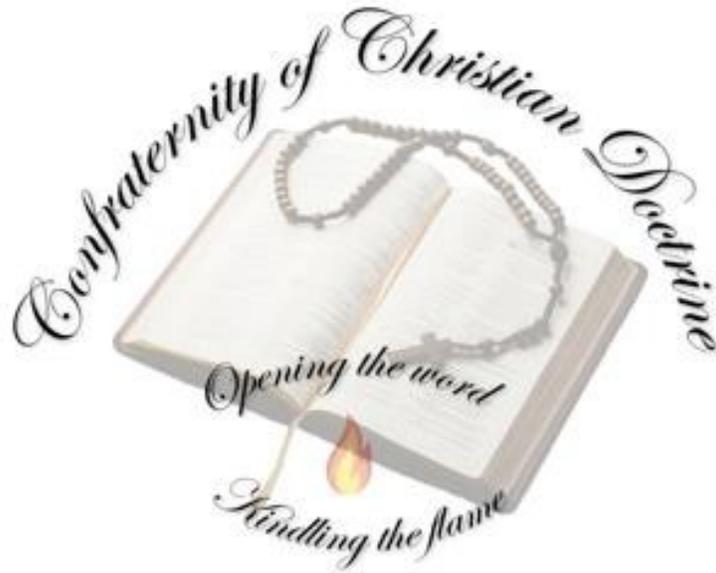


# DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE



## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CATHOLIC S.R.E. VOLUNTEERS

APPROVED FOR USE IN THE DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE



# CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CATHOLIC SRE VOLUNTEERS

The following document refers to the role of the Special Religious Educators in the State Schools across the state of New South Wales. This document is to consolidate the work of Child Protection Legislation and its implications for SRE Teachers/Assistants, and clarifies the boundaries in which the SRE Teacher and Assistant would participate on behalf of both the New South Wales Department of Education and Training [DET] and the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Armidale

The ministry of the SRE teacher and assistant in all parishes across the state of NSW is:

**“...a mission that transforms the ordinary values of the world. It grows slowly, from small beginnings, often unnoticed but always carried forward by the powerful Spirit of God. Its foundation is love: ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind’; ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ In fact, to live the reign of God is a commitment to a way of love. ‘I give you a new commandment; love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you. It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.’ [Integrity in Ministry pg viii]**

# CODE OF ETHICS

## **Ethical Principles upon which this code is based are:**

### Principle 1: Commitment to the Student

As educators within the Catholic tradition, SRE Teachers and Assistants believe that children and youth, like ourselves, are pilgrim people, making their journey through this life with a constant focus on the next. SRE Teachers and Assistants have a special responsibility to encourage each to achieve his/her maximum potential. SRE Teachers and Assistants work to stimulate the spirit of enquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals and values, and a sound relationship with God in the Church.

### Principle 2: Commitment to Parents.

As educators within the Catholic tradition, SRE Teachers and Assistants believe children and young persons are influenced by home, community, and a society in which attitudes toward Christian values are often challenged. Parents, and guardians, the source from whom children and young persons derive their values, entrust their children to the State School to instruct, complement and intensify the education and formation begun in the home. As SRE Teachers/Assistants we are called to assist these parents and guardians in fulfilling their responsibility for the Christian formation and education of their children.

### Principle 3: Commitment to the Community.

As educators within the Catholic tradition, SRE Teachers and Assistants believe the State School is both an agent for change and a preserver of basic values. SRE Teachers and Assistants consider that the Catholic students who attend State Schools are an integral part of the parish and so SRE Teachers and Assistants have a vital role to play in preparing future citizens, parishioners, and civic and church leaders.

### Principle 4: Commitment to Sound Educational Practice.

As educators within the Catholic tradition SRE Teachers and Assistants strive for excellence with our students for their own good, and the good of our Church, country and world. SRE Teachers and Assistants strive to create a Christian classroom environment which promotes sound moral values based upon Catholic beliefs and teachings. Through the SRE Teachers' and Assistants' spirit of joy, enthusiasm and zest for life-long learning, and the strength of their own relationships with God, SRE Teachers and Assistants encourage others to join them in the ministry of Special Religious Education

## Preamble

The provision of a safe and supportive environment is an essential element to ensure that each student entrusted to the care of the State School is to be affirmed in his or her dignity and worth as a person. This is the environment in which Catholic parish SRE Teachers/Assistants carry out their ministry of Special Religious Education to Catholic children attending State Schools.

It is expected that Catholic SRE Teachers/Assistants in schools endorse the principles of child protection as a fundamental responsibility and it is within this context that this Code of Conduct for Catholic SRE Teachers/Assistants has been prepared. This document will assist SRE Teachers/Assistants in understanding and fulfilling their legal and other responsibilities in this critical area of their ministry. It takes into account the State School/s they teach in and the Catholic Church community they represent. It will form part of a wider Code of Conduct pertaining to SRE Teachers and Assistants to be developed within each specific Diocesan context.

The *Child Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2003* took effect on 23 April 2004. This Act amended *Part 3A Ombudsman Act 1974* and *Part 7 Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998* (referred to in this document as 'the Child Protection Legislation').

This Code of Conduct will assist in clarifying the parameters of appropriate and inappropriate conduct for SRE Teachers/Assistants working in child related ministry. It will also assist in achieving a safe and supportive school environment for students, SRE Teachers/Assistants and the school's broader community.

**“...A code of conduct is not intended to restrict or stifle the conduct of those professionals to whom it applies. Rather, it is a set of behavioural standards to ensure that professionals themselves preserve their own dignity and respect the human dignity of all to whom they relate in the exercise of their profession....”**

[statement from Foreword : 'Integrity in Ministry' June 2004.]

**Please Note:** this document represents a synthesis of key elements of the following documents:

1. Code of Conduct of the Department of Education and Training  
[Unique Identifier PD/2004/0020/V001 Implementation Date 15<sup>th</sup> June 2004.]
2. Child Protection Code of Professional Standards for Catholic Schools  
[formulated by CCER and CEO Sydney.]
3. 'Towards Healing' [ 2000]and 'Integrity in Ministry'[June 2004].

### ***Related policies, procedures and publications***

\*Privacy Policy.....please refer to your parish policy.

\*The Code of Conduct and Behaviour Management [Discipline] Policy of the school where you teach SRE is of great importance to the SRE teacher and assistant.

O.H.& S policy for State Schools and Diocese.

\*N.B. SRE Teachers/Assistants need to be aware that Occupational Health and Safety issues..e.g. electrical cables placed in inappropriate positions, are their responsibility as well as that of paid employees of the school. This means that an SRE teacher or assistant would be required to report such a matter to the appropriate authority in the school.

## Department of Education Code of Conduct for SRE Teachers/Assistants

### 1. *Responsibilities of SRE Teachers/Assistants*

SRE Teachers/Assistants should be aware that there is a statement of core values recognized by the Department of Education and Training. (This statement can be found in the document “Values in NSW Schools”) In performing their duties it is expected that all SRE Teachers/Assistants will support the core values of the school. In doing so, they will avoid by word or action, any influence upon students that is contrary to the teachings and values expressed by the School, and the Catholic Church, as its authorizing Religious Denomination.

SRE Teachers/Assistants have a responsibility to meet the high standards and ethical behaviour required by the students’ families, the Catholic Church and the State Schools in which they minister.

SRE Teachers/Assistants undertake their responsibilities within the framework of the law. They must comply with lawful instructions from the Department of Education and Training, the State School in which they minister and the authorizing agent, the Parish Priest or his delegate. SRE Teachers/Assistants must comply with legislative and industrial requirements, with this Code and any policies and procedures that are implemented by their school in which they are engaged.

SRE Teachers/Assistants (and school authorities) owe a duty of care to students during the **time on the school property**. This duty of care is to take reasonable steps to protect students from any foreseeable risk of injury.

### 2. *Relationships*

#### *2.1 Interactions with Students*

It is expected that SRE Teachers/Assistants will be caring, compassionate adults who take an interest in their students and who set appropriate boundaries within those teacher-student relationships.

SRE Teachers/Assistants must be aware that their interactions with students are based on a trusting relationship arising from the nature of the work, and that those relationships are open to scrutiny.

SRE Teachers/Assistants must always treat students with respect. Within this, there is no place for sarcasm, derogatory remarks, offensive comments or any other inappropriate conduct that may result in emotional distress or psychological harm to a child.

*Behaviour that may cause psychological harm to a student includes:*

- ◆ *Targeted and sustained criticism, belittling or teasing;*
- ◆ *Excessive or unreasonable demands;*
- ◆ *Hostility, verbal abuse, rejection or scapegoating;*
- ◆ *Using inappropriate locations or social isolation, outside of the school's discipline policy, as punishment.*

SRE Teachers/Assistants must always treat students in a consistent manner without inappropriate familiarity or spending 'special time' with any student.

*Some indicative behaviours that may suggest a student is not being treated in a consistent manner could include:*

- ◆ *Giving gifts to a child (for example giving a birthday gift to a particular student when this is not the practice with other students, or asking the student to keep the gift a secret from others);*
- ◆ *Showing special favours;*
- ◆ *Allowing a student to over-step rules, except where it is clearly articulated in a student's Individual Education Plan or Individual Behaviour Management Plan;*
- ◆ *Sharing secrets with a student;*
- ◆ *Inconsistent consequences or allowances.*

Personal interactions between SRE Teachers/Assistants and students outside of school and school related activities can be problematic and may lead to allegations against SRE Teachers/Assistants. SRE Teachers/Assistants must be conscious that their position places extra obligations on them and should follow the policy and procedure as set by their school and church. In schools where there are many relationships between SRE Teachers/Assistants and students' families, SRE Teachers/Assistants must be aware of the limitations placed on these relationships by the Code of Conduct.

*Inappropriate behaviours may include:*

- ◆ *Visiting students at their home;*
- ◆ *Inviting students to visit the SRE teacher/Assistants home;*
- ◆ *Making telephone calls of a personal nature to students;*
- ◆ *Sending emails of a personal nature to students;*
- ◆ *Sending sms (text) messages to students;*

*should any of these actions be taken without the prior knowledge and consent of parent or guardian.*

When congratulating a student, a consistent approach should be used in line with school practice. SRE Teachers/Assistants must be conscious that their actions, particularly physical gestures may be open to scrutiny by others. SRE Teachers/Assistants are required to develop and exercise prudent judgment and sensitivity regarding appropriate physical interactions with students.

SRE Teachers/Assistants should not drive students in their cars unless they have specific permission, and do so in accordance with school policy. In the event of an emergency, SRE Teachers/Assistants should use prudent judgement and report the matter to the school authorities prior to undertaking any journey.

SRE Teachers/Assistants should avoid, as far as possible, situations where they are alone with a student. If, in the conduct of their duties, they are required to work in a one to one situation with a student, SRE Teachers/Assistants must follow the school's policy and procedure.

*When responsible for a single student, SRE Teachers/Assistants should:*

- ◆ *Have previously discussed arrangements with the School Authorities;*
- ◆ *Ensure that they and the students are visible if inside a room;*
- ◆ *Where possible, interact with the student in an area open to observation.*

SRE Teachers/Assistants must do everything within reason to ensure that alcohol tobacco or prohibited substances are not consumed by students on the school's premises or at school functions. SRE Teachers/Assistants must not give to students, nor are they to encourage or condone the use by students of, the abovementioned substances.

Consumption of alcohol by SRE Teachers/Assistants at school, or while at school functions should be in accordance with school policy. SRE Teachers/Assistants must not enter school premises under the influence of alcohol or prohibited drugs. Administration of prescribed medications should be in accordance with school policy.

Similar to all employees, SRE Teachers/Assistants must not, under any circumstances, engage in intimate and/or sexual relationships with a student or engage in any conduct of a sexual nature with a student. It is irrelevant whether the relationship is heterosexual or homosexual, consensual or non-consensual or condoned by parents or caregivers. The age of the students or SRE Teachers/Assistants involved is also irrelevant

*Improper conduct of a sexual nature by an SRE teacher or assistant against a student includes sexual intercourse and any other form of Sexual misconduct..*

*Sexual misconduct includes:*

- ◆ *Obscene language of a sexual nature;*
- ◆ *Suggestive remarks or actions;*
- ◆ *Jokes of a sexual nature;*
- ◆ *Obscene gestures;*
- ◆ *Unwarranted and inappropriate touching;*
- ◆ *Sexual exhibitionism;*
- ◆ *Undressing in front of students;*
- ◆ *Requesting students to undress;*
- ◆ *Personal correspondence with students in respect of the SRE Teachers'/Assistants' sexual feelings for the student;*
- ◆ *Deliberate exposure of students to sexual behaviour of others, other than in the case of prescribed curriculum material in which sexual themes are contextual;*
- ◆ *Possession, distribution or display of pornography;*
- ◆ *Electronic transmission of messages or files which are sexually explicit, offensive or contain inappropriate jokes;*
- ◆ *Sending sms (text) messages, which are sexually explicit, offensive or contain inappropriate jokes.*

SRE Teachers/Assistants in their pastoral care role must be cautious of the content and context of their discussions with students.

*SRE Teachers/Assistants must not:*

- ▯ *Make derogatory personal comments about a student;*
- ◆ *Ask questions that probe a student's sexuality or personal relationships;*
- ▯ *Discuss personal details of lifestyle of themselves or others;*
- ▯ *Disclose their personal contact details to students;*
- ▯ *Discuss matters of a sexual nature relating to themselves.*

Should any student engage, or attempt to engage, in inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature with an SRE teacher or assistant, then immediate steps must be taken to discourage the student and the matter should be reported to the **principal and the appropriate diocesan authority.**

SRE Teachers/Assistants must notify the Principal immediately should they suspect a situation involving any form of reportable conduct or concern of risk of harm to students. SRE Teachers/Assistants must also be aware of individual mandatory reporting requirements under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. ***It is not the responsibility of SRE Teachers/Assistants to investigate allegations or suspicions of a child abuse of any kind***

## 2.2 *Maintaining Boundaries*

*SRE Teachers/Assistants should be aware of the following professional boundaries:*

- ▮ *All students should be treated equally with no particular student singled out for particular attention.*
- ▮ *My words and behaviours must be acceptable under any circumstances.*
- ▮ *My standard of dress must be professional when on school property.*
- ▮ *My use of language must be appropriate and non-threatening.*
- ▮ *I must be equally available to all students.*
- ▮ *My personal feelings must not be allowed to affect my interactions with students.*
- ▮ *Interactions with a student which may be seen as demeaning or belittling are not acceptable.*

SRE Teachers/Assistants are required to bring to the attention of the Principal any potential, perceived or actual contraventions of any of these boundaries set out in this Code, whether by themselves or colleagues in accordance with current legislation and school policy.

## 3 *Duty of Care for SRE Teachers/Assistants.*

The school owes a duty of care to its employees, which includes SRE Teachers/Assistants, and students. It is expected that an SRE Teacher/ Assistant, will contribute towards the fulfillment of this legal duty. SRE Teachers/Assistants will exercise with diligence, the duty of care that they owe to the student. In addition to this, SRE Teachers and Assistants are expected to take all reasonable steps to protect students from risk of harm. This may require making formal notifications/reports to government agencies as well as referring matters of concern to relevant personnel within the Catholic Diocesan Offices.

SRE Teachers/Assistants are also expected to cooperate with the school to maintain a workplace environment that is positive, open and healthy for members of the school community. Each volunteer has a significant role to play in achieving and maintaining this objective. If SRE Teachers or Assistants were having difficulties in this area they should talk with their school SRE coordinator and parish SRE coordinator.

The role of SRE Teachers/Assistants is to enhance the student's educational opportunities through faith development and religious education. Whilst in this role, the SRE Teacher/Assistant also has an obligation to fulfill duty of care requirements.

SRE Teachers/Assistants must comply with the arrangements for student supervision put in place by the school for all activities where the student is under the duty of care of and SRE teacher/assistant.

*Duty of Care involves the following:*

- *Punctuality*
- *Reporting incidences of bullying, harassment or discriminatory behaviour to the appropriate school authority.*
- *Attending the needs of ill or injured students and notifying the supervising teacher or the school SRE coordinator of whatever action has taken place.*

#### 4. **Risk Management...SRE Teachers/Assistants.**

All SRE Teachers/Assistants should be aware of risks that arise in the school and take steps to minimise and/or eliminate those risks. Examples might include: the danger of boiling water, if taking a class in the staff room; the danger of students being hurt by falling equipment, if taking a class in an equipment room; sunburn, if a lesson is taken outside.

#### 5. **Student Management**

It is the responsibility of each SRE Teacher and Assistant to be familiar with the relevant school's policies on Student Management and Discipline and Pastoral Care.

Students who display recurrent challenging behaviours, especially unsafe behaviours, should be referred to the appropriate person in accordance with the school's policy and procedures. Where the school has an individual behaviour management plan, SRE Teachers/Assistants should act in accordance with this plan. If the SRE Teacher/Assistant feels unsafe or threatened in any given school situation, a member of the School Staff should be informed, and requested to resolve the immediate situation. The volunteer personnel should consult with their Parish SRE Coordinator, and then, if necessary, Diocesan SRE staff.

**Corporal punishment is prohibited by law.** Corporal punishment involves the application of physical force to punish or correct a student unless that physical contact is reasonable and necessary for the protection of any person.

*Prohibited behaviour management practices include:*

- ◆ *Using an object, such as a ruler, book, duster, chalk or whiteboard marker to gain a child's attention in a hostile or an inappropriate physical manner;*
- ◆ *Restraining a student for any purpose other than where a student's actions are causing harm to him/her self or others;*
- ◆ *Hitting or kicking a student;*
- ◆ *Holding a student (other than for comfort or safety purposes);*
- ◆ *Pushing, pulling, shoving, grabbing, pinching or poking a student;*
- ◆ *Shaking or throwing a student;*
- ◆ *Intimidating a student;*
- ◆ *Swearing at a student;*
- ◆ *Using sarcasm to humiliate;*
- ◆ *Locking a student in a confined space;*
- ◆ *Refusing biological needs as a means of punishment;*
- ◆ *Applying painful or noxious conditions;*
- ◆ *Criticizing a student rather than the student's actions;*
- ◆ *Practices which instill fear, or using fear as a means of controlling a student;*
- ◆ *Practices which cause a student to feel alienated;*
- ◆ *Exposing a student to material that contains violent or inappropriate sexual messages or themes, or contains adult concepts or themes that are inappropriate to the student's age or curriculum expectations;*
- ◆ *The use of psychotropic medication to manage a student's behaviour, as opposed to treatment for a diagnosed condition.*

## 6. Physical Contact with Students....SRE Teachers/Assistants.

When physical contact with a student is a necessary part of the teaching/learning experience SRE Teachers/Assistants must exercise caution to ensure that the contact is appropriate and acceptable for the duty to be performed.

### **Physical contact with students which may be appropriate and acceptable includes:**

- Comforting an upset student;
- Guiding a student in a non-threatening manner;
- Tapping a student on the shoulder to gain his/her attention after verbal requests were unsuccessful; and
- Protecting a student from imminent danger to himself/herself or to others.
  
- *Assessing a student who is injured or ill may necessitate touching. A employee should advise the student of what they intend to do and, where possible, seek the student's concurrence;*
  
- *Using drama or other activities as part of a lesson may require the physical handling of a student to demonstrate a particular action or skill;*

The physical contact referred to above is only acceptable if the contact was reasonable for the purpose of discipline, management or care of the student. The contact must also be appropriate given the age, maturity, health or other characteristics of the child. Physical contact with a student should be consistent with any behaviour management plan in place for that student.

Physical interventions (including physical restraints, removals or escorts) to contain and/or control the behaviour of students should only be employed as measures of last resort to ensure safety and protection. The use of physical intervention is restricted to occasions when the student, other students, SRE Teachers/Assistants are being harmed or are in imminent danger of being harmed.

*Some examples of when it may be appropriate to use physical intervention as a last resort include:*

- ◆ *A student attacking another adult;*
- ◆ *A student attacking another student;*
- ◆ *Students physically fighting;*
- ◆ *A student causing, or at risk of causing, injury to self or others;*
- ◆ *A student misusing dangerous materials, substances or objects where it is likely that this will cause imminent harm.*

As any physical intervention involves some risk of injury to the student or adult, SRE Teachers/Assistants must weigh this risk against the risks involved in failing to intervene when it may be warranted. All SRE Teachers/Assistants using physical interventions are responsible and accountable for the manner in which they exercise that authority.

## **7. Confidentiality...SRE Teachers/Assistants.**

SRE Teachers/Assistants should be aware of, respect and adhere to, the established lines of communication in the school.

Where matters arise in a school under Child Protection Legislation, SRE Teachers/Assistants should maintain the confidentiality of all parties concerned. In any matters where an SRE teacher or assistant is in doubt as to the requirements of confidentiality, they should seek the advice of the Principal or the Principal's delegate, without discussing the matter with anyone else

## **8. Unacceptable Conduct**

Conduct which is contrary to this Code may amount to reportable conduct and/or disciplinary action within the meaning of Child Protection Legislation and will be dealt with in accordance with the Diocesan policy.

## **9. Clarification of the Code**

If there is any conflict between this code of conduct for SRE Teachers/Assistants and applicable legislation, the legislation will prevail. If an SRE teacher or assistant is in doubt about the interpretation of this code then the matter should be discussed with the State School SRE Coordinator or if this is not practical the State School Principal. If this matter cannot be clarified at a local level, the matter should be referred to the appropriate Catholic Church authority.

## **10. Review of the Code**

To maintain the currency and value of this Code it will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

## GLOSSARY

**Child Protection Legislation** is defined to include the following:

1. *Ombudsman Act 1974*
2. *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*
3. *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*

**SRE Teacher** includes SRE Teachers and Assistants, engaged to provide faith education in State Schools

**School** means services provided to children undertaken on school property and other school related activities such as school sport, excursions, camps, billeting.

**Catholic Church Authority** means the body responsible for the governance of each school such as a parish, Catholic Education Office, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Office, Catholic Schools Office, canonical administrator or a religious institute.

**Principal** means the Principal or the Principal's delegate.

**Student** means any child under the age of 18, regardless of whether they are an enrolled student at the school.

**Reportable Conduct** means:

- ◆ Any sexual offence, or sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including a child pornography offence), or
- ◆ Any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child, or
- ◆ Any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child, whether or not, in any case, with the consent of the child.