

BEST PRACTICE IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE¹

Kilmacud and Mount Merrion Parishes 2012

Code of Good Practice

The Catholic Church in Ireland is striving to develop a child-centred culture: a Church which is all-inclusive, welcoming and keen to promote the rights and best interests of children.

The Vatican and the Republic of Ireland are signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In honouring this Convention, we in the Church recognise that children have rights and that it is our job to ensure the absolute protection of those rights. Among the rights which are most significant within our Church today are the right to protection from harm and the right to participation (in decision-making, for instance).

The aim of the following Code of Good Practice is to ensure the safety of children and young people, to enhance the work practices of parish personnel and to reassure parents and guardians, as well as children themselves, that there is a commitment to best practice.

All personnel – clergy, religious, employees and volunteers – are required to sign up to this Code of Good Practice when they begin working in our church. The Code will be regularly reviewed and all workers reminded that they are required to behave according to the Code at all times.

General Conduct

- Physical punishment of children is not permissible under any circumstances.
- Verbal abuse of children or telling jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children can never be acceptable. Great care should be taken if it is necessary to have a conversation regarding sexual matters with a child or young person.
- Being alone with a child or young person may not always be wise or appropriate practice. If a situation arises where it is necessary to be alone with a child, another responsible adult should be informed immediately, by telephone if necessary. A diary note that the meeting with the young person took place, including the reasons for it, should be made.
- Best practice in relation to travel with children and young people should be observed. Personnel should not undertake any car or minibus journey alone with a child or young person. If, in certain circumstances, only one adult is available, there should be a minimum of two children or young people present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency, where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a child, a record of this should be

¹ For the purposes of this document, a child is a person under 18 years of age. This document does not deal with the issue of vulnerable adults. However, the same principles apply when dealing, for example, with an adult with an intellectual disability as apply when working with a child.

made and the child's parent or guardian should be informed as soon as possible.²

- Children and young people should not be permitted to work or remain in churches, parish property or schools unless there are at least two adults present.
- All children and young people must be treated with equal respect; favouritism is not acceptable.
- Personnel should not engage in or tolerate any behaviour – verbal, psychological or physical – that could be construed as bullying or abusive.
- A disproportionate amount of time should not be spent with any particular child or group of children.
- Under no circumstances should personnel give alcohol, tobacco or drugs to children or young people.
- Only age-appropriate language, material, media products (such as camera phones, internet, video) and activities should be used when working with children and young people. Sexually explicit or pornographic material is never acceptable.
- Permission must be sought from parents and children for using photography, video, internet. Develop a clear procedure for the use of these media products.

Respect for physical integrity

- The physical integrity of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Personnel must not engage in inappropriate physical contact of any kind, including rough physical play, physical reprimand and horseplay (tickling, wrestling). This should not prevent appropriate contact in situations where it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of a child (for example, where a child is distressed).

Respect for privacy

- The right to privacy of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Particular care regarding privacy must be taken when young people are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers and toilets.
- Photographs of children or young people must never be taken while they are in changing areas (for example, in a locker room or bathing facility).
- Tasks of a personal nature (for example, helping with toileting, washing or changing clothing) should not be done for children or young people if they

² If, for example, a child is in need of emergency medical treatment and there is no way to get him or her to hospital other than for an adult to travel alone with the child, it would be irresponsible not to do so. Where it becomes necessary to depart from the Code of Good Practice, the reasons for this should be carefully recorded and steps taken to avoid such a situation recurring in the future.

can undertake these tasks themselves. Permission must be sought from parents and children for undertaking personal care tasks.

Meetings with children and young people

- If the pastoral care of a child or young person necessitates meeting alone with them, such meetings should not be held in an isolated environment. The times and designated locations for meetings should allow for transparency and accountability (for example, be held in rooms with a clear glass panel or window, in buildings where other people are present, and with the door of the room left open.)
- Both the length and number of meetings should be limited.
- Parents or guardians should be informed that the meeting(s) took place, except in circumstances where to do so might place the child in danger.
- Visits to the home or private living quarters of church/parish personnel should not be encouraged, nor should meetings be conducted in such locations.
- When the need for a visit to the home of a child or young person arises, professional boundaries must be observed at all times.

Children with special needs or disabilities

- Children with special needs or disabilities may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, and so sensitivity and clear communication are particularly important.
- Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a child with special needs, this should be done with the full understanding and consent of parents or guardians.
- In carrying out such personal care tasks, sensitivity must be shown to the child and the tasks should be undertaken with the utmost discretion.
- Any care task of a personal nature which a child or young person can do for themselves should not be undertaken by a worker.
- In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents should be fully informed as soon as is reasonably possible.

Vulnerable children

- Since especially vulnerable children may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, sensitivity and clear communication are of utmost importance.
- Workers should be aware that vulnerable children may be more likely than other children to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse and may also be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.
- It is particularly important that vulnerable children should be carefully listened to, in recognition of the fact that they may have difficulty in expressing their concerns and in order that the importance of what they say is not underestimated.

Code of conduct for children

- Children can benefit greatly from participation in Church life. They should be encouraged to engage and participate as fully as possible in liturgies and all church activities.
 - They should be encouraged to be independent and to become aware of their own rights and the rights of others in church activities. Children need to be aware of appropriate boundaries and acceptable behaviour.
 - Children will need to be informed of the consequences of not behaving appropriately.
 - At all times seek children's consent to their involvement in activities.
 - Work alongside them in setting out suitable ways of interacting with their peers and with adults.
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| • <u>Do:</u> | <u>Do not:</u> |
| Engage fully in the activity | Bully |
| Show respect for others | Use unacceptable language |
| Be kind towards others | Be rough with others |
| Listen to others, give everyone a chance to speak | Shout or argue |
| Support others in the group | Tell lies |
| Talk to someone if you are worried | Isolate self or others |
| Take care of church property | Damage property |

Parental code and parental consent

- Parents and guardians have an important part to play in encouraging children's active participation in church life and in ensuring that while involved they are safe and well cared for.
- Church organisations should ensure that signed consent from parents or guardians is obtained prior to the participation of children and young people in events, activities and groups.
- Parents or guardians should be asked to indicate if their children have any specific dietary requirements, medical needs or special needs.
- Parents should check-in with their children to ensure they enjoyed and felt O.K. about the church activity.
- Parents should act on any concerns or worries their children may have.

Ensure safe activities

- Set out in writing ways in which the activity is going to be managed, to ensure the safety of the children involved. This should include supervision ratios and a risk assessment.
- Arrangements and procedures for leaving activities or centres should be explicit.
- In places such as changing areas, toilets and showers, separate provision should be made for boys and girls.

- There should be adequate and gender-appropriate supervision of boys and girls in such areas.
- A clear policy should be agreed with parents and guardians on the taking of photographs and the making of video recordings of children or young people involved in Church-related activities or events. This should also cover the generation of computer images. In addition, the policy should address the question of where and for what purpose photographs and images may be displayed.
- There should be regular health and safety reviews of facilities, procedures and practices.

Record important information

- An accurate record should be kept for each child and young person participating in activities including, but not limited to, attendance, programme details and medical information.³ This record should include a copy of the consent form or letter signed by the parent or guardian. It should also contain details of emergency contact numbers.
- A written record of organisers, supervisors, employees and volunteers in attendance at events, such as meetings, choir rehearsals, sports activities, should be kept.
- An Incident Report Form should be completed in the event of an accident or incident relating to a child.

Develop a complaints procedure

- Church organisations/groups should develop a clear complaints procedure for use by young people or by parents who are dissatisfied with any aspect of activities or services provided.
- Children and young people and their parents or guardians should be given a copy of the complaints procedure and should be made aware of the procedure for making a complaint.
- All staff and volunteers should be informed about the complaints procedure.

Ensure appropriate use of computers

- Every church organisation/group should have a clear policy in place regarding the use of e-mail and the internet.
- Where a computer is used by more than one person, each person should be obliged to have a unique username and password or, where this is not possible, to maintain a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.

³ The requirements of data protection legislation – Data Protection Act, 1998 and Data Protection (Amendment) Act, 2003 – must be adhered to in retaining records. For further information see www.dataprotection.ie

- Where a computer in a church organisation, group or institution can be accessed by children or young people, it should be accessible only through the use of a username and password unique to each child. Where this is not possible, the children or young people should be obliged to provide a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.
- Computers which can be accessed by children or young people should always have appropriate filtering software.
- All computers in church organisations, groups and institutions should be monitored regularly to ensure that they are being used in accordance with the stated policy. Where there is any suspicion or doubt, a person with specialist knowledge of computer hardware and software should be asked to assess the purposes for which the computer has been used.

Trips away from home

- All trips need careful advance planning, including adequate provision for safety in regard to transport, facilities, activities and emergencies. Adequate insurance should be in place.
- Written consent by a parent or guardian specifically for each trip and related activities must be obtained well in advance.
- A copy of the itinerary and contact telephone numbers should be made available to parents and guardians.
- There must be adequate, gender-appropriate supervision for boys and girls.
- Arrangements and procedures must be put in place to ensure that rules and appropriate boundaries are maintained in the relaxed atmosphere of trips away.
- Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the privacy of young people is respected when they are away on trips.
- The provision of appropriate and adequate sleeping arrangements should be ensured in advance of the trip.
- Sleeping areas for boys and girls should be separate and supervised by two adults of the same sex as the group being supervised.
- At least two adults should be present in dormitories in which children or young people are sleeping. Under no circumstances should an adult share a bedroom with a young person.
- If, in an emergency situation, an adult considers it necessary to be in a children's dormitory or bedroom without another adult being present they should (a) immediately inform another adult in a position of responsibility and (b) make a diary note of the circumstances.

Pilgrimages and retreats

- Pilgrimages and retreats are an important part of the Church's pastoral and spiritual engagement with children and young people. Those involved in the planning and delivery of pilgrimages and retreats should adhere to the same guidance as outlined for other activities with children and young people within the Church.