

# Safe Ministry Blueprint for Heads of Youth Ministry

**Safe Ministry Blueprints**

Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

## Introduction

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

This booklet sets out the guidelines and Code of Conduct for the person with overall responsibility for youth ministry in the parish. The person with this role might be a paid Youth Minister, a volunteer youth ministry leader, an assistant minister or, by default, the Senior Minister.

For the purposes of this booklet, youth ministry refers to ministry to high school students, or otherwise teenagers under the age of 18. There is a separate booklet for leaders engaged in ministry to children up to and including Year 6.

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## 1. General principles for ministry with young people

### Young people have rights

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, whether mixed age or young-person specific.



### Leaders are responsible

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

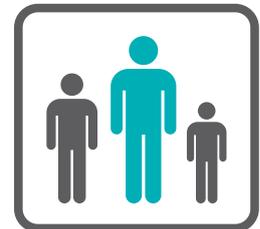
### Abuse is power misused

Leaders have authority over 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.

## 2. The role of the Head of Youth Ministry

As the person with overall responsibility for youth ministry you must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of the young people in your care. Those reasonable steps include:

- the careful selection of leaders and volunteers who have satisfied the screening and training requirements (and ensuring that you do not involve people who have not satisfied those requirements);
- making sure those persons are aware of the basic health and safety issues related to the physical environment where youth activities occur;
- making sure your youth ministry program complies with the core safe ministry policies contained in this booklet.



### 3. Screening and training of leaders

Sadly, many young people have been abused physically, sexually and emotionally by trusted members of their communities, including people in churches. As a result, there are requirements for people involved in any kind of work with youth and children that we as leaders must comply with, both under NSW law and the Anglican Church's ordinances.



#### Legal requirements

Any person involved in child-related work (including all volunteers) must get a Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance (subject to some exemptions). A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 years and therefore "child-related work" includes youth ministry activities.

Your church must verify the WWCC number with the Office of the Children's Guardian to determine whether the person has been cleared or barred. This is the responsibility of the Senior Minister, although this task can be delegated to the Safe Ministry Representative. However, as the Head of Youth Ministry, you must make sure that verification of the leaders that you're responsible for has occurred.

#### Diocesan requirements

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

- Obtain a WWCC clearance that must then be verified by the parish;
- Make a formal application for the children's ministry position, including producing proof of identity documents and providing references ([www.safeministry.org.au/](http://www.safeministry.org.au/));
- 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.

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

A "children's ministry position" means any paid or unpaid position to which a person is appointed by or on behalf of the minister or the wardens that involves activities primarily related to, and physical or face-to-face contact with, children. Examples include youth group leaders, youth camp leaders, etc.

The Diocese uses the phrase "children's ministry position" to cover both children's and youth ministry positions. When you see the term "children's ministry position" used in this document, it includes youth ministry positions.

In our parish system, the Senior Minister has the ultimate responsibility for appointing people to children's ministry positions, even though in practice that responsibility is often delegated to other leaders.

The screening and training requirements vary for particular ministry roles and circumstances, and depend on the different levels of risk. The following table sets out the requirements for screening and training for different ministry positions.

Ministry position	WWCC	Formal application	Safe Ministry training
Youth group coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓
Holiday youth program coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓
Youth Camp leader	✓	✓	✓
Casual helpers who do not fulfil a leadership or teaching role in a youth program and simply assist from time to time	✓	Only required if they have joined the church in the last 3 years or are not otherwise well known to the church leadership	✗
Volunteer assisting in an emergency	✗ Only if having them help is necessary to prevent an increased risk to the safety of the youth and it's not for more than 5 consecutive working days	✗	✗
Parent or close relative of a young person, volunteering in a youth ministry group that their child is a member of or usually participates in	✗ Though it is preferable that they have a WWCC clearance	At the discretion of the Senior Minister	✓
Other member of church staff ministry team	✓	✗	✓
A visiting speaker or performer for a one-off occasion in the presence of other adults, volunteers serving food, wardens, Parish Councillors, Synod representatives, building caretakers, cleaners, administrators and bookkeepers	✗	✗	✗

The Safe Ministry Representative for your parish must keep records for each leader with details of WWCC clearances and the completion of safe ministry training. And he or she needs to ensure that people are followed up when the time for their renewal is approaching. Unless the legal and Diocesan requirements are met and continue to be met, a person should not be permitted to continue in youth ministry.

## 4. Youth Ministry Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct is written to protect both the youth in our churches, and you as a leader from situations where your integrity or actions might be questioned.

In the exercise of your ministry you must:

- Never abuse young people or cultivate relationships in order to initiate or cloak abuse of young people.
- Never become romantically involved with any young person participating in the youth ministry (Years 7-12 or otherwise under the age of 18).
- Never be alone with a young person away from the presence of other adults.
- Never have young people to your home or visit young people in their home when no other adult is present, except with the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Never touch a young person in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender or cultural background.
- Never physically discipline a young person.
- Never make drugs, alcohol or cigarettes available to young people.
- Never develop inappropriate special relationships with particular young people that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any contact with a young person that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).



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 young person. 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 young person often starts with something relatively minor, but can then gradually build up to more involved behaviors through a process of grooming. It is often characterized by secrecy.

Those at greatest risk of child abuse in ministry are undoubtedly teenagers. This is because youth ministry more easily allows for the possibility of one-to-one unsupervised contact. This is why there must always be more than one adult leader present, and that no opportunities present themselves for a leader to engage in one-to-one activity with a young person away from the presence of other adults.

A breach of this Code of Conduct may raise issues concerning your fitness to continue as a leader.

You are to inform the Senior Minister or the Safe Ministry Representative if you observe another leader acting in a way that may be contrary to this code of conduct.

## 5. Guidelines for Youth Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for 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 youth ministry events.

#### Never Alone

Leaders must not be alone with a young person during an activity, and should make sure, as far as possible, that other leaders are not left alone with a 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 youth ministry should not be allowed access to young people.

### a. Physical safety of young people

One of the ways that we can protect young people in our churches is to make sure that they are meeting in a physical environment that is appropriate and safe for them.

Consider particularly the suitability of the space, the safety of the space, and the safety measures in place by asking the following questions. Ideally it is preferable if you are objectively able to tick all the following boxes 'yes'.

## CHECKLIST

### Suitability of the space

- Are toilet facilities available?
- Is the space appropriate for activities such as games?
- Is the equipment being used suitable and appropriate for the ages using it?
- Is the floor non-slip and splinter-free?

### Safety of the space

- Is the area to be used a safe distance from roads or traffic?
- Is the area far removed from places where people may engage in unsafe behaviour (such as smoking or drinking alcohol)?
- Is any glass installed at floor level safety glass?
- Is the heating safe to use?
- Are all electrical wiring, sockets and appliances regularly maintained and in a safe condition?
- In regard to areas that may be used for games and outside play, has the area been checked for items that may pose a potential hazard and such items safely removed (such as broken glass, or discarded needles)?
- Is all furniture in a safe condition and without risk of toppling onto a young person (such as stacks of chairs)?

### First aid and safety measures

- Is there a fire extinguisher and fire blanket accessible and available on-site?
- Is there a well-stocked first aid kit at the activity site?
- Is there a specific person in the church who is responsible for checking the first aid kit regularly and replenishing it?
- Is there a specific person on-site who is trained in first aid?
- Are all leaders aware of the fire safety and evacuation procedures?

## b. Supervision of activities

An important part of providing a safe environment is making sure you have enough leaders present to adequately supervise the activities taking place.

The degree of supervision required will vary according to the nature and environment of the activity, the age and maturity of the young people and the size of the group. In considering the number of leaders required, take into account:

- the age, number, ability and gender mix of the youth; and
- the venue, time, duration and nature of the activity.

The suggested supervision ratio for low risk onsite events with youth would be 1:10 (one leader for every 10 youth) after the minimum requirement of 2 adult leaders is met.

Where the risks in the activity increase, the supervision should also increase. For example, if you were to take the Year 7 and 8 youth off-site to do indoor rock climbing, it would be appropriate to reduce the ratio to 1:6 (one leader for every 6 youth). This is to account for the high-risk nature of the activity and the fact that it is off-site.

## c. Appropriateness of activities

You should thoughtfully consider what message young people 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.

To minimise the possibility of youth being harmed, you should give careful consideration to any activities or games that require young people to act alone or in pairs independent of leaders.

You should review in their entirety any DVDs, youtube clips, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics that you intend to show young people. You should also make sure that any elements containing violence, sexual activity, nudity, drug use, coarse language or questionable lifestyle are appropriate for the intended audience. In assessing whether something is appropriate you should be governed by the age of the youngest person present. Exercise particular care 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. If in doubt, seek the advice of a supervisor or colleague.

#### **d. Parental consent**

You must have the written consent of a parent or guardian before taking youth away from church premises, and you must keep them informed of the place and timing of the event. If you can, include parents or guardians in the leadership team.

Ask parents or guardians for information about any particular physical needs (eg, allergies), mental health needs (eg, depression) or safety needs of youth in your care.

And never administer medications to a young person without the written consent of a parent or guardian.

#### **e. Transportation**

It is the responsibility of parents and guardians to arrange transportation to and from youth events for their child, unless another specific arrangement is in place.

You must have written permission from a parent or guardian before a young person can be driven anywhere by someone other than the parent for the purposes of a church activity.

When making transport arrangements, take reasonable steps to ensure that:

- All drivers or operators are licensed (green Ps or above), responsible, experienced, and are not impaired by alcohol or any other mind-altering or addictive substance; and
- All motor vehicles and other forms of transport used are registered, insured, safe, and fitted with age appropriate restraints or safety devices (e.g. seat belts, life jackets).

Leaders should avoid being alone with a young person in a motor vehicle or driving a young person home unaccompanied, even with parental permission. If such a situation is unavoidable, inform another leader of the trip and the reason for it.

#### **f. Trips away**

When events involve youth sleeping over, you 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 youth being supervised; and
- do not sleep in close personal proximity to a young person, unless they are a parent or guardian of the young person.

Leaders should never share accommodation with only one young person, unless they are a parent or guardian of the young person.

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

## **g. Communication**

For most children and young people in our society today, electronic communications are a part of daily life and a key way of engaging socially. New social media platforms and apps are being developed every day, and no one policy can hope to keep up with the ever-changing landscape. Rather than attempting to create a comprehensive policy for use in parishes, there are 10 key principles to guide you as you communicate with young people:

### **THE TEN**

#### **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
<b>Phonecalls</b>	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.
<b>Text messages</b>	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Email</b>	For logistical purposes and encouragement only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Social networking (Facebook, Instagram, etc)</b>	Use your discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use your discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
<b>Video calls/streaming and chat rooms</b>	Never	Never

## h. Photographs/videos

Youth and leaders will often want to take photos as part of their time together. However, leaders should not take photos of youth without parental consent, and should only use photos in accordance with the purposes for which that consent was given. The storage of these images must also be carefully considered.

Do not photograph any young person who has asked not to be photographed.

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

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

Embarrassing or offensive photos or videos must not be shared.

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

Generally, videos should only be used to showcase 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.

## i. Meeting outside programmed events

### Years 7-9

It is never appropriate for a youth leader to meet socially with youth in Years 7-9 without written or verbal permission from parents and discussing it with you as the Head of Youth Ministry. If you are proposing to do this yourself you must obtain parental permission and discuss it with your ministry supervisor first. This type of meeting is best done in groups rather than one-to-one, and should be with youth of the same gender. Any meetings should be in a public place

### Years 10-12

Leaders may choose to meet casually with mixed groups of youth in Years 10-12 or in one-to-one meetings with members of the same gender. Any meetings should be in a public place and parents and the supervisor of the ministry should be aware of this contact outside of programmed events, including the location, duration and reason for the meeting. If you are proposing to do this yourself, you must obtain parental permission and discuss it with your ministry supervisor first.

## 6. Reporting abuse

It is your responsibility to ensure that any child abuse that you become aware of is reported to the relevant authorities. You may become aware of abuse because you have observed indicators of abuse, another person has informed you of their concerns for a young person or a young person has told you they are being abused.

If a young person tells you about any abuse, you should –

- listen to their story;
- comfort them if they are distressed;
- let them know you're glad they told you and that they did the right thing;
- let them know you are going to get help about what to do next and that you will get back to them.

As soon as possible after the disclosure you must

- a. write down the details of what was said, and
- b. report the information to the appropriate authorities.



### a. **WRITE DOWN** the details of what was said including such details as:

- who you spoke to,
- date, time and place,
- what you said,
- what the young person said, and
- any grounds for forming the belief that abuse has occurred.

Keep to the facts about what was said and don't express your opinion. Be aware that this document must be signed and dated and could be subpoenaed in court proceedings.

b. **REPORT** the information to the appropriate authorities.

## REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND DISCLOSURES

Issue or concern	Report to:
General Suspicions	<b>Senior Minister*</b>
Child or young person currently at risk of significant harm	<p><b>FaCS</b> If possible discuss with your head ministry leader or Senior Minister* first and use the Mandatory Reporters Guide.</p> <p><b>Police</b> Contact the police first if the situation requires emergency assistance.</p> <p><b>Professional Standards Unit</b> Contact the PSU where the alleged perpetrator is a church worker.</p>
Knowledge of relevant criminal offences	<p><b>Police</b></p> <p><b>Professional Standards Unit</b> (regarding a church worker)</p>
Child abuse by a church worker**	<p><b>Senior Minister*/church worker's employer</b></p> <p><b>Anglican Abuse Report line</b> (1800 77 49 45)</p> <p><b>Police</b></p>

**Contact the Professional Standards Unit if you are unsure of what to do in any circumstance or where an allegation is regarding the Senior Minister**

\* Do not report to the Senior Minister if the allegation is regarding the Senior Minister

\*\* A church worker includes a minister, any ministry volunteer or leader (eg, Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, organist, etc), warden, parish councillor, parish Synod representative.

Do not undertake an investigation, and do not disclose the allegations to the alleged offender at this initial stage.

### **Confidentiality**

You must treat any suspicion, knowledge or disclosure of abuse with the utmost confidentiality. Apart from reporting it to the relevant authorities and to your Minister, you must not ordinarily share the information with anyone else.

### **Pastoral care**

A victim of abuse may require immediate specialist counselling or other support. When a report is made to the Professional Standards Unit, the Professional Standards Unit Chaplain can provide advice on care for victims and their families. Victims often need ongoing contact and support and the Minister should ensure that an appropriate person is appointed to follow up with them.

If a leader informs you that a child or young person has disclosed abuse to them, you should make sure that the above steps are taken. You should also ensure that the leader is appropriately cared for and supported. The leader may need to debrief about how the experience has affected them.

## **7. Contact details**

### **Professional Standards Unit**

Website: [www.safeministry.org.au](http://www.safeministry.org.au)

### **Director of the Professional Standards Unit**

Phone: (02) 9265 1514

Email: [psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au)

### **Anglican Abuse Report Line**

Phone: 1800 774 945

Email: [abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au](mailto:abusereport@sydney.anglican.asn.au)

