



# Safe Ministry Blueprint For Parents and Church Members

**Safe Ministry with Children  
and Other Vulnerable People**

**Safe Ministry Blueprints**

Office of the Director of Safe Ministry Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

## Introduction

The Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney wants its ministries to be characterised by grace and forgiveness, not rules and regulations; but the Bible is concerned that leaders have a particularly high standard in their personal life. Unfortunately, not all Christian workers have protected children and young people in the past. This policy has been developed so that as far as possible, such crimes will not be committed in future in the context of our church ministries.

Except where a particular age bracket is indicated, or a distinction is drawn between children and youth, references to children in this document are references to anyone under the age of 18.

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This document was prepared in 2015 by the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry for the Safe Ministry Board with assistance from Anglican Youthworks. It was updated in 2021 and 2023 to reflect current changes in the Diocese and in relevant NSW Legislation. This document outlines the requirements of the *Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020* that are relevant to safe ministry.

## 1. Commitment to Safe Ministry

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

The more parents and other congregation members are familiar with the church's safe ministry policies, the more able they will be to support the children's and youth ministry leaders as they implement them and identify breaches when they occur.

If you have any concerns about the safety of children or young people in ministry activities, please speak to the Senior Minister, the Safe Ministry Representative, the person responsible for children's or youth ministry in your parish or the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry (See contact details at the end of this document).

## 2. General principles for ministry with children and young people

### **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.

### 3. Child Safe Standards

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended 10 child safe standards based on its findings, extensive research and consultation about what makes organisations child safe. The NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian seeks to support organisations (including religious organisations) to implement these standards.

The standards work together to emphasise the importance of adopting multiple strategies to address child safety and avoiding an over-reliance on any one strategy. By implementing the standards in our church ministries we can create and maintain a child safe culture. The 10 Child Safe Standards in extract are as follows:

1. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

The child safe standards inform our current safe ministry policies and practices and provide a framework for ongoing review and improvement. It is recommended that church leadership consider how the standards are being implemented specifically in their own parish and how to improve and develop child safe practices and culture. For more resources and information about the standards refer to the <https://safeministry.training/resources>.

## 4. Selection and screening 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 children that leaders must comply with, both under NSW law and the Anglican Church's ordinances.

### a. Legal requirements

Any person involved in **child-related work** (including all volunteers) must get a Working With Children Check clearance (subject to some exemptions). A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years and therefore child-related work includes ministry to youth. A church must verify the WWCC number with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian prior to engaging a person in child-related work to determine whether the person has been cleared or barred.

Compliance with these legal requirements is the responsibility of the senior minister, although this task can be delegated to the Safe Ministry Representative.

### b. Diocesan requirements

A person who wishes to undertake **ministry to children** must usually:

- Complete a **Safe Ministry Check** and submit this for assessment with the Senior Minister or his delegate (Safe Ministry Check forms can be downloaded from <https://safeministry.org.au/safe-ministry-check-information/> or parishes can register for the online system <https://safeministry.org.au/smc-church-registration/>),
- 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 (A sample application form is available at <https://safeministry.org.au/>),
- Undertake **Safe Ministry training** prior to undertaking ministry to children, followed by a Refresher course every three years, and

- Read, understand, and comply with **Faithfulness in Service** (available at <https://safeministry.org.au/>).

It is recommended that all volunteers are a member of a parish for at least 6 months before undertaking ministry to children in that parish. This provides time for a person's character and suitability for such a role to be observed.

**Ministry to children** means a role that:

- Requires the person to hold a WWCC clearance; or
- Involves pastoral ministry which has direct, regular and not incidental contact with children; or
- Involves an overnight activity with children (e.g. camps) or the provision of personal care to children (such as changing clothes, toileting, washing); or
- Involves the supervision of a person engaged in ministry to children.

## 5. Code of Conduct for Children's and Youth Ministry

The Code of Conduct is written to protect both the children in our churches, and leaders from situations where their integrity or actions might be questioned.

### Code of conduct for children's and youth ministry

A children's or youth ministry leader **must**:

- Never abuse people especially children or youth, nor cultivate relationships in order to initiate or hide abuse.
- Report to the appropriate authorities any behaviour that could be considered abusive. This includes speaking to the head ministry leader about behaviour by another leader.
- Never be alone with a child or young person in their ministry role where other adult leaders are not present.

- Never have children or young people to their home or visit children or young people in circumstances where no other adult is present, except with the permission of their parent or guardian.
- Never touch children or youth in a manner which is inappropriate given their age, gender, cultural background, context or personal circumstances.
- Never physically discipline a child or young person in the course of their ministry.
- Never make alcohol, cigarettes or illicit drugs available to children or youth.
- Never develop special relationships with particular children or youth that could be seen as involving favouritism or any form of special treatment.
- Never engage in any contact with children or youth that is secretive (whether physical or through electronic media or in any other way).
- Never use electronic communication with children and young people in a manner inconsistent with the guidelines for appropriate use as set out in this Blueprint document when communicating with people under their leadership.
- Never become romantically involved with any participant in the youth or children's ministry where they are a leader.
- Never take unauthorised photos, movies or recordings of anyone, especially of a child or young person on church property or at church activities without church authorisation and the consent of the child's parents or guardians.
- Never view, possess, produce or distribute restricted material containing sexual acts or nudity; and never view, possess, produce or distribute any form of child pornography or child exploitation material.

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 child often starts with something relatively minor but can then gradually build up to more involved behaviours through a process of grooming. Grooming is often characterised 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 should always be more than one adult leader present and efforts made to limit the opportunity for any 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 a person's fitness to continue as a leader. Leaders are to inform the senior minister or the Safe Ministry Representative if they observe another leader acting in a way that may be contrary to this Code of Conduct.

## 6. Guidelines for Children’s and Youth Ministry activities

The guidelines that follow cover a wide array of issues for children’s and 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 children and youth, as well the issue of meeting up with children or youth outside of programmed events. However, there are **three golden rules** that are relevant to all of the guidelines:

### **Two or More**

There should always be two leaders aged 18 years or over present for all children’s and youth ministry events.

### **Never Alone**

Leaders should 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.

### **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.

### a. Supervision of activities

An important part of providing a safe environment is making sure there are 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 on-site church events would be: crèche and pre-schoolers 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. The suggested supervision ratio for low risk on-site 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 leaders were to take primary-aged children off-site to indoor rock climbing, it would be appropriate to reduce the ratio to 1:4 (one leader for every four children). Similarly, if leaders 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.

Please note that a junior leader (under the age of 18) does not count as a leader for the purposes of supervision.

In the case of camps and similar activities, there should be at least one adult present who has first aid training.

## b. Physical safety of children

Children and young people should be meeting in a physical environment that is safe and suitable for them. There is a recommended checklist for the leader of the children's or youth ministry to use in assessing the safety of the physical environment where children's or youth ministry occurs.

## c. Appropriateness of activities

Leaders 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, leaders should give careful consideration to any activities or games that require children to act alone or in pairs independent of leaders.

Leaders are to review in their entirety any DVDs, You Tube clips, computer games, graphics, photographs and lyrics that they intend to show to children. In assessing whether something

is appropriate leaders are to be governed by the age of the youngest child present. Censorship ratings should be kept to G or PG for children up to Year 6, keeping in mind that some G or PG material may still not be appropriate due to the themes it contains. For youth, leaders should make sure that any elements containing violence, sexual activity, nudity, drug use, coarse language or questionable lifestyle are appropriate for the intended audience. Care is to be exercised 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 (e.g. 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.

#### d. Parental consent

Children and youth must not be taken away from church premises without the written consent of a parent or guardian. Parents must be kept informed of the place and timing of the event and where possible provided with contact details for the head ministry leader. If possible, it is recommended to include parents or guardians in a leadership team which includes leaders of both genders.

Parents or guardians should be asked for information about any physical needs (such as allergies), mental health needs (such as depression) or safety needs of the children and youth attending children's and youth ministry activities.

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

#### e. Registration and permission forms

Parents should complete a form in which they give 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. A sample permission form is available at <https://safeministry.org.au/resource-docs>

## f. 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.

A child should not be driven anywhere by someone other than the parent for the purposes of a church activity without written permission from a parent or guardian.

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, the leader should inform another leader of the trip and the reason for it.

## g. 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, 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 a leader needs to wash or toilet a child, they should tell another adult what they are doing.

## h. Communication

### **Guidelines for those ministering to children (primary school age and below)**

Leaders should take care that their communication with 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.

Communication via mail, e.g., birthday cards or letters of encouragement, is acceptable when done with parental knowledge. Leaders should not contact children by email, 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.

### **Guidelines for those ministering to youth (high school age)**

For most 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 leaders in their communication with young people.

## **TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES**

### **1. ABOVE REPROACH**

Communications should always be above reproach, both in terms of the content and the way it is communicated. Leaders should ask themselves: if this communication were to be made known to all of church, would they consider it to be appropriate? Leaders ought to be sensitive to the impact of the words and images used, to avoid offence or miscommunication. They must never use flirtatious, sexually suggestive, explicit or offensive language or images. Leaders ought also to be conscious of how things might look. They should be careful that the circumstances of their communication do not suggest that their relationship with a young person is inappropriate by, for example, communicating regularly or late at night. Even if a leader's motives are pure, misunderstandings can arise.

## TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

### 2. IN PERSON IS BEST

Face-to-face interactions are the best way to build relationships with youth. Leaders should not 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 a leader using electronic communications, the leader should ask if they can talk about it with the young person the next time they 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 for leaders to be transparent in all communications. Leaders should 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, leaders should consider how to 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, the leader should let their ministry leader know so that nothing is going on in secret. Leaders should also keep any emails, text messages or conversation threads with youth, in case an accusation is ever made or a misunderstanding arises.

### 4. DON'T INITIATE SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDSHIPS

There is a power imbalance that exists between leaders and the youth they are ministering to. That power imbalance might make it difficult for a young person to say 'no' when a leader initiates a friendship on social media by, for example, sending a Facebook friend request or following them on Instagram. For that reason, it is best for a leader not to initiate, though a leader might choose to accept if the young person initiates a friendship.

### 5. SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Wherever possible, leaders should 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. When using social media for ministry purposes, closed groups should be used where possible (for example, Facebook) and youth should be directed to the group rather than to a leader's individual account if possible.

## TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

### 6. BUILD UP THE CHURCH

When posting on social media, leaders should think carefully about the impact of what is being communicated on the entire church community (including children, youth and the vulnerable). It is important to remember that leaders are often seen as representing the church. Leaders ought to consider how they can build up the church community, and avoid being divisive, showing favouritism or making others feel excluded or inferior.

### 7. RESPECT OTHERS

Leaders should be careful to observe confidentiality and privacy in electronic communications, for example, not publishing the names, contact details or other personal information of people online.

### 8. BE TRUTHFUL

A leader should never hide their 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

When using social media, leaders should be aware of and comply with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to using it in 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 COMMON SENSE!

There may be exceptional circumstances that arise from time to time, and common sense might dictate that a leader deviates from their usual practice when it comes to electronic communications. In those situations, leaders must be transparent and above reproach and, where possible, should seek advice from their ministry leader.

Recommendations about the sort of contact that is likely to be appropriate at different ages:

Type of contact	Primary school Students	Years 7–9 Students	Years 10–12 Students
<b>Phone calls</b>	Only after speaking to parent then, if the parent gives permission, with the child and only for ministry purposes.	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>	X	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Email</b>	X	For logistical purposes and encouragement	For logistical purposes and encouragement
<b>Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, etc)</b>	X	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
<b>Video calls/ conferencing</b>	Only with parental permission and in a group setting, not one to one.	Only with parental knowledge and in a group setting not one to one.	Inform parents (where possible) and only meet online in a group setting, not one to one

## i. Online Environments

Just as we do with physical gatherings we must ensure that online environments are safe and minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur (Standard 8 of the Child Safe Standards).

Many of the principles that govern how we conduct safe ministry face to face will apply to the online world as well, however there are some specific things to bear in mind.

### **Maximise transparency**

- Only communicate with children online at the regularly programmed times e.g. Friday night youth group or Wednesday afternoon kid's club.
- Let parents and carers know when and how you will be interacting online with their children and what rules are in place. Get parental permission for primary aged children and ensure parents are fully informed for high school aged children.
- Communicate expectations and rules about online interactions and meetings to the children in the group, including how leaders are to interact with them. In particular children should be aware that leaders should not be contacting them privately or arranging online gatherings other than the advertised usual times.

### **Social Media**

- Youth group members, their friends and parents should be directed to the **church or youth group's official social media account** (not the individual leader's personal account).
- The official account should be administered by two or more leaders, ideally at least one of each gender, to ensure greater transparency in communication and to moderate the content.
- Do not use social media platforms in leader to youth interactions that delete posts, messages, images or comments or that allow for anonymity.

### **Video Conferencing**

- **Video conferencing meetings should be run on church owned accounts (not the individual leader's personal account).**
- When meetings are run online through video conferencing platforms the same principles that apply to safe ministry in person will largely apply online. Two or more leaders should always be present during the meeting and where that is not possible the meeting should be recorded.

- As in the face to face gathering children and youth need to be supervised by responsible leaders during online meetings. Disabling private chat functions and ensuring a leader is regularly checking in on any small group breakout rooms (or the like) will ensure that participants are not able to engage in inappropriate communication or conduct during the gathering.

For more detailed [guidelines](#) and [permission note](#) templates go to <https://safeministry.org.au>

## j. Photographs and videos

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

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

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

- Do not identify in writing the people in the photograph, e.g. tagging on social media.
- All children must be appropriately dressed when photographed (e.g. 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 and youth online. Privacy is of utmost importance and care should be taken to protect children and youth from having their personal information being displayed on a social networking site or church website.

Generally, videos should only be used to showcase or advertise ministry-related events and activities.

When video of services or activities are distributed or streamed on the web or via other broadcast media, signs should be posted that indicate the service is being or will be broadcast.

If you engage a volunteer to take official photographs at a church event it should be clearly stated in writing the role and tasks of the photographer and that in undertaking these tasks the photographer assigns the rights of copyright in the photos to the wardens and minister to hold on behalf of the parish. This will prevent the photographs from being used in other publications and contexts without proper consent.

## k. Meeting outside programmed events

### **Guidelines for ministering to Year 6 and under**

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 or with parental permission.

### **Guidelines for ministering to Years 7-9**

It is not appropriate for a youth leader to meet socially with youth in Years 7-9 without written or verbal permission from parents and without discussing it with the Head of the Youth Ministry (or ministry supervisor). This type of meeting is best done in groups rather than one-to-one, and should be with youth of the same gender.

### **Guidelines for ministering to 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 a leader is proposing to do this, they must obtain parental permission and discuss it with the Head of Youth Ministry (or ministry supervisor) first.

For more detailed information and age specific guidelines concerning the matters raised in (h)-(k) above you can refer to the Social Contact Policy at <https://safeministry.org.au>.

## 7. Age-specific guidelines for ministering to children and youth

In addition to the general principles and guidelines set out above, the Safe Ministry Guidelines document for specific age groups and ministry activities is available at <https://safeministry.org.au>. It covers the following topics:

- Ministry with 0-5 year olds
- Playtime/toddler groups
- Kids Club
- Sunday Children's Ministry
- Camping
- Youth Group
- Offsite activities
- Holiday clubs and activities

## 8. Further information

If you have any questions or require any further information, please speak with the Senior Minister, the Safe Ministry Representative or the leader of the youth or children's ministry in your parish.

## 9. Contact details

### Office of the Director of Safe Ministry

Website: <https://safeministry.org.au>

### Director of Safe Ministry

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)

### Feedback

Our aim is to support parishes and church workers to provide care and protection for everyone by building a culture of safe ministry.

Any feedback to help us review and improve is welcome. Please email your feedback to the address below

[feedback@safeministry.org.au](mailto:feedback@safeministry.org.au)