



## Guidelines for activities with Children and Young People

Adopted by Southern Illawarra Church of Christ Board on 23.7.2022

### Principles

All aspects of every child / young person related program are open to observation by parents/ guardians at any time. The Safe Church Policy is accessible to the church via the SCoC Website and through the Church Office.

### 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 a 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 (outside 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. Exception may be made for family or domestic arrangements which are distinct from any role at the Church, such as babysitting, if this is authorised by the parent or guardian responsible.

### Leader/Participant ratios

- There must always be one leader aged 18 years or over and an assistant aged 16 years or over present for all children's ministry events.
- There must always be two leaders aged 18 years or over present for all youth ministry events.
- Enough leaders are needed to make sure a space is safe for both the leaders and the children/young people.
- The leadership 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 each other, the leaders and the children/young people.
- Student Leaders (or Leaders in Training) aged 16 to 17 years will undertake the Safe Spaces Training during their time as a student leader.

**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.

## 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 (for example clear panels in doors) and communication (for example documented reporting procedures). Documenting any potential incident as soon as possible provides both accountability and protection for those involved.

All leaders in Children's and Youth Ministry are appointed and approved by the Southern Church Leadership Board.

## 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 volunteers.

**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.

## Particular issues

### Attendance, permission and roll keeping.

The two main principles to be worked out are: firstly, how you will get permission from parents or carers for children/young people to take part in programs; and secondly, how you will record who was present (including leaders) at an activity.

Permission could be gained by a registration process at the beginning of each year or when a child/young person joins the program and updated as needed. Additional permission can be requested for specific events.

Permission Slips serve a number of purposes in addition to being required in order to ensure adequate coverage under the SICoC insurance policy. These are legal documents. Under no circumstances will a youth member be allowed to participate in any off-site activity unless they have a completed permission slip. These cannot be back-dated and must be submitted prior to the planned activity. See *Off-site Permission Form*.

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

Both permission/registration forms and attendance records for every activity/event need to be securely held on file for at least 45 years.

It is also important to make clear to everyone (children, parents and leaders) the process for children returning to their parents/carers to the school hall at the end of the service. It is important to use a sign-in/sign-out process.

All ministry areas must employ adequate means of ensuring the safety of the children/young people in their care. Leaders must employ a system to track the whereabouts of each child/ young person while in their care.

Leaders have the right to ask persons who do not have a valid reason to be present at child related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request to leave.

## Driving

### Licences and Drivers

- Leaders should not transport children or young people unaccompanied. Travel for ministry activities should not occur without permission from a parent/ guardian. As much as possible there should always be at least 2 leaders in the vehicle, and in the event a leader is driving unaccompanied by another leader, the children travelling will not sit in the front seat.
- Drivers with provisional licenses are not permitted to drive for organised events unless the Senior Minister / Church Leadership Board and parental permission (of provisional licenses holder and children travelling in the vehicle) is given.
- Leaders transporting children or young people in private vehicles must have at least two children or young people with them at all times and at least one child or young person of the same gender in the vehicle at all times.
- A leader should never transport an individual or group of the opposite gender alone.
- Volunteer drivers are to complete the *Volunteer Driver Information form* that will be held by the Church Office and be accessible to the Leadership Board.
- 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.

### Activities and Games

- All materials used (eg. videos, pictures, songs, plays) should be consistent with the recommended practices of the SICoC Safe Church Policy.
- Leaders should promote an environment of respect towards the privacy of others during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders should set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations.
- Nude swimming or other such activities are forbidden.
- The exploitation of gender, physical or intellectual differences is not permitted.

### 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

During overnight activities, at least two leaders should be the same gender as the children or young people.

Decisions regarding these issues will depend on various contextual factors such as the physical location and facilities of the accommodation or site. 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.

## Alcohol and Other Drugs

- The church premises are an alcohol and drug free zone.
- Vaping and smoking will not be permitted in church children and youth activities.
- Never make drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or vapes available to children or youth.

## Social Contact

### In person communication outside of Church activities

Fruitful Christian ministry with children and young people involves healthy, appropriate relationships. This can at times involve contacting them outside of Church programs and can include meeting in-person. However, 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.

Staff and volunteers, when meeting with a child or young person, should:

- have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;
- meet with them in a public place (for example, a café) in line of sight of other people;
- not have children or young people alone in their home, or visit children or young people alone in their home when no other adult is present; and
- make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any face-to-face meetings with any child or young person.

### Telephone and online communication outside Church programs

For many Church programs, telephone and online communication are a useful tool for building community and ministerial care and support. However, telephone and online communication may 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. We need to be mindful of the positional power dynamic that exists between staff and volunteers and the children and 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;  
or
- is defamatory.

### Contact with primary-aged children

- *Telephone contact:* 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).
- *SMS (or other messaging service) contact:* must be limited to conveying information about Church programs.
- *Online contact:* must be limited to conveying information about Church programs. Staff and volunteers should never communicate directly (privately or one-or-one) with primary-aged children on a social networking site.
- *Email contact:* must be limited to conveying information about Church programs. More significant conversations should be held in person.
- *In-person contact 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 the principles above).

### Contact with children in Years 7 and 8

- *Phone contact:* 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 Year 7 to 8 on the child's mobile phone (unless there is a serious emergency relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child).
- *Email contact:* should be limited to conveying information about Church programs and basic encouragement. More significant conversations should be held in person.
- *In person contact 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.
- Private video calls (skype/facetime) are not appropriate for children in years 7 & 8.
- *SMS (or other messaging service) contact:* must be limited to conveying information about Church programs.
- *Online contact:* Caution must be used when participating with children via social media. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you 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. For example, you should never have a group discussion where the group of students are all of the opposite gender (for example a male leader should not have an online chat with four of the year 8 girls).
- The history of the chat should be kept. Staff and volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.
- Consider privacy settings which prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with child contacts connected to your 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.

### Contact with young people in years 9-12

- *Phone contact:* Phone contact is permissible.
- *SMS (or other messaging service) contact:* 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.
- *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 contact outside of programs:* Leaders may meet with same gender students or in mixed groups in public places (e.g. a café). Parents and the relevant ministry leader should be informed of this meeting ahead of time.
- Private video calls (Skype/Facetime) are not appropriate, however, group video calls may be appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. small group bible study context).
- *Online contact:* Caution must be used when participating with young people on social media. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you 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:
  - Ideally, communicate through group discussions that can be read by multiple people.
  - Consider gender dynamics. For example, you should never have a group discussion where the group of students are all of the opposite gender (e.g. a male leader should not have an online chat with four of the year 9 girls).
  - The history of any chat should be kept. Staff and volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.
  - Consider privacy settings which prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with child contacts connected to your ministry.
  - Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
  - Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.

### References:

2020, Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT  
2022, Churches of Christ NSW & ACT