

7. “Good Practice” Guidelines for the Prevention of Abuse

7.1 Introduction

As followers of Jesus, we welcome young people into our Church and want to give them time and attention. As valued members of our Church community, they should be treated with respect, listened to and kept safe.

Many people would say that good practice in youth work is just common sense. However, the variation in what is considered to be “common sense” in terms of child care is enormous, so this section of our policy document endeavours to define what we believe to be good practice in our own church situation. Much of what is presented would be good practice irrespective of child protection issues. These are the standards we want to operate because we strive to do the very best for our children and young people.

These good practice measures are first and foremost about protecting young people.
However, they will also help to protect workers from false accusation
or unnecessary and unwarranted suspicion.

7.2 Good practice - Ratios

- a) As far as possible, workers will not be left alone with a young person or young people where their activity cannot be seen. On church premises, this may mean leaving doors open or having two groups working in the same room.
- b) Principal Leaders are responsible for ensuring that there is a suitable ratio of staff to young people. This may depend on the age of the young people concerned and the activities being undertaken, but should also take into account “emergencies” (e.g. having enough staff to cope when a child has an accident and needs immediate medical attention). The gender balance of the workers should also be considered. There must always be at least two staff present, and more staff should be used for outdoor or off-site activities. The Baptist Union recommends the following minimum staffing ratios:

For indoor activities:

Age 0-2 years	1:3
Age 2-3 years	1:4
Age 3-8 years	1:8
Age 8 years and over	2:20 (1 male and 1 female), plus 1 extra adult for every 10 children.

For outdoor activities:	Age 0-2 years	1:3
	Age 2-3 years	1:4
	Age 3-8 years	1:6
	Age 8-13 years	2:15 (1 male and 1 female), plus 1 extra adult for every 8 children
	Age 13 and over	2:20 (1 male and 1 female), plus 1 extra adult for every 10 young people

- c) Young people should not be given access to church premises unless responsible adults are present. For their own safety, unsupervised children under the age of 11 are not permitted in the kitchen at any time.
- d) At no time should one adult be alone on church premises with an individual young person or group. This means that when young people are leaving the premises, at least two adults should remain on site until the last one has departed.

- e) Youth workers should not invite young people into their homes alone. It is acceptable to invite a group if another adult is in the house. Parents should know where their children are and at what time they should return home.
- f) In a counselling situation with a young person, where privacy and confidentiality are important, ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place, and with whom. Whenever possible, another adult should be in the building, and the young person should be aware that this person is there. It is good practice to set an agreed time-limit prior to the counselling session and stick to it. If necessary, make another appointment to continue at a later date.

7.3 Good practice - The way we work

Youth workers should treat all young people with respect and dignity.

- a) They should be careful in the use of language and tone of voice, and be aware of their own body language and the effect they are having on the individual young person.
- b) They should listen well and be careful that they do not assume they know what a young person is thinking or feeling.
- c) They should not engage in any of the following:
 - invading the privacy of young people when they are showering or using the toilet;
 - rough, physically or sexually provocative games;
 - making sexually suggestive comments about or to a young person, even in “fun”;
 - inappropriate and intrusive touching of any form;
 - any scapegoating, belittling, ridiculing or rejecting of a young person;
 - allowing young people to involve them in excessive attention-seeking that is overtly sexual or physical in nature.
- d) They should learn to control and discipline young people without using physical punishment. (Occasionally, however, there may be a need to restrain a young person for his own or others’ protection.)
- e) They should make sure another adult is present if, for example, a young child has soiled his underclothes and needs to be thoroughly washed. If possible, the child’s parent/carer should be called in to carry out such a task.

7.4 Good practice - Can I touch a child?

- a) It is hard to conceive how anyone can be a nurturing, caring worker with young people without some physical contact happening at least occasionally! For example, if a young person is distressed, it would be natural to want to put an arm round his or her shoulder. It could even be considered as abusive not to respond by touching a young person in such circumstances. However, workers must be conscious that a touch, which to many people would seem innocent, may be unacceptable for some young people. If a young person appears to be cringing or responding in a negative way to being touched, workers should stop immediately and find an alternative, non-tactile way to convey their concern. They should also avoid touching a young person when no-one else is in the room.
- b) If a worker sees a colleague acting in a way which might be misconstrued, he should be prepared to speak to that person, the Principal Leader or Youth Co-ordinator about his concerns. Leaders should encourage an atmosphere of mutual support and care which allows all workers to be comfortable enough to discuss inappropriate attitudes or behaviour.

7.5 Good practice - Transportation and off-premises activities

- a) Lifts should not be given to young people on their own, other than for short journeys. If they are alone, they must be asked to sit in the rear of the car.
- b) All drivers must have correct insurance cover for transporting young people in their care.
- c) All drivers must be over the age of 21 years and must have held a full driving licence for at least one year.
- d) Parents shall be notified of any intention to take young people off church premises in advance of the day of the event and should give written consent before the event. (See Appendices 10 and 11)
- e) When a minibus is used and people make a contribution towards its cost, the Principal Leader is required to obtain a "Section 19" Small Bus Permit which must be displayed on the vehicle. Contact the Traffic Area Office for the Eastern Area at Terrington House, 13-15 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 1NP. Tel 01223 358922. (The cost of a permit was £7 in July 2003.)
- f) When using a coach, ensure that the company has full insurance cover. Check on the limit of passenger numbers and do not exceed this figure.
- g) Young people must be required to wear seat-belts at all times when travelling by car, minibus or coach and should remain seated. Until children reach either their 12th birthday or 135 cm in height, they must travel on a correctly fitted booster seat in the rear of the car. Rear-facing baby seats must not be used in a seat protected by a front air-bag, unless the air-bag has been deactivated manually or automatically. For forward-facing travel, the guidance given in the individual car's manual should always be followed, as this may vary from car to car.
- h) On every outing, each adult should be allocated a small group of young people for whom they have responsibility and should be given a written list to minimise the risk of anyone going astray. For the same reason, if travelling in several vehicles, it is good practice to insist that the same group of young people should travel with the same adult on both the outgoing and return journeys.
- i) It is the responsibility of the Principal Leader to ensure that anyone assisting with transport is made aware of these rules.

7.6 Good practice - Sharing information

- a) All young people in our Church groups should be registered and parents/carers asked for details of full name, date of birth, address and contact telephone number(s), as well as consent for emergency medical treatment. A standard registration form is used by all youth organisations in our Church (see Appendix 8). For certain activities, events and residential holidays, it will be necessary to obtain further consent from parents (see Appendices 10 and 11). There should always be a clear understanding of the type of activities in which the young people will be participating.
- b) Workers should be aware that in some families there are legal constraints on contact with children by absent fathers or mothers.
- c) Parents/carers are expected to notify youth leaders if a different adult is going to be collecting their child at the end of the session. Youth workers should not allow any child to leave the premises with another adult unless a prior arrangement has been made. In the event of a child being removed without prior notification or consent, the registered parent/carer should be contacted immediately. Where this proves impossible, 999 will be called.
- d) Parents/carers should be advised of the Church's Safe to Grow Policy and should be given the leaders' names and a contact telephone number.

7.7 Good practice - Looking after young people overnight

- a) Workers should not share sleeping accommodation with an individual young person. Males and females should sleep separately.
- b) Before the event, parents/carers should be given written details, including the address and telephone number of the overnight location, a person to contact in case of emergency and brief information about the planned activities. Suggested information to be given to parents is included in the Event and Activity Checklist (see Appendix 9). The parents should also complete a consent form, stating any special dietary requirements and current medication and giving the name and telephone number of their child's doctor (see Appendix 10).
- c) Leaders are responsible for checking that all forms have been returned in advance of the event and are taken to the overnight location, along with a mobile phone for use in emergencies. They should check the insurance cover of any building being used for sleeping and make sure that limits on numbers are not exceeded, rendering the insurance invalid. They should also know the location of the nearest accident and emergency hospital and doctor, and should consider informing the doctor, local police and fire brigade of the overnight event.
- d) All reasonable precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of the young people, including checking that fire exits are clear, knowing where fire extinguishers are, knowing where water, gas and electricity can be turned off, checking that there are always two exits from rooms used for sleeping, etc. It is helpful to establish rules and boundaries with the young people very soon after arrival.
- e) Where outdoor and adventurous activities are concerned, leaders must ensure that all supervisors are appropriately qualified. If an activity is being provided by an outside organisation, they should check that this organisation is registered with the Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority and has appropriate insurance.

7.8 Good practice - Abuse of trust

- a) Relationships between young people and their leaders take many forms, but all of them can be described as "relationships of trust". The leader is someone in whom the young person has placed a degree of trust, perhaps because he or she has an educational role, is a provider of leisure activities or even is a significant adult friend. In every case, however, that relationship is not one of equal partners and there is the potential for the trust to be abused by the leader, who is in a position of power over the young person.
- b) It is always wrong for a leader to enter into a sexual relationship with a young person, neither is it acceptable for a leader to form a romantic relationship with a young person.

7.9 Good practice - Health and safety

- a) At Rushmere Baptist Church, we have a Maintenance Group which is responsible for ensuring that the premises are maintained in a good condition. We also have a Health and Safety Officer whose responsibility it is to check that the buildings and equipment such as furniture and electrical appliances are safe for both adults and children to use. He also ensures that the access points are safe and well lit. A Health and Safety Policy is in place.
- b) All potentially hazardous tools and cleaning fluids are stored in a locked cupboard.
- c) We have a First Aid Officer, an accident book and a first aid box which is regularly checked and well supplied.
- d) A Church Member is responsible for arranging and updating the Church's insurance cover.

7.10 Good practice in supervision

- a) Supervision and support is not just about seeing what is going on but it can also be about discussing together how work is being done and trying to identify the needs of the young people.
- b) Principal Leaders should watch for any young person receiving exceptional treatment, being highly favoured or treated unduly harshly.
- c) They should meet with workers regularly to review and plan the work. They should ask about working and personal relationships with the young people. They should also take or create opportunities for observing each worker with the young people.
- d) It is very helpful to keep a brief written record of the facts of all meetings, noting anything of importance. (This applies equally to normal meetings of the organisation, planning meetings, prayer meetings, etc.)
- e) If Principal Leaders have any doubts about a worker's relationships, they should explore further by talking with him/her, then confidentially with other workers and with the young person or people concerned. The issue should not be dropped until they are sure that there is no possibility of abuse.

7.11 Photos and Videos

Our policy for these areas is under review and will be published by the end of January 2012.

7.12 Good Practice in Electronic Communication

- a) Electronic communication includes the use of mobile phones, e-mail, and social networking sites. They are an easy way to communicate with young people in particular. However, there are dangers associated with electronic communication that call for vigilance.
- b) Parents or carers and young people themselves have the right to decide if a worker is to have email addresses or mobile phone numbers etc.
- c) Signed consent should be obtained from parents/carers for communicating in these ways.
- d) Direct electronic communication with children of primary school age is inappropriate and should be avoided. Any contact with children of primary school age should be via the parents/carers.
- e) Contact with young people by electronic communication should be at sensible times of day and generally for information-giving purposes only.
- f) Instant messaging should not be used.
- g) Where a young person in need or at a point of crisis uses this way of communicating with a worker then significant conversations should be saved as a text file if possible, and a log kept of when they communicated and who was involved. The worker should seek further guidance. This may be from the Principal Leader, Youth Co-ordinator or Minister.
- h) Workers should be careful in their communications with young people so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives.
- i) Clear, unambiguous language should be used, avoiding the use of unnecessary abbreviations.

Social Networking Sites (including Facebook)

- j) If workers use their own personal site they should ensure that all of its content is appropriate for young people to see. They should check their privacy settings are appropriate for young people who may access their profile.

- k) If they feel unable to do this then they should not have young people as Facebook friends on their personal site. Instead they could have a site that is solely used for youth work communications.
- l) Workers should wait for a young person to contact them to be their friend rather than the other way around.
- m) Workers should attempt to communicate with young people through a public domain (e.g. facebook wall). If a young person starts a communication via a private message, copies should be retained and where possible other workers should be copied in.
- n) If a worker feels that a communication is developing into a situation that does not fit within the above guidelines, then it should be stopped as soon as possible and further guidance sought, having informed the young person. This may be from the Principal Leader, Youth Co-ordinator or Minister.