

Safe Ministry

with vulnerable people

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Core Guidelines For Children's And Youth Ministries

To be accompanied by specific activity guidelines, e.g. Crèche, Kids Club, Youth

1. The senior minister will generally be responsible for the recruitment and training of leaders appointed for children's and youth ministry, although he may delegate the responsibility. This person is also responsible for appropriately screening leaders before they are appointed.
2. Leaders should be trained in all the responsibilities of caring for children and young people, treating them properly and reporting reasonably suspected child abuse.
3. The designated area and its contents should be safe and suitable for the particular ministry activity. Consider particularly:
 - the proximity to roads and traffic;
 - availability of toilet facilities;
 - enough room for appropriate activities, e.g. games and craft;
 - safety glass at floor level;
 - possibility of grounds where games will be played being littered with dangerous objects, e.g. discarded needles or broken glass;
 - suitability of equipment being used;
 - a fire extinguisher or fire blanket should be available;
 - any heating should present no danger to the children;
 - electrical wiring, sockets and appliances should be maintained in a safe condition, and sockets should be child-proofed.
4. In the case of children's activities, parents should complete a registration form, giving details of:
 - names, addresses and phone numbers of child and parents;
 - name and phone number of a contact person in an emergency situation;
 - important medical information, e.g. allergies, disabilities, special diets;
 - names of people allowed to collect the child (carefully note if there is a non-custodial parent to whom the child should never be handed over);
 - permission for leaders to obtain medical treatment in an emergency.

Suitable registration/permission forms available on the 'Resource Documents' page on the Safe Ministry website (<http://safeministry.org.au>)

5. A well-stocked first aid kit should be kept handy. At least one leader should be able to administer first aid (having done, for example, a St John Ambulance First Aid Course).
6. When administering first aid, at least two leaders should be present and any treatment documented. Parents should be informed of any injury as soon as possible.

7. Be careful with hygiene. Anyone handling food, including children, should wash their hands first or wear disposable gloves. Activities or games should not encourage unhygienic practices (e.g. using the same spoon in a team game that requires putting the spoon in mouths).
8. Leaders should not physically discipline a child. Consequences that do not include corporal punishment can be imposed on children for overstepping stated boundaries.
9. Primary-aged children should be able to visit the toilet on their own. Preschoolers and infants should be accompanied by a female leader. The leader should avoid, if at all possible, being alone with the child in the toilets—take another leader or child with you.
10. Be on the alert for people wandering around—a person unknown to the leaders should not be allowed access to children or young people.
11. As much as possible, leaders should work in pairs. If that is difficult because of a lack of leaders, groups should meet where they can be clearly seen by others.
12. Male leaders should be particularly aware of their behaviour towards children and young people, keeping unavoidable physical contact to a minimum. Children should not sit on male leaders' laps.

Very Young Children (0-5yrs) And Physical Contact

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

The following identifies some of the key issues regarding touch and 0-5 year olds, and sets out some clear 'Do's and Don'ts' for working with this age group.

Age and stage of development

In regard to their proper development, very young boys and girls are highly dependent on touch for communication, security, learning, comfort, and a growing understanding of their world. Touch has always been an important element in the care and nurturing of young children. This means that in dealing with them, we must be very aware of their needs at particular ages and stages.

0-2 years

The issues are fairly clear-cut.

- If a baby or young infant is crying or distressed, our most likely response would be to pick them up, talk in reassuring tones, and hold them in order to comfort them. We should also check as best we can to discern the cause of their tears (e.g. hungry, soiled nappy, or temporary separation from parents) and if possible take appropriate action to overcome their discomfort, which may include holding them for a period.
- Within Christian ministry contexts, hugging, sitting on one's lap, rocking, carrying, rubbing or patting backs, and hand-holding are acceptable responses with this age group.

3-5 years

Children in this age group are developing a greater sense of self-awareness and independence.

- If a 3-5 year old is crying or distressed, the first response may be to give them an open hug with appropriate words in order to comfort them. We would still check for the cause, perhaps engaging them in conversation in order to understand their upset.
- Other appropriate action may include having them sit with you or join in an activity, or undertake a task of their choice within the limits of their ability.
- The preferred strategy for this age group is to redirect their attention and energies to some other worthwhile pursuit e.g. reading a book, playing a game, craft.

Except for safety reasons e.g. personal injury, girls and boys have the right to refuse touch, especially as they gain a sense of their own identity and preferences. It is also highly recommended that females rather than males and experienced over inexperienced carers administer first aid and assist in toileting. Assistance in toileting should occur only where needed, as children of this age would generally be toilet-trained.

In situations where the parents are readily accessible (e.g. crèche) they should be sought to administer first aid or undertake toileting. In all cases, physical contact, whatever form it takes, should be respectful of children and their rights.

Encouraging independence

Part of our job in any ministry context is to help children grow and learn, shifting responsibility for action and help to them.

- We should encourage independent self-help skills, especially in relation to personal hygiene, rather than leaping in to provide physical assistance.
- As they grow, we can ask them questions about clothing themselves, getting drinks or eating, but at the level they can manage.
- It is good for growing healthy self-esteem to have children act on their own behalf with some adult assistance, rather than become dependent on adults to do everything for them.
- It is important to find out what they want, especially in relation to comforting young children, and letting them have a say in what they see will be helpful as they grow older.

Personal care and first aid

- Personal care may involve cleansing, dressing and rest-time routines. These should always be carried out gently and respectfully. Assisting with face-washing, hand-washing, changing clothes, examining sore spots and blowing noses will all require appropriate touch.
- Incidental contact with the genital areas might occur for the purpose of personal hygiene such as nappy changing, toilet training and personal hygiene. Experienced and female leaders are generally recommended to carry out these tasks if parents are not available.
- First aid when administered should be undertaken by two people with accompanying verbal explanation and appropriate comforting.

Cultural awareness

- We also need to be aware of differences in terms of what is acceptable especially to children of parents who have recently arrived in Australia e.g. taboos on touching the head; restrictions concerning touch between males and females.
- It would be wise to undertake training in cross-cultural issues such as that conducted by Anglicare (especially in communities where families are drawn from a variety of cultures).

- Carers and ministry leaders, would also be well advised to consult directly with parents if they have any concerns or questions regarding cross-cultural matters and in particular when a child is stressed, suffers from asthma or is injured.

Child initiated touch

Often young children take the initiative and seek out physical contact, especially with a well-known and trusted adult figure. In each case, the paramount issue is the need of the child.

- We must learn to provide appropriate responses to their behaviour.
- Quick contact within the range of acceptable responses identified above is all that is required in many cases.
- With the very young we will generally respond by providing a reassuring open hug or something similar.
- As children grow older and more independent, we will seek to engage them in appropriate pursuits, providing comfort and reassurance more by verbal means, nearness to them and facial expressions.
- More insistent demands by children mean that we need to seek out causes and where possible address them.

Other expressions of care and love

Often while physical closeness is a pleasant experience for both adult and child, in a ministry context of caring for young children, we need to be very careful in relation to physical contact. for many children their need for expressions of love and care may be better met through:

- words of encouragement,
- giving them quality time and attention,
- providing tangible objects for them to play with or manipulate,
- directly addressing the causes of their discomfort by taking appropriate action.

While tickling can be an acceptable form of playful touch in some contexts, we recommend it be avoided in ministry contexts, because it can all too easily get “out of hand”. furthermore, other children often misinterpret unequal attentiveness to a demanding child as favouritism.

Challenging behaviours

It must be acknowledged that amongst the very young, overt instances of challenging behaviour can occur. Our response then

- may need to be quite firm,
- will always involve clear words identifying what the issues are,
- could require some level of physical restraint if there is a danger that the child may injure others or themselves.

The general advice in taking necessary restraining action is to, where possible, hold the child at arm's length from behind, facing away from yourself and any others in the immediate surrounds until he or she settles down. Any words spoken should be clear and calm, avoiding shouting or raised pitch. Such incidents should be reported to the child's parents with an explanation of the restraint.

Acceptable Contact with Young Children (0-5 years)

It is necessary to take into account the time, place and leaders involved as well as the aims of the ministry to the young children in your care when considering how best to demonstrate love to them. The following forms of physical contact would be appropriate in settings for babies, toddlers and preschoolers in a mid-week group run as a church ministry (e.g. toddler group) or part of a church ministry (e.g. childcare for a women's bible study group) or in Sunday morning ministries (e.g. crèche).

- Open hugging, to welcome or comfort
- Sitting beside a leader/caregiver to read a book
- Sitting on a leader/caregiver's lap to check discomfort or ill health
- Rocking, to comfort or settle down
- Patting the top of the child's back, to reassure or praise
- Carrying for a short period, to reassure if hurt or facilitate separation from a parent
- Holding hands, to guide or reassure
- Holding firmly from behind, to restrain or prevent injury

Unacceptable Forms of Physical Contact

- Slapping, hitting or shaking
- Forceful grabbing or picking up
- Intentional touching of genital areas

We must re-iterate in the context of ministry where we are responsible for children entrusted to our care, that **under no circumstances should they be left alone and unsupervised** for any period of time whatsoever. We repeat our earlier recommendation that there are **always at least two people** on duty in the context of a caring situation with younger children, **for safety and any emergencies**, in the best interests of members of the group, and for our own protection as responsible ministry leaders.

Creche/Nursery

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. In addition to the Core Guidelines the designated area and its contents should be safe for toddlers:
 - The area is securely fenced off or contained in a room.
 - Electrical appliances are not used near water or where children can reach the controls or dangling cords.
 - All equipment and toys are safe to use, and appropriate for the age, especially climbing equipment.
 - Cupboards at child height should have safety or child-proof locks.
 - Flooring should be non-slip and splinter-free.
2. Be aware of issues of hygiene. If a child vomits or soils an area of the crèche/ nursery, the area should be disinfected as soon as possible. Toys and equipment should be cleaned regularly.
3. A child in crèche/nursery should never be smacked. Speak firmly and gently to the child and speak to the parents later if necessary. If it is necessary to restrain a child for the purpose of safety, use only the minimum of force.
4. Children should be adequately supervised at all times.
5. Smoking should not be permitted in the crèche/nursery area.
6. Children should never leave the crèche/nursery area unless accompanied by the adult responsible for them.
7. Where possible, parents should change nappies and take children to the toilet otherwise it should be an experienced female leader.
8. Train leaders into the habit of thinking through the implications of every activity that is planned for the children. What could possibly go wrong? What are the inherent dangers?
9. The appointment of the Crèche/Nursery Supervisor is generally the responsibility of the Senior Minister.
10. A copy of emergency procedures should be displayed clearly in a prominent place. For example, "If fire breaks out".

Playtimes/Toddler Groups

(These groups cater for both adults and children-parents and carers remain with children throughout. They are sometimes called “playgroups”, but this is a registered, copyrighted name.)

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. The designated area and its contents should be safe for the preschoolers who will be attending. As well as the Core Guidelines, take into consideration:
 - the area should be securely fenced off or contained in a room.
 - electrical appliances should not be used near water or where children can reach the controls or dangling cords.
 - all equipment and toys should be safe to use, and appropriate for the age, especially climbing equipment.
 - flooring should be non-slip and splinter-free.
 - have a designated area for strollers and prams that are not in use.
2. Have a storage area where equipment can be locked away.
3. Tea and coffee-making facilities for the adults should be kept out of the reach of the children.
4. The leader or coordinator of the toddler group should be appointed by the minister/pastor and appropriately screened in line with the Core Guidelines.
5. Draw up an information sheet for parents and carers that includes:
 - registration details.
 - ways they can help, e.g. setting out equipment, tidying up, making morning tea or snacks for the children, running an activity.
 - group guidelines, e.g. no bikes near the baby area, no smoking at toddler group.
 - expectations on the parent and carer, e.g. discipline your own child and nobody else's.

Kids' Clubs

(This category covers midweek activities, including Kids Plus, CEBS and GFS)

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. Parents should be given an information document about the club, giving details of :
 - the purpose and philosophy of the club
 - the names and phone numbers of the leaders of the club
 - the procedure that is to be followed in a medical emergency
 - the principles to be used in group management including disciplinary procedures
 - the qualifications/training of the leaders
 - the costs involved, and uniforms if applicable
 - the times and the scope of activities of the club.
2. Make clear to parents that it is their responsibility to transport children to and from the site.
3. Parents should be kept informed of the programs of the club, and any sudden changes that may need to be made.
4. Any videos to be shown as a club activity should be viewed by a responsible leader to assess their suitability. Censorship ratings should be kept to "G" or "PG", unless specific permission is granted by the senior minister. Parents should be informed if a video is to be screened.
5. Children should be supervised at all times to prevent, for example, bullying from other children.
6. In choosing games to play in the club consider levels of safety and intimacy. They should be safe, minimising the risk of injury, and they should not cause embarrassment to the children.
7. Smoking should not be allowed on the club site.
8. Train leaders into the habit of thinking through the implications of all activities. What could go wrong? Is this dangerous?

Sunday Ministries

(This category covers Sunday Schools at both junior and primary levels- approximate ages 3-12- and includes those groups that call themselves clubs)

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. Areas for different age groups should be allocated on their suitability, safety, proximity to toilets and ease of supervision. Try to have an enclosed area for pre-school children.
2. Safety of the area should take into account:
 - any equipment not being used by children. Stacked tables and chairs, electrical equipment, maintenance tools etc. should be safely barricaded off from the children
 - if the floor is generally uncarpeted, a carpet square or something similar should be provided for children to sit on.
3. Parents should be kept informed of details about the Sunday group, such as names of leaders, current and future curriculum, special events coming up, etc.
4. Equipment used should be safe for the age group using it.
5. Use of equipment should be supervised at all times, e.g. scissors for pre-schoolers.
6. Be sensitive to parents by being careful about children's clothing, e.g. wearing paint shirts or aprons when painting, or avoiding extra rough games.
7. Have clearly thought out procedures for the conclusion of the program.
 - Preschoolers and infants generally will need to be collected by parents.
 - Will primary aged children be dismissed? Or will they need to be supervised until parents collect them?
 - Parents should know what the procedures will be.
8. If the Sunday School is held off-site, 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 main congregation?

Day Away Activities

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. As well as the permission note from the Core Guidelines, leaders should prepare a detailed information form for
 - parents, indicating:
 - place to which group is going
 - times for departure and return
 - means of travel
 - level of supervision
 - purpose of trip and nature of activities cost.
2. Children or youth should know a pre-determined meeting place that they can return to, if they become separated from the group.
3. Children should be counted (or a roll call taken) before leaving and at several times through the day, especially at transition points such as moving from place to place, or onto a form of transport.
4. There should be adequate staff for supervising the type of group that you are taking away, e.g. more leaders will be needed for a day trip for 2nd graders than for a youth group trip.
5. If possible, leaders should carry a mobile phone, especially if travelling to an area where public phones will be scarce.
6. If travelling in leaders' cars, drivers should be chosen according to level of maturity and good driving record. Seatbelts should always be used.
7. Develop a critical incident policy. What needs to happen, and who will be responsible if an incident occurs on an outing?
8. The activity should be recognised as an activity of a properly constituted church group. Details should be given to the minister or other appropriate staff member before the event. This may also be relevant for insurance purposes.

Church Based Activities

(This category includes one-off events that are based at a church site.)

To be read in conjunction with the Core guidelines

1. Enough leaders should be available to deal with the number of children that could attend.
2. If extra helpers have been co-opted from the congregation for the occasion, they should be informed of the responsibility they have for the children and have signed relevant documentation e.g. Working with Children Check.
3. There should be contingency plans in place in case of larger than expected numbers.
4. The site should be secure and safe for the activity.
5. If parents are leaving their children, they should complete a registration form.
6. Parents should be informed of time to pick their children up.
7. Children should be supervised at all times.
9. Each child and leader should have a name badge, and leaders' badges should also carry the church logo and role title, e.g. Grade 5 Leader, Grade 3 Helper.

Stay Away Activities

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. An information document should be prepared for parents and caregivers, giving details of:
 - venue of the activity
 - sleeping arrangements
 - supervising personnel
 - purpose of the activity
 - costs
 - times of departure and return
 - means of travel
 - clothing and equipment to be taken
2. Strict segregation of male and female sleeping quarters should be maintained. Each area should be supervised by two people of the same sex as the children or young people in them.
3. An adult should not share accommodation with only one child or youth.
4. Leaders should not be left alone with a child of either sex.
5. Leaders and group members should respect the privacy of others during activities that require undressing, etc. Be careful, especially, at times of showering.
6. Nude swimming or other similar activities should be forbidden.
7. Any activity should have defined boundaries that are easily observed and patrolled. Leaders should avoid situations where it is possible to become physically isolated with children or young people.
8. No cigarettes, alcohol, drugs or any other harmful objects should be allowed. Leaving kids unsupervised for any length of time will make this difficult to determine.
9. Leaders should avoid being private or secretive with the young people in their care.

Holiday Activities

(This could be day care or a holiday mission sited on church property. Taking children away from the site is covered under “Day away activities”)

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. The site for the activity should be secure-make sure that young children cannot wander away either accidentally or deliberately.
2. Registration forms should be available for each child who attends the activity. (See sample form on the Safe Ministry website.)
3. On the first day of registration, parents should be given information about the activity:
 - the names and phone numbers of the leaders of the activity
 - procedure that is to be followed in a medical emergency
 - principles to be used in group management, such as disciplinary procedures
 - qualifications of the leaders
 - details about costing
 - details about the beginning and ending times of the activity.
4. As a number of casual volunteers are likely to be involved in an activity such as this, they should be aware of their responsibilities as well.
5. Each child should have a name badge to be worn at all times.
6. Each staff member should have a name badge for identification as well. The badge could have the church’s logo and either “Staff” or “Team Member” on it. Then, any adult on the premises without a name badge can be approached for the purpose of enquiry.
7. Because many of these children will come from outside the church community, leaders should be absolutely scrupulous in their policy of non-touching.
8. If no permanent phone is available on the site a mobile phone should be kept by one of the leaders

Youth Group

(This category covers any group of children aged 12-18 years of age, that meet on Sundays, weekends or through the week, on or off the church site)

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. The site should be adequate for the activities of a group of teenagers.
2. Leaders should be aware of their positions as role models to young people, so they should be very careful of their standards of dress, language, driving and other habits. Lewd and suggestive language should be avoided completely.
3. Leaders should not be responsible for driving young people home. If it is absolutely necessary, have another leader with you, and wherever possible, obtain parental permission before doing so.
4. Leaders who drive motor vehicles should be selected for their skill, maturity and experience.
5. A leader should not be left alone with a young person (for example at the end of a program or in a car).
6. Leaders should not visit the home of a group member if the parents are absent.
7. The suitability of activities should be assessed according to the level of risk involved and the qualifications of the leaders. This is especially pertinent in choosing games. Will the game be embarrassing in its level of physical contact? Does it encourage an unhygienic practice? Is it capable of being dangerously rough?
8. Young people should be supervised at all times.
9. In the event of personal or spiritual counselling, female leaders should counsel females, male leaders should counsel males. These meetings should always be seen or known about by others.
10. Leaders should not establish such an exclusive relationship with the young people in their group that those young people find it difficult to relate to other leaders, parents or ministry staff. Leaders should encourage the young people in their care to relate widely, so as to avoid the development of a "guru" or "sect" mentality.
11. Leaders should always review visual material used in programming, especially films and videos. remember that the Censorship Classification Board's classifications should be an absolute minimum, and therefore "r" rated and "MA" rated (for under 15s) should be totally

off limits. Other films with lesser classifications may still contain material that runs counter to the Christian message and ethic, e.g. offensive language, unnecessary violence, sexual innuendo and depiction of sex scenes.

Conferencing And Conventions

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. The activities at the convention or conference should be suitable for the age group that will be attending.
2. Parents should be aware of the nature of the topics that will be dealt with at the conference or convention.
3. See support documents entitled “Day Away Activities” and “Stay Away Activities”

Site-Based Camping

To be read in conjunction with the Core Guidelines

1. See support document titled “Stay Away Activities”.
2. Check with the site authorities’ rules or guidelines to ensure that your group is keeping within those guidelines.