

Guidelines for activities with children and young people



PRINCIPLES

Risk management

It is not possible to eliminate all risk from activities. However, we have a responsibility to be aware of possible risks and to take appropriate action in response. This is what risk assessment involves: Identify possible risks and consider how likely they are, how serious they are and how difficult they are to avoid. For example, a risk of minor injury or inconvenience does not require as much precautionary action as a risk of serious injury.

Never alone

As a general rule, Church staff and volunteers should never be alone in private (out of line of sight of another person) with any child or young person unless they are family members. This protects the child or young person from risk of harm, and it also protects the leader. This rule is applicable for Church programs and social contact outside of Church programs. Exceptions may be made for family or domestic arrangements which are distinct from any role at the Church (e.g. babysitting) if this is authorised by the parent or guardian responsible.

Accountability

Procedures and systems help staff and volunteers to avoid difficult situations with children and young people. This protects the children and young people and also protects the leaders. When making decisions about activities involving children and young people it is important to maintain accountability. This often takes place through visibility (e.g. clear panels in doors) and communication (e.g. documented reporting procedures). Documenting any potential incident as soon as possible provides both accountability and protection for those involved.

Awareness

It is important for everyone involved in ministry with children or young people to maintain an awareness of potential risks and issues. Ministry with children and young people involves building relationships of trust, but staff and volunteers should also be aware of the potential for healthy relationships to be misunderstood as an inappropriate grooming relationship. Similarly, staff and volunteers should remain alert to potentially dangerous grooming behaviour by any other staff or volunteer.

PARTICULAR ISSUES

Attendance, permission and roll keeping

The particular issues relating to children and young people are firstly, how one gets permission from parents or carers for children/young people to take part in programs and secondly, how one records who was present (including leaders) at an activity.

Permission

Permission could be granted by a registration process at the beginning of each year (or when a child/young person joins the program) and which is updated as needed. Additional permission can be requested for specific events. Alternatively, parents could be asked to sign their children into the program each week.

Attendance

Attendance could be recorded by parents signing children/young people into an activity or program. Alternatively, where permission has already been granted, it could be recorded by the marking of a role by program leaders. The leaders who were present at an activity also need to be recorded.

Permission, registration and attendance records for every activity or event involving a child or young person need to be held on file for at least 45 years.

The process for children re-joining parents needs to be made clear to everyone (children, parents and leaders) for each activity/event. This procedure may vary according to the ages of the children. A sign-in/sign out process must be used where there are legal orders around custody of children.

Leader / participant ratios

When determining how many leaders are required for an activity, the number of leaders needed to build relationship and provide good discipline of children/young people should be considered first. Further considerations, such as whether there is an adequate number of leaders to provide supervision and protect children/young people from harm, should then also be made. The exact number of leaders will depend on the setting. How old are the children/young people? What size is the group? What activities are part of the program? What is the layout of the space?

Enough leaders are needed to make sure a space is safe for both the leaders and the children/young people. As a general guideline, all programs need at least two fully screened and trained leaders on-site and participating in the program. If there are more than 16 participants there should be additional leaders to provide a minimum ratio of 1:8 (one leader for every eight participants).

That ratio will need to be adapted depending on context. More leaders will be needed if the children are younger, if there are children with additional needs, or if there are a lot of outdoor activities. Less leaders may be required for older teens, depending on the program.

Other questions to ask include:

- How well-know are these children to the Church?
- How familiar are the children with the space and the leaders? (compare a weekly kids club with a holiday kids club)
- (Regarding Sunday programs) Where is the room for the children's program in relation to where the adults are listening to the sermon?
- If one leader gets hurt and the other leader has to go for help, who will supervise the children?

Answering these questions may mean a higher ratio is needed.

These ratios do not prevent breaking up into smaller discussion groups with one leader or assistant leader in each group, provided there are enough responsible people (who have been screened and trained) in the room to look out for one another, the leaders, and the children/young people.

Junior leaders, those who are under 18 years old, can be a wonderful and key part of the team. Junior leaders can take responsibility for many facets of the program however, in almost all circumstances, leaders under 18 will be assistants and will not count as a leader towards the leader/participant ratio.

Certain 16 or 17-year olds with outstanding maturity may be considered able to take on full leadership responsibilities. In this case, the individual should be screened and trained (including Creating Safe Spaces training) as though they were an adult volunteer (see the *Procedure for Staff and Volunteers*). Even if they are fully screened and trained, leaders aged 16 or 17 should not lead groups of their own peer group and there should always be at least one adult (over 18 years) leader involved in any program or activity.

Driving

Licences and Drivers

In order to drive children or young people as part of church activities, the staff member or volunteer must have a full licence (i.e. not provisional or learners' licence) for the type of vehicle they are driving.

P plate drivers can drive members of their own immediate family.

Drivers are expected to follow all road rules and drive responsibly when driving children or young people as part of church activities.

Time alone in cars

No staff member or volunteer should be in a car alone with a child or young person (unless they are family members). Exceptions may be made for family or domestic arrangements which are distinct from any role at the Church (e.g. babysitting) if this is authorised by the parent or guardian responsible.

If there are extraordinary circumstances where no one else is available and the child or young person may be at greater risk of harm if they were not transported in the car, then the time spent alone in the car should be minimized as far as possible and some additional measures may be taken, for example:

- The staff member or volunteer receives express permission from the child's parent or carer for the specific occasion
- A phone call is placed to another leader and maintained throughout the journey (where legal to do so)

If it has been necessary for a staff member or volunteer to spend time alone in a car with a child or young person then the situation and the circumstances giving rise to the situation should be recorded and the Safe Church Team and/or Ministry Leader should be notified.

Overnight activities

Where there are activities involving overnight accommodation consideration should be given to some of the additional risk factors involved, including:

- Transport arrangements
- Sleeping arrangements
- Bathroom configuration
- Safety and instruction on activities
- Third parties involved
- Physical safety of external locations

Decisions regarding these issues will depend on various contextual factors such as the physical location and facilities of the campsite. It is important that a thorough risk assessment, including consideration of the items listed, is conducted and recorded. The list of activities, leaders and sleeping arrangements should also be recorded. These records should be stored, along with permission and attendance records for the event, for a minimum of 45 years.

SOCIAL CONTACT

In person communication outside Church programs

Fruitful Christian ministry with children and young people involves healthy, appropriate relationships. At times this can involve contacting them outside of Church programs and can include meeting in person. It is important that relationships between staff/volunteers and children/young people are transparent, and that parents, families and program leaders are appropriately informed and have given permission for this contact.

When meeting with a child or young person, staff/volunteers should:

- Have parental or guardian consent, where practicable
- Meet with them in a public place (e.g. a café) in line of sight of other people
- Not have children or young people alone in their home, or visit the home of a child/young person when no other adult is present
- Make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any face to face meetings with any child/young person

Telephone and online communication outside Church programs

For many Church programs, telephone and online communication are useful tools for building community, as well as for pastoral care and support. However, they may also be used by those seeking to harm children, young people and vulnerable people. Telephone and online communication may be used to test or step over relational boundaries. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of the positional power dynamic that exists between staff/volunteers and the children/young people under their care.

Contact with all children and young people

- Where possible and practical, parents will be informed of any possible telephone or online communication with children and young people
- Staff and volunteer leaders must not engage in any telephone or online communication that
 - Constitutes unlawful discrimination
 - Is harassing, threatening or derogatory
 - Is obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic
 - Is inappropriately personal or intimate
 - Attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else
 - Is defamatory

Contact with primary-aged children

Via phone

Staff and volunteers should first contact parents and then, if appropriate, speak with the child. If the child answers the phone the staff member or volunteer should ask to speak to the parent first and explain to the parent, why they are calling. Staff and volunteers should never call a primary-aged child on the child's mobile phone (unless there is a serious emergency relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child).

Via SMS or messaging service

Must be limited to conveying information about Church programs.

Online

Must be limited to conveying information about Church programs. Staff and volunteers should never communicate directly (i.e. privately, one-on-one) with primary-aged children on a social networking site.

Via email

Must be limited to conveying information about Church programs. More significant conversations should be held in person.

In-person, outside of programs

It is never appropriate to meet primary-aged children socially without written or verbal permission from their parents or carer. It is also important to ensure that a leader is never alone with a child (see Principles above).

Contact with children in Years 7 and 8

Via phone

Staff and volunteers should first contact the parents or carer of the child and then, if appropriate, speak with the child. If the child answers the phone the staff member or volunteer should ask to speak to the parent first and explain to the parent why they are calling. Staff and volunteers should never call a child in years 7 & 8 on their mobile phone (unless there is a serious emergency relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child).

Via SMS or other messaging service

Must be limited to conveying information about Church programs.

Via private video calls

Not appropriate for children in years 7 & 8.

Online

Caution must be used when participating with children on social networking sites. Staff/volunteers must maintain transparency and be accountable for what they say. They must also take care with the message they intend to communicate through both the words and images they use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.

Staff and volunteers should consider limiting social media contact with children in years 7 & 8, however, if social media contact is made with children in years 7 & 8 the following guidelines are recommended:

- Limit contact to group discussions that can be read by others.
- Consider gender dynamics. (e.g. There should never be a group discussion where the group of students are all of the opposite gender to the leader.)
- The history of the chat should be kept. Staff/volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.

- Staff/volunteers should consider privacy settings to prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with the children/young people connected to their ministry.
- Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Private contact or conversations with children in years 7 & 8 should be limited to conveying information about Church programs and basic encouragement.

Via email

Should be limited to conveying information about Church programs and basic encouragement. More significant conversations should be held in person.

In person, outside of programs

It is never appropriate to meet children in years 7 & 8 socially without written or verbal permission from the parents and discussing it with your ministry supervisor first.

Contact with young people in years 9-12

Via phone

Is permissible.

Via SMS or other messaging service

Is permissible and can include conveying information about Church programs and encouragement (e.g. “praying for you this week”). Messages should be retained for accountability.

Via email

Can include logistics and private conversations. If possible, more significant conversations should be held in person. Messages should be retained for accountability.

In-person, outside of programs

Leaders may meet with same gender students or in mixed groups in public places (e.g. café). Parents and the relevant Ministry Leader should be informed of this meeting occurring ahead of time.

Via private video calls

Are not appropriate, however, group video calls may be appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. small group bible study context).

Online

Caution must be used when participating with young people on social networking sites. Staff/volunteers must maintain transparency and be accountable for what they say. They must also take care with the message they intend to communicate through both the words and images they use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.

If social media contact is made with young people in years 9–12 the following guidelines are recommended:

- Communicate through group discussions that can be read by multiple other people.
- Consider gender dynamics. (e.g. There should never be a group discussion where the group of students are all of the opposite gender to the leader.)
- The history of any chat should be kept. Staff/volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.
- Staff/volunteers should consider privacy settings to prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with the children/young people connected to their ministry.
- Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.