



Rabbinical Council of Victoria
 Religious Leadership for the Jewish Community
 ועד הרבנים דויקטוריה

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Updated response to the submission provided to the Royal Commission in October 2016 on behalf of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria.

Addendum to section 1.1 of previous submission - Action the Rabbinical Council of Victoria has taken as a result of Case Study 22

Following the Royal Commission, the RCV worked to formalise a transparent complaints process for any complaints against the RCV or a member of the RCV.

The guidelines follow best practices expected of an organisation such as the RCV and are modelled on procedures commonly used by courts of law to achieve what is often referred to as natural justice.

When a complaint is lodged with the RCV, the complainant and the accused are sent a copy of the process and the expected timeline for handling the complaint. An independent lawyer is appointed to assist the investigative sub-committee, thus ensuring complaints are handled with transparency and fairness. A copy of the complaints process and guidelines is attached.

Addendum to section 1.3 of previous submission - training and supervision of staff

Whilst much of the following is not specifically related to child sexual abuse, we include it to demonstrate that the RCV is committed to consistently and continuously offering professional development opportunities to Rabbis and Rebbetzins in matters that are of interest to the community.

1. DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE FORUM

In April 2016 the RCV partnered with the JCCV in a drug and alcohol abuse prevention forum for the Jewish Community including a panel representative from Odyssey House Victoria, a family therapist and an emergency physician from the Alfred Hospital.

2. PALLIATIVE CARE TRAINING

In September 2016 Rabbis and Rebbetzins of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV) participated in a training session on Palliative Care with Dr Michelle Gold, Director of Palliative Care Service at Alfred Health. The session, hosted at Caulfield Shule, provided insights into the ethics of end of life care such as; increasing awareness in the medical profession and DHHS, Medicalization of Dying, Death-denying society, leaving a legacy, quality of life and other such moral issue's relating to palliative care.

3. MARRIAGE COUNSELLING

In November 2016, RCV Rabbis and Rebbetzins participated in a two-day training course learning about the relationship education and counselling tool PREPARE/ENRICH. The National Coordinator of PREPARE/ENRICH, Mandi Smith led the training focusing on the program as a marriage preparation or enrichment tool. The workshop also provided the group with practical skills they can use in their work with couples and important messages about how couples need to be intentional to have healthy marriages and strong emotional intimacy.

The areas the training covered were the interpersonal areas, where many couples can struggle, such as communication and conflict management. Additionally, financial management, personality, relationship roles, family & friends, family of origin and other relevant influences that affect couples through their lives were explored. On the second day three Rabbi's attended who have used PREPARE/ENRICH for some time and were able to share their experiences of working with the program with Jewish couples which was of great benefit to the rest of the group.

4. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DISCLOSURE

In March 2017 Rabbis and Rebbetzins of the RCV attended training facilitated by Tzedek CEO Dr. Michelle Meyer and Trainer, Lisa Belleli. The practical and relevant training focused on developing the rabbis and rebbetzins' understanding of the more complex dynamics of child sexual abuse and utilising their shule's child protection policy. Complex case studies of child sexual abuse were considered and the complexities of the reporting process discussed.

The RCV has been working with Australian Childhood Foundation to implement the Safeguarding Children Program in shules and this training forms part of the ongoing importance that the RCV places on educating and keeping its members informed on matters relating to CSA.

The RCV recognises that Rabbis have a critical role to play in responding to child sexual abuse. The training encouraged Rabbis to consider their role in respect of child safe policies and advocates and role models in the community and using a public voice to remove the stigma associated with child sexual abuse.

The RCV has formed a strong working relationship with Tzedek and intends to continue offering ongoing training with Tzedek to ensure that our members are kept up to date and informed in these crucial matters.

The role of the RCV in providing advice to rabbis and the broader Jewish community about child protection and child safety:

The RCV continues to offer training to rabbis and rebbetzins (rabbis' wives) in areas of child protection and disclosure by victims of child sexual abuse.

The RCV continues to work with the Australian Childhood Foundation to support member shules to formalise their child protection policies and implement training and standards across their organisations.

The RCV has forged and solidified its relationships with community organisations such as the JCCV and Tzedek as well as media outlets such as the AJN. These relationships will further set the RCV in a position to promote cultural change in supporting child protection and child safety in the community.

The application of halachic principles, such as mesirah, to allegations of child sexual abuse:

To quote from the RCV's official Press Release from February 2015

“The RCV has, since 2010, publicly reiterated, on numerous occasions and through numerous forums, the Jewish Halachic position that any prohibition of mesira (reporting to the civil authorities) and arkaot (adjudication in civil courts) does not apply in cases of child sexual abuse and that there is an actual obligation to report any allegations of child abuse directly to the police and relevant authorities.”

The RCV is completely committed to such ruling and will continue to publicise such advice to the community as often as deemed necessary to ensure the message reaches and is heeded by all members of the Jewish Community.”

The RCV is currently confident that the majority of the members of the Jewish community widely understand and accept that there is no halachic (Jewish Law) prohibition against reporting allegations of sexual abuse to the police or responsible authorities, nor are members of the Jewish community required or advised to seek rabbinic approval before making any such allegations.

Furthermore, there is currently community-wide acceptance and broad public expectation that any and all allegations of such nature be referred immediately and directly to the police and not hushed up in any way.

The advice, if any, given to Jewish institutions including schools and colleges as to the sexual education of children and young people:

The RCV encourages all local schools, colleges and responsible community institutions to facilitate age-appropriate sexual awareness education and to develop culturally appropriate sex-education curricula and materials.

Members of the RCV will continue to make themselves available to various local schools to provide advice to the educators and guidance to students about Jewish attitude to intimacy, body image, sexual maturity and various related topics.

The cultural or theological barriers, if any, in responding to child sexual abuse:

Whilst the RCV believes that the broad majority of the members of the Jewish community understand and accept that there is no halachic (Jewish Law) prohibition against reporting allegations of sexual abuse to the police or responsible authorities, the RCV notes the findings of the Royal Commission Report of Case Study 22 that “The 2010 RCV Resolution did not result in an immediate change in the community’s approach to communication about child sexual abuse” and that the commission “heard from survivors, and family members of survivors, whose communities ostracised them, partly because the communities regarded them as having committed a sin in communicating with secular authorities about other Jews against whom allegations of child sexual abuse had been made. The communities held this belief despite the clarification contained in the 2010 RCV Resolution”.

The RCV, representing the religious leadership of our community, will therefore continue to engage with and remind members of Jewish community, that it is not only permissible but an obligation for persons to act immediately and directly in contacting the relevant authorities with any concerns raised by children, young people, their parents/carers and/or concerned members of the public in regards to child sexual abuse.

Whether rabbis and other religious leaders, employees and volunteers in organisations formed for religious or spiritual purposes should be subject to mandatory reporting obligations in relation to child sexual abuse.

The RCV supports obligating mandatory reporting of cases of suspected child sexual abuse on Rabbis and other religious leaders, employees and volunteers in organisations formed for religious or spiritual purposes.

Rabbinical leadership, in particular:

a. any support given to rabbis to assist them to respond to child sexual abuse matters:

The RCV continues to run professional development sessions for the rabbis and rebbetzins on all matters relating to child protection including responding to child sexual abuse disclosures.

b. rabbinical oversight, if any (e.g. any external authority for reporting grievances against rabbis, and enforcing disciplinary measures):

All members of the public are eligible to lodge any matter of complaint against the RCV or the conduct of a member of the RCV through our complaints process as described above and as per the attached complaint guidelines and procedures.

Response to the announcement of the Commonwealth Government's redress scheme.

The RCV welcomes and supports the Commonwealth Government's redress scheme.

Recommendations for any improvements as to:

a. The way institutions manage child protection and child safety issues, including complaint handling:

The RCV believes that all rabbis must work with their synagogues to develop best practice in child protection. The RCV continues to encourage and support shules that seek accreditation with Australian Childhood Foundation in regards to child safety. Institutions should also be encouraged to adopt best practice in relation to having open and transparent complaint procedures readily accessible by the public.

b. Information sharing within the Jewish community and amongst rabbis

The RCV will continue to promote public statements educating the community on topics such as child protection and sexual abuse disclosures.

The RCV encourages its member rabbis to ensure that at least one sermon per year is dedicated to talking about child sexual abuse matters and reminding the community of our shared responsibility in protecting children.

The RCV is a co-sponsor for an event planned on March 27, a 'Night of Healing', for victims of child sexual abuse and the Jewish community.

The RCV will continue to support such events and also encourage other organisations to support and conduct events that support child sexual abuse prevention and victims of child sexual abuse.

c. Sexual education

The RCV encourages all organisations to facilitate age appropriate sexual awareness education to help prevent sexual predators taking advantage of or abusing children.

d. Enhancing rabbinical accountability

The RCV is in the process of developing an 'excellence program' with the aim to re-build and strengthen the confidence and trust of the members of the RCV and the communities in which they provide leadership.

It will include introducing Best Practise Guidelines, namely; a) A communications protocol, including centralising the communications between the RCV and external persons and organisations as well as internal communications; and b) the ongoing governance development of the Executive members with regard to best practise and good governance as officers of the RCV, which will include the following:

1. Governance: in particular the distinction between being engaged in matters as a Rabbi versus being engaged in matters as a member or executive of the RCV, and the legal risks associated therewith.
2. Capacity: in particular the organisational capacity to deal with complaints and related matters such as communications within the RCV and between the RCV and the community.

3. Record keeping: in particular the legal and related risks that arise from the RCV's role as an institution of the community