

Safe Ministry Blueprint for Heads of Children's Ministry

Safe Ministry Blueprints

Professional Standards Unit Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

Introduction

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

This booklet sets out the guidelines and Code of Conduct for the person with overall responsibility for children in the parish. The person with this role might be a paid Children’s Minister, a volunteer children’s ministry leader, an Assistant Minister or, by default, the Senior Minister.

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

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1. General principles for ministry with children

Children have rights

Children 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 child specific.

Leaders are responsible

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

Abuse is power misused

Leaders have authority over children 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 Children's Ministry

As the person with overall responsibility for children's ministry you must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety and welfare of the children 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 children's activities occur;
- making sure your children's ministry program complies with the core safe ministry policies contained in this booklet.



3. Screening and training of leaders

Sadly, many children 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).

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 Children's 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/);
- 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 Sunday School teachers, crèche helpers, etc.

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 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
Crèche coordinator	✓	✓	✓
Crèche helper	✓	At the discretion of the Senior Minister	✗
Casual helpers who do not fulfil a leadership or teaching role in a children's program and just 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.	✗
Sunday School Coordinator or teacher	✓	✓	✓
Mid-week kids club coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓
Holiday kids program coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓
Children's Camp leader	✓	✓	✓
Playgroup coordinator or leader	✓	✓	✓
Playgroup helper (not formally appointed to a leadership position)	✓	✗	✗
Volunteer in children's ministry aged 16 or 17	✗	At the discretion of the Senior Minister	✓ (unless assisting as a one-off, eg week-long school holidays kids program)
Volunteer in children's ministry under the age of 16	✗	At the discretion of the Senior Minister	✓ Safe Ministry Junior (unless assisting as a one-off, eg week-long school holidays kids program)
Volunteer assisting in an emergency	✗ (Only if having them help is necessary to prevent an increased risk to the safety of children and it's not for more than 5 consecutive working days)	✗	✗
Parent or close relative of a child, volunteering in a children's ministry group that the 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	✓
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 people are followed up when the time for their renewal is approaching. Unless the legal and Diocesan requirements above are met and continue to be met, a person should not be permitted to continue in a children's ministry position.

4. Children's Ministry Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is written to protect both the children 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 children or cultivate relationships in order to initiate or cloak abuse of children.
- Never be alone with a child away from the presence of other adults.
- Never have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present, and never meet privately with a child outside of church activities, except with the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Never touch a child 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.
- Never make drugs, alcohol or cigarettes available to children.
- Never develop inappropriate special relationships with particular children that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any contact with a child 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 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. It is often characterized by secrecy.

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 child 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 Children's Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for children's 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 children, as well the issue of meeting up with children 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 ministry events.

Never Alone

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

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 ministry should not be allowed access to children.

a. Physical safety of children

One of the ways that we can protect children 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 and craft activities?
- Is the equipment being used suitable and appropriate for the ages using it? (this is a particularly pertinent question to ask if there is any climbing equipment)
- Is the floor non-slip and splinter-free?

In regard to areas used by toddlers and preschoolers:

- Is the area fenced off or contained in a room?
- Is there a designated area for strollers that are not in use?

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?
- Are all child-height cupboards fitted with child-proof locks?
- Is the heating safe to use near children (i.e. is the source of heat removed away from small inquisitive fingers)?
- Are all electrical wiring, sockets and appliances regularly maintained and in a safe condition?
- Are all sockets child-proofed?
- 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 child (such as stacks of chairs)?

First aid and safety measures

- Is there a fire extinguisher or fire blanket 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 children 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 children; and
- the venue, time, duration and nature of the activity.

The suggested supervision ratios for low risk onsite events would be: crèche and preschoolers 1:5 (one leader for every five children) and primary age 1:7 (one leader for every seven children), 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 primary-aged children offsite to indoor rock climbing, it would be appropriate to reduce the ratio to 1:4 (one leader for every four children). This is to account for the high-risk nature of the activity and the fact that it is off-site.

Please note that a junior leader (under the age of 16) does not count as a leader for the purposes of supervision.

c. Appropriateness of activities

You should thoughtfully consider 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.

To minimise the possibility of children being harmed, you should give careful consideration to any activities or games that require children 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 children. In assessing whether something is appropriate you should be governed by the age of the youngest child present. Censorship ratings should be kept to 'G' or 'PG', unless specific permission is granted by the senior minister. Though note that some G or PG material may still not be appropriate due to the themes it contains. If in doubt, seek the advice of your Senior Minister.

d. Parental consent

You must have the written consent of a parent or guardian before taking children 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 physical needs (eg, allergies), mental health needs (eg, depression) or safety needs of the children in your care.

And never administer medications to a child 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 children's ministry events for their child, unless another specific arrangement is in place.

You must have written permission from a parent or guardian before a child 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 child restraints or safety devices (e.g. seat belts, life jackets).

Leaders should avoid being alone with a child in a motor vehicle or driving a child 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

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, 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 children being supervised; and
- do not sleep in close personal proximity to a child, unless they are a parent or guardian of the child.

Leaders should 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. If you need to wash or toilet a child, tell another adult what you are doing.

g. Communication

You should take care that your communication with a child or children is appropriate and above reproach. Be aware that those who wish to abuse children may use electronic communications to try to cultivate secretive or exclusive relationships.

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.

Quick reference table of recommended age appropriate contact

Type of contact	Primary Students (approx ages 5 to 12)
Calls to home phone or via parent's mobile	Only after speaking to parent then, if the parent gives permission, with the child and only for ministry purposes.
Calls to a child on their own mobile phone	x
SMS	x
Email	x
Social networking (Facebook, Instagram, etc)	x
Video calls/streaming & Chat rooms	x

h. Photographs/videos

Leaders should not take photos of children without parental consent, and should only use photos in accordance with the purposes for which that consent was given.

Do not photograph any child who has asked not to be photographed.

Photos of children 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 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.

i. Meeting outside programmed events

It is not appropriate for leaders to meet up with children socially, unless it is in the context of socialising with the child's family.

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.

Ensure that no furniture or other items could topple or drop onto a child.

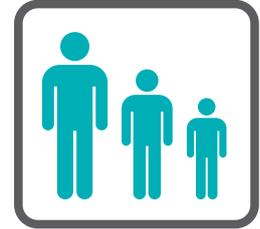
Parents

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, we 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; and
- touching any area of the body normally covered by a swimming costume.

c. Infants and primary age children (6-12 years)

Health and Safety

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. Will primary-aged children be dismissed or will they need to be supervised until parents collect them?

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.

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. 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 child or a child has told you they are being abused.



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

8. Contact details

Professional Standards Unit

Website: www.safeministry.org.au

Director of the Professional Standards Unit

Phone: (02) 9265 1514

Email: psu@sydney.anglican.asn.au

Anglican Abuse Report Line

Phone: 1800 774 945

Email: abuserreport@sydney.anglican.asn.au

