

CANBERRA CHURCHGOERS SEEK TRAINING IN HOW TO SPOT, REPORT CHILD SEX ABUSERS



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There has been a spike in Canberra churchgoers seeking child protection training following royal commission revelations of past Australian child sex abuse.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has uncovered horrific cases of abuse and failures to report attackers across the country.

Assistant bishop in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn Matt Brain said it had led to a surge in interest in child protection training in the ACT. "We want people to be able to trust us and we want to be able to do the right thing.

"People will often come either with scenarios that they've heard in the media or scenarios from personal experience of when things have gone wrong," Dr Brain said.

"We'll often have times just of question and answer on how to deal with particular circumstances that have arisen."

He said the training helped parishioners safeguard children in the congregation against abuse, identify potential offenders or victims, and know how to report any concerns.

"One of the ways that the wheels fall off is when people don't know how to respond when they see something concerning," Dr Brain said.

"We want people to be able to trust us and we want to be able to do the right thing."

Training not about ticking boxes

Wendy Evans from St Matthew's Anglican Church Wanniasa said the training was "essential" for her role as a children's ministry leader.



Photo: Wendy Evans says child protection training helps her as a ministry leader. (ABC News)

She said people took child safety very seriously in the wake of revelations from the royal commission.

"There's far more communication between children's ministry leaders and parents," she said.

"There's requirements that there are two leaders in a room at any one time and that's kept to the book."

Ms Evans said those she worked with had a real desire to keep the children in their care safe.

"They're not doing it to tick boxes or because they've been told to," she said.

Experts warn more than training is needed

Australian Catholic University child protection expert Tim Moore said he was "heartened" to hear churchgoers were being proactive about protecting the younger members of their flock.

He said the training would help keep young people safe in future.

"We know that people who have received training around abuse and neglect do feel more confident raising those concerns within their institutions and, if they're not getting the support they need, externally as well," Dr Moore said.

But he said training was not enough on its own.

"Training often focuses on what to do when you're concerned about a child or when a child discloses," Dr Moore said.

"What we actually need to do is create a community around those children of adults who are trustworthy, who kids can go to and raise their concerns.

"As well as training, we really need to change the cultures of organisations and institutions so that children's safety is a priority."