

Fourth Annual report by Jehovah's Witnesses in response to the Royal Commission's Final Report, Recommendation 17.3

Submitted December 9, 2021

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 762 congregations in Australia with over 73,116 Jehovah's Witnesses

The activities of the 762 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 Child Institutions Child Safe:

Every elder has a Working with Children clearance in those states where this is legislated.

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

As stated in point seven of our *Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection*, Jehovah's Witnesses do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction or other activities. Parents have the 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 more than 1000 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. A recent example is found in the attached copy of the May 2019 issue of *The Watchtower* where on page 13 the following is stated:

¹⁹ Who have the responsibility to protect children from harm? Parents do. Your children are a sacred trust, “an inheritance from Jehovah.” (Ps. 127:3) It is your responsibility to safeguard that trust. What can you do to protect your children from abuse?

²⁰ First, **educate yourself about abuse**. Learn about the kind of individuals who abuse children and the tactics they use to deceive them. Be alert to potential dangers. (Prov. 22:3; 24:3) Remember that in most cases, the abuser is someone the child already knows and trusts.

²¹ Second, **maintain good communication with your children**. (Deut. 6:6, 7) That includes being a good listener (Jas. 1:19) Remember that children are often reluctant to report abuse. They may fear that they will not be believed, or they may have been threatened by the abuser to keep the abuse secret. If you sense that something is wrong, kindly draw them out with questions and then patiently listen to their answers.

²² Third, **educate your children**. Share with them age-appropriate information about sex. Teach them what to say and do if someone tries to touch them in an inappropriate way. Use the information that God’s organization has provided on how to protect your children.—See the box “Educate Yourself and Your Children.”

How These Measures Enhance Child Safety:

As noted in last year’s report, for decades, *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* journals and other Bible-based publications and videos 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.

The Watchtower magazine (in the Study Edition of May 2019), published a series of articles that were discussed in every congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide in hundreds of languages, involving over nine million attendees. These articles clearly explained the Scriptural position Jehovah’s Witnesses take on protecting children from child abuse as well as never shielding or protecting perpetrators of child sexual abuse, or in fact any kind of child abuse. The magazine is freely available to the public on the website jw.org. A copy of these articles is attached. Furthermore, individual Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide, including elders and their families, review and discuss a Bible text selected for each day. The text appears on the home page of [Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY \(jw.org\)](http://Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY (jw.org)) and on the home page of the app JW Library. In 2021, on 23 days, the Scripture text revolves around child sexual abuse. (Excerpts of the May 2019 issue of *The Watchtower* have been selected and published for discussion on the following dates in 2021: January 3; January 4; February 1; February 2; February 3; February 17; February 24; March 2; March 4; March 28; April 9; April 10; May 8; May 9; June 6; July 4; August 3; September 3; October 2; October 30; October 31; December 3; and December 4.)

Professor Patrick Parkinson, one of Australia's foremost experts on the subject of child sexual abuse has reviewed Jehovah's Witnesses' child protection policies and gave them a very high rating. Attached please find Professor Parkinson's Expert Report entitled "The Child Protection Policies of Jehovah's Witnesses." Among other things, he concluded the following:

- "The educational materials put out by JWs to their members seek to educate their congregations about the problem of child sexual abuse to a greater extent than most faith-based organisations in Australia, in my experience. This is because those materials are studied by all members, whereas the educational programs of the major Christian denominations are only directed towards those who work with children" (par. 5)
- "I would think JWs do more to educate all their members about child sexual abuse than most mainline denominations" (par. 64)
- "I do not know of any organization in Australia, secular or religious, that provides child sexual abuse awareness material to all its participants" (par. 65)

False Media Reports Regarding Jehovah's Witnesses

On 14 September 2021, the ABC Four Corners report on Jehovah's Witnesses focused on sensational and unchallenged accounts of hostile ex-Witnesses. The program made false and defamatory statements about the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. A number of false representations have arisen based on a gross misinterpretation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse data that were recklessly and maliciously perpetuated by ABC *Four Corners*.

National Redress Scheme for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse

On September 9 of this year, Jehovah's Witnesses in Australia officially onboarded the Scheme.