someone attempts to touch them in an inappropriate manner. We believe that parental education of children about sex and the dangers of child sexual abuse can be a major factor in helping to prevent child sexual abuse.

Reporting against institution specific rules:

Regarding Recommendation **(16.27)**, the so-called "two-witness rule" is found in the Holy Bible. It was first stated in the law God gave to Moses and later mentioned by Jesus Christ in the gospel of Matthew.¹ It is simply the principle used to determine if a serious sin was committed by a congregation member who has denied the allegation against him. As such it is a Scriptural rule of evidence related only to the internal religious or ecclesiastical establishment of sin, and is not related to the reporting of an allegation of crime to the authorities. Regarding Recommendation **(16.28)**, the involvement of women, we confirm that women can be and are fully involved in receiving and submitting evidence of child sexual abuse and in providing support to a victim. It is the Scriptural responsibility of congregation elders to determine whether the alleged perpetrator should remain a member of the congregation. And in relation to Recommendation **(16.29)**, shunning, we confirm that Jehovah's Witnesses do not shun victims of child abuse but treat them with compassion, understanding and kindness.

¹ Deuteronomy 17:2-6; Matthew 18:15-17

Of the other 28 recommendations in the Final report by the Royal Commission **(16:31-58)** for all religious institutions, inasmuch as Jehovah's Witnesses are not a religious institution that takes custody of children or that otherwise separates children from their parents, we believe we are fully compliant.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' SCRIPTURALLY BASED POSITION ON CHILD PROTECTION

Definitions: Child abuse may include neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse.

Child *sexual* abuse is a perversion and generally includes one or more of the following: sexual intercourse with a child; oral or anal sex with a child; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a child; voyeurism of a child; indecent exposure to a child; or soliciting a child for sexual conduct. It may include sexting with a minor or showing pornography to a minor.

In this document, references to parents apply equally to legal guardians or other persons who hold parental responsibility for a minor.

1. Children are a sacred trust, “an inheritance from Jehovah.”—[Psalm 127:3](#).

2. The protection of children is of utmost concern and importance to all Jehovah’s Witnesses. This is in harmony with the long-standing and widely published Scripturally based position of Jehovah’s Witnesses, as reflected in the references at the end of this document, which are all published on [jw.org](#).

3. Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child abuse and view it as a crime. ([Romans 12:9](#)) We recognize that the authorities are responsible for addressing such crimes. ([Romans 13:1-4](#)) The elders do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the authorities.

4. In all cases, victims and their parents have the right to report an accusation of child abuse to the authorities. Therefore, victims, their parents, or anyone else who reports such an accusation to the elders are clearly informed by the elders that they have the right to report the matter to the authorities. Elders do not criticize anyone who chooses to make such a report.—[Galatians 6:5](#).

5. When elders learn of an accusation of child abuse, they immediately consult with the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses to ensure compliance with child abuse reporting laws. ([Romans 13:1](#)) Even if the elders have no legal duty to report an accusation to the authorities, the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses will instruct the elders to report the matter if a minor is still in danger of abuse or there is some other valid reason. Elders also ensure that the victim’s parents are informed of an accusation of child abuse. If the alleged abuser is one of the victim’s parents, the elders will inform the other parent.

6. Parents have the primary responsibility for the protection, safety, and instruction of their children. Therefore, parents who are members of the congregation are encouraged to be vigilant in exercising their responsibility at all times and to do the following:

- Have direct and active involvement in their children’s lives.
- Educate themselves and their children about child abuse.
- Encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children.—[Deuteronomy 6:6, 7](#); [Proverbs 22:3](#).

Jehovah’s Witnesses publish an abundance of Bible-based information to assist parents to fulfill their responsibility to protect and instruct their children.—See the references at the end of this document.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' SCRIPTURALLY BASED POSITION ON CHILD PROTECTION

7. Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction or other activities. ([Ephesians 6:4](#)) For example, our congregations do not provide or sponsor orphanages, Sunday schools, sports clubs, day-care centers, youth groups, or other activities that separate children from their parents.

8. Elders strive to treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. ([Colossians 3:12](#)) As spiritual counselors, the elders endeavor to listen carefully and empathetically to victims and to console them. ([Proverbs 21:13](#); [Isaiah 32:1, 2](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#); [James 1:19](#)) Victims and their families may decide to consult a mental-health professional. This is a personal decision.

9. Elders never require victims of child abuse to present their accusation in the presence of the alleged abuser. However, victims who are now adults may do so, if they wish. In addition, victims can be accompanied by a confidant of either gender for moral support when presenting their accusation to the elders. If a victim prefers, the accusation can be submitted in the form of a written statement.

10. Child abuse is a serious sin. If an alleged abuser is a member of the congregation, the elders conduct a Scriptural investigation. This is a purely religious proceeding handled by elders according to Scriptural instructions and is limited to the issue of membership as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. A member of the congregation who is an unrepentant child abuser is expelled from the congregation and is no longer considered one of Jehovah's Witnesses. ([1 Corinthians 5:13](#)) The elders' handling of an accusation of child abuse is not a replacement for the authorities' handling of the matter.—[Romans 13:1-4](#).

11. If it is determined that one guilty of child sexual abuse is repentant and will remain in the congregation, restrictions are imposed on the individual's congregation activities. The individual will be specifically admonished by the elders not to be alone in the company of children, not to cultivate friendships with children, or display any affection for children. In addition, elders will inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children's interaction with the individual.

12. A person who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any congregation privileges or to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation for decades, if ever.—[1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10](#); [5:22](#); [Titus 1:7](#).

13. This document is available upon request to members of the congregation. It is reviewed at least once every three years.

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' SCRIPTURALLY BASED POSITION
ON CHILD PROTECTION**

References available on jw.org:

- *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1983, “Help for the Victims of Incest”
- *Awake!*, October 8, 1991, “The Innocent Victims of Child Abuse” and “The Secret Wounds of Child Abuse”
- *Awake!*, October 8, 1993, “Your Child Is in Danger!,” “How Can We Protect Our Children?,” and “Prevention in the Home”
- *Awake!*, October 2007, “A Danger That Concerns Every Parent,” “How to Protect Your Children,” and “Make Your Family a Safe Haven”
- *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 1, chapter 32: “How Can I Protect Myself From Sexual Predators?”
- *What Your Peers Say*: “Sexual Harassment” video
- *Young People Ask*, “What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?—Part 1: Precautions”
- *Young People Ask*, “What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?—Part 2: Recovery”
- “We Protect Our Children” video
- “How Can Parents Teach Their Children About Sex?”
- *Become Jehovah’s Friend*, “Lesson 17: Protect Your Children” video
- *Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask*, Question 8: “What Should I Know About Sexual Assault?”
- “Jehovah’s Witnesses Educate Parents and Children to Protect Against Sexual Predators”
- *Learn From the Great Teacher*, chapters 10 and 32
- *The Watchtower*, October 1, 2008, “How to Be a Good Father”
- *The Watchtower*, November 1, 2010, “Talk to Your Children About Sex”