

Safe Ministry for Parents and Church Members

Safe Ministry Signposts

Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

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1. Commitment to safe ministry

Ministry to children and young people is vibrant and exciting work, and also greatly significant to the life of the church. Teaching children and youth about Jesus is kingdom work. It is a service to the children and youth, the church family, and to God himself that offers great opportunities, but also carries significant responsibilities for the wellbeing of the children and young people in our care. If we as a church take the teaching and leadership of children and young people seriously then we must do all we can to provide an environment that is safe from any form of harm.



The more parents and other congregation members are familiar with the church’s safe ministry policies, the more able they will be to support the children’s and youth ministry leaders as they implement them, and identify breaches when they occur.

If you have any concerns about the safety of children or young people in ministry activities, please speak to the Senior Minister, the Safe Ministry Representative or the person responsible for children’s or youth ministry in your parish.

2. General principles for ministry with children and young people

Children and young people have rights

Children and young people have the right to be safe and well looked after when they are in our care. They have the right to be protected, listened to and their particular needs addressed in all church activities that they are part of, whether mixed age or young-person specific.



Leaders are responsible

All those exercising a pastoral ministry involving children and young people in the church have responsibility for the safety and welfare of the children and young people in their care.

Abuse is power misused

Ministers and leaders have authority over children and young people because of their positional power and because of their greater age, maturity, physical size and life experience. Abuse arises from the misuse of authority or power. Any form of abuse is always wrong.

3. Screening and training of leaders

There are screening requirements for children's and youth ministry leaders, both under NSW law and the Anglican Church's ordinances.



A person who wishes to volunteer or work in a children's or youth ministry position must usually:

- Obtain a Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance that must then be verified by the parish (see www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au for more information);
- Make a formal application for the children's ministry position, including producing proof of identity documents and providing references;
- Undertake Safe Ministry training within three months of starting the children's ministry position, followed by a Refresher course every three years; and
- Read, understand, and comply with Faithfulness in Service (www.safeministry.org).

In addition, it is recommended that all volunteers are a member of the parish for at least 6 months before entering into a children's ministry position in that parish.

The Safe Ministry Representative for your parish is required to keep records of leaders' WWCC clearances and safe ministry training.

4. Code of Conduct for Children's and Youth ministry

The Code of Conduct for children's and youth ministry leaders is written to protect the children and young people in our churches, as well as to protect leaders from situations where their integrity or actions might be questioned.

A breach of the Code of Conduct may raise issues concerning a leader's fitness to continue as a leader. If you observe a leader acting in a way which may be contrary to the relevant Code of Conduct, please inform the Senior Minister, Safe Ministry Representative or the person responsible for Children's and Youth Ministry in the parish.



A children's or youth ministry leader must:

- Never abuse children or young people, or cultivate relationships in order to initiate or cloak abuse of children or young people.
- Never be alone with a child or young person away from the presence of other adults.
- Never have children or young people to his or her home or visit children or young people in their home when no other adult is present, and must never meet privately with a child or young person outside of church activities, except with the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Never touch a child or young person in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender or cultural background.
- Never help children in ways that involve intimate care if the child is capable of doing it on his or her own (eg, toileting or changing clothes).
- Never physically discipline a child or young person.
- Never make drugs, alcohol or cigarettes available to children or youth.
- Never develop inappropriate special relationships with particular children or youth that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any contact with a child or young person that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).
- Never become romantically involved with any person under the age of 18 in the youth or children's ministry.

There are good reasons for this code of conduct. Those who seek to abuse children may use group-based activities in order to gain the trust of a child. Having gained that trust, they may then engage in one-to-one activities that offer an opportunity for abuse to occur, including sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse of a child often starts with something relatively minor, but can then gradually build up to more involved behaviors through a process of grooming. Grooming is often characterized by secrecy.

This is why there must always be more than one leader present, and that no opportunities present themselves for a leader to engage in one-to-one activity with a child away from the presence of other adults.

5. Guidelines for Children's and Youth Ministry activities



The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for children's and youth ministry activities, such as the supervision of activities and their appropriateness, the physical safety of those involved, the importance of parental consent, transportation and trips away, forms of communication with young people, as well the issue of meeting up with young people outside of programmed events. However, there are three golden rules that are relevant to all of the guidelines.

The Golden Rules

Two or More

There must always be two leaders aged 18 years or over present for all children's or youth ministry events.

Never Alone

Leaders must not be alone with a child or young person during an activity, and should make sure, as far as possible, that other leaders are not left alone with a child or young person.

Stranger Danger

Leaders should be on the alert for people wandering around – a person unknown to the leaders or not part of the children's and youth ministry should not be allowed access to children and youth.

a. Supervision

There must always be two leaders aged 18 or over present for all activities.

The degree of supervision required will vary according to the nature and environment of the activity, the age and maturity of the children or young people and the size of the group. Suggested supervision ratios for low-risk onsite activities would be: crèche and preschoolers 1:5 (one adult leader for every 5 children), primary school 1:7 (one adult leader for every 7 children), high school 1:10 (one adult leader for every 10 children).

b. Physical safety of children

Children and young people should be meeting in a physical environment that is safe and suitable for them. There is a recommended checklist for the leader of the children's or youth ministry to use in assessing the safety of the physical environment where children's or youth ministry occurs.

c. Appropriateness of activities

Leaders are expected to have thoughtfully considered what message children may learn from the way events are organised and conducted. Games or activities that could in any way emphasise gender, physical, intellectual or ethnic differences should be assessed for their appropriateness.

Careful consideration should be given to any activities or games that require children to act alone or in pairs independent of leaders to minimise the possibility of children being harmed.

Leaders are to review in their entirety any DVDs, youtube clips, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics that they intend to show to children or youth. In assessing whether something is appropriate leaders are to be governed by the age of the youngest child present. Censorship ratings should be kept to G or PG for children up to Year 6, keeping in mind that some G or PG material may still not be appropriate due to the themes it contains. For youth, leaders should make sure that any elements containing violence, sexual activity, nudity, drug use, coarse language or questionable lifestyle are appropriate for the intended audience. Care is to be exercised if a TV show, film or computer game has been recommended by the Office of Film and Literature Classification as unsuitable for youth of a particular age (eg, PG, M or MA classifications). MA rated material will rarely be suitable, and material rated M may or may not be suitable with parental consent.

d. Parental consent

Leaders need a parent's written consent to take children or youth away from church premises. They are to keep parents informed of the place and timing of the event.

Leaders also need a parent's written consent to administer medications to a child.

If a child has particular physical needs (eg, allergies), mental health needs (eg, depression) or safety needs, the parent should pass any relevant information on to the child's leaders.

e. Transportation

It is the responsibility of parents to arrange transportation to and from children's and youth events, unless another specific arrangement is in place.

Written permission from a parent is required before a child or young person can be transported in a vehicle driven by someone other than a parent for the purposes of a church activity.

Leaders are to avoid being alone in a car with a child or young person, even with parental permission. If such a situation is unavoidable, the leader is to inform another leader of the trip and the reason for it.

f. Trips away

It is not usually appropriate to have children under the age of Year 5 sleeping over at events. When events involve children aged Year 5 and above sleeping over, leaders should ensure that the sleeping accommodation (where possible) is:

- segregated between males and females;
- supervised by more than one person, preferably including a parent or guardian;

and ensure (where possible) that those supervising the sleeping accommodation:

- are of the same gender as the children being supervised; and
- do not sleep in close personal proximity to a child, unless they are a parent or guardian of the child.
- never share accommodation with only one child, unless they are a parent or guardian of the child.

Venues should allow for the privacy of all parties to be respected, particularly when changing clothes, washing and toileting.

g. Communication

Children

Leaders should not contact children by email, mail, social media, video calls, using chatrooms or by any other form of electronic communication. Leaders should not call or text a child on the child's mobile phone.

All electronic communication must be with the child's parent or guardian. On the rare occasions when a leader might need to speak to a child on the phone for ministry purposes, the leader is to call the child's parent to explain why he or she is calling. Only then, with the parent's permission, should the leader speak with the child. The leader should be conscious of keeping the conversation with the child short.

Youth

Leaders are to be guided by the following principles in their communication with youth –

1 ABOVE REPROACH

Communications should always be above reproach, both in terms of the content and the way you communicate. Ask yourself: if this communication were to be made known to all of church, would they consider it to be appropriate? Be sensitive to the impact of the words and images you use, to avoid offence or miscommunication. Never use flirtatious, sexually suggestive, explicit or offensive language or images. Be conscious too of how things might look. Be careful that the circumstances of your communication do not suggest that your relationship with a young person is inappropriate by, for example, communicating regularly or late at night. Even if your motives are pure, misunderstandings can arise.

2 IN PERSON IS BEST

Face-to-face interactions are the best way to build relationships with youth. Don't use electronic communications for matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged or that require a back-and-forth conversation. In those cases, it's much better to have a conversation in person. If a young person initiates a pastoral conversation with you using electronic communications, ask them if you can talk in person with them about it next time you see them.

3 BE TRANSPARENT

Be aware that those who wish to abuse young people may try to cultivate secretive or exclusive relationships through electronic communications. That is why it is so important to be transparent in all your communications. Aim to keep communications public and brief. Long or intense conversations by electronic means should be avoided. If a young person initiates a conversation like that with you electronically, consider how you might redirect it to a more transparent forum or include other people in the conversation. That might mean talking face to face or including another leader in the communication with the young person's permission. At the very least, you should let your ministry leader know so that nothing is going on in secret. You should also keep any emails, text messages or conversation threads with youth, in case an accusation is ever made against you or a misunderstanding arises.

4 DON'T INITIATE SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDSHIPS

There is a power imbalance that exists between you and the youth you are ministering to. That power imbalance might make it difficult for them to say 'no' when you initiate a friendship on social media by, for example, sending a Facebook friend request or following them on Instagram. For that reason, it is best not to initiate, though you might choose to accept if they initiate.

5 SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Wherever possible, communicate electronically with groups rather than individuals. The best practice when sending emails or text messages is to include multiple youth or another leader in the message. If you're using social media for ministry purposes, use closed groups where possible (for example, Facebook) and direct young people to the group rather than your individual account if you can.

6 BUILD UP THE CHURCH

If you are posting on social media, think carefully about the impact of what you communicate on the entire church community (including children, youth and the vulnerable). Remember that if you are a leader, people may see you as representing the church. Consider how you can build up the church community, and avoid being divisive, showing favouritism or making others feel excluded or inferior.

7 RESPECT OTHERS

Be careful to observe confidentiality and privacy in electronic communications – for example, do not publish the names, contact details or other personal information of people online.

8 BE TRUTHFUL

Don't ever hide your identity or pretend to be someone else. Electronic communications that seek to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else should not be used in ministry in any circumstances.

9 KNOW THE DIGITAL TERRAIN

If you're using social media, be aware of and comply with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to using it in your ministry.

10 REPORTING ONLINE ABUSE

Laws regarding mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children and youth apply equally to the digital world.

AND FINALLY, USE YOUR COMMON SENSE!

There may be exceptional circumstances that arise from time to time, and common sense might dictate that you deviate from your usual practice when it comes to electronic communications. In those situations, be transparent and above reproach and, if possible, seek advice from your ministry leader.

Recommendations about the sort of contact that is likely to be appropriate at different ages:

Type of contact	Years 7–9 Students	Years 10–12 Students
Phonecalls	To be avoided. Preferable to speak with the parent first and ask permission to speak with the young person.	Reasonable phone contact for ministry purposes permissible. Long conversations to be avoided.
Text messages	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
Email	For logistical purposes and encouragement only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
Social networking (Facebook, Instagram, etc)	Use your discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use your discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
Video calls/streaming and chat rooms	Never	Never

h. Photographs/videos

Leaders should not take photos of children without parental consent.

Leaders should not photograph any child who has asked not to be photographed.

Photos of children should focus on small groups rather than individuals:

- Leaders should not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph, eg tagging on Facebook.
- All children must be appropriately dressed when photographed (eg, not in swimsuits or pyjamas).

Embarrassing or offensive photos or videos must not be either taken or shared.

Parental permission must be sought before posting photographs or videos of children online. Privacy is of utmost importance and care should be taken to protect children from having their personal information being displayed on a social networking site or Church website.

Generally, videos should only be used to showcase/advertise ministry-related events and activities.

When video of services or activities is distributed or streamed on the web or via other broadcast media, signs and/or notifications should be posted that indicate the service is being or will be broadcast.

6. Age-specific guidelines

a. Crèche (0-2 years)

Health and Safety

Children should never leave the crèche area unless accompanied by the adult responsible for them.

Be aware of issues of hygiene. If a child vomits or soils an area of the crèche, that area should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible. Toys and equipment should be cleaned regularly.

Parents

Where parents are readily accessible, they should be asked to change nappies and undertake toileting. If parents are not available, experienced female leaders should carry out these tasks, but always with another child or leader present.

Physical Contact

Very young children are highly dependent on touch for their proper development. This means that in dealing with them, leaders must be very aware of their needs at particular ages and stages.

Physical contact is primarily for the purpose of assisting or comforting a child for a short period of time. Leaders should not continue physical contact for longer than necessary to achieve this purpose. All physical contact should be in the open and able to be seen by others, for example, sitting on a leader's lap to be comforted should occur in view of others.



Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- hand-holding to reassure or to guide;
- offering open hugs (placing one arm around the child's shoulders) to welcome or comfort a child;
- short periods of carrying, sitting on one's lap, rocking, rubbing or patting backs to comfort a child who is distressed;
- sitting on one's lap to check discomfort or ill health;
- sitting beside a leader to read a book;
- necessary touching of genital areas while changing a nappy;
- appropriate touch to administer first aid or assist with personal hygiene, for example, changing clothes or blowing noses.

Inappropriate physical conduct for this age includes:

- hitting or shaking;
- forceful grabbing or picking up; and
- unnecessary touching of the genital areas.

b. Preschoolers (3-5 years)

Health and Safety

Children should never leave the preschool area unless accompanied by the adult responsible for them.

Children of this age are generally toilet-trained. A leader should accompany a child to the toilet with another leader or child, but should assist the child only where necessary.

Physical Contact

Except in circumstances of physical danger or medical emergency, children have the right to refuse touch. In general, physical contact should be initiated by the child or occur with their permission.

Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- open hug (with space between you) with the child's permission;
- placing arm around shoulder and giving a gentle squeeze from the side;
- patting backs;
- hand-holding to reassure or guide;
- sitting beside a leader to read a book;
- sitting on a female leader's lap to check discomfort or ill health;
- carrying for a short period to reassure if hurt or facilitate separation from a parent (providing the child wants to be held); and
- holding firmly across the upper arms to restrain or prevent injury.

Inappropriate physical contact includes:

- hitting or shaking;
- forceful grabbing or picking up;
- kissing or coaxing a child to kiss you;
- extended hugging or tickling;
- touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimming costume.

c. Infants and primary age children

Health and Safety

Leaders should have clearly thought out procedures for the conclusion of the program and advise parents of them. Infants will generally need to be collected by parents.

If Sunday School is held offsite, there should be clear guidelines and procedures to follow. The following issues need to be thought through:

- Are children taken there by parents or leaders?
- How are children collected?
- How is communication maintained between off-site groups and the main congregation?

Parents

Parents should be kept informed of details of the ministry, including the names of leaders, current and future curriculum, and upcoming special events, etc.

Leaders ought to be considerate of parents by being careful about children's clothing, eg, wearing paint shirts when painting and avoiding extra rough games.

Physical Contact

Appropriate physical contact for this age includes:

- open hug (with space between you) with the child's permission or placing arm around shoulder and giving a gentle squeeze from the side;
- high fives; and
- holding firmly across the upper arms to restrain or prevent injury.

Inappropriate physical contact includes:

- hitting or shaking;
- forceful grabbing;
- kissing or coaxing a child to kiss you;
- extended hugging or tickling;
- touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimming costume; and
- sitting children on your lap.

7. Further information

If you have any questions or require any further information, please speak with the Senior Minister, the Safe Ministry Representative or the leader of the youth or children's ministry in your parish.

