

07

Good Standards of Practice



TAKINGCARE

www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare

7. GOOD STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

::7.1 PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical contact with children should be child initiated and appropriate to the age and gender of the child. If a child is in distress it may be perfectly acceptable (and sometimes necessary) to offer comfort and reassurance by placing a hand on their shoulder or taking their hand. This is a valid way of expressing concern and care for children and most children will feel comfortable with it. Making staff and volunteers frightened of any physical contact with children is not an effective way of reducing abuse.



Leaders should avoid being on their own with a child; if a child wishes to talk confidentially with them they should remain visible to other adults.

Leaders must avoid physical contact which may be misconstrued by a young person or other observer.

Leaders should never:

- :: Spend an excessive amount of time alone with children away from others
- :: Take children to your home without the child's parents and the leader of the organisation or other responsible person knowing
- :: Allow or engage in inappropriate touching in any form
- :: Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- :: Make sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a child, even in fun
- :: Let allegations made by a child go unchallenged or unrecorded
- :: Do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves
- :: Engage in rough or inappropriate behaviour
- :: Rely solely on their reputation to protect themselves

It may sometimes be necessary for leaders to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are very young or have disabilities. In such situations leaders need to be sensitive to the child and undertake personal care with the utmost discretion (see Section 7.7 for more information on working with children who have special needs, and Section 12 for a personal care form and a personal care log).

Using Restraint

Sometimes restraint may need to be applied to a child in order to protect him/her from harming themselves or others, or seriously damaging property. The priority at all times must be to protect all children from harm.

The proper use of restraint requires skill and judgement. Only the minimum force necessary to prevent injury or damage should be applied. Leaders should never try to restrain a young person on their own. Another leader may act as an assistant or as a witness. Remember that restraint should be an act of care, not punishment. Following an incident when restraint has been used, a report should be inserted in an accident/incident report form and parents/carers should be notified.

::7.2 RECOMMENDED RATIOS

All organisations must abide by the recommended ratios of children/young people to leaders. In determining the ratios of staff to children organisation leaders should bear in mind that there should be a minimum of at least 2 leaders/helpers present at all times.

Young leaders/helpers

Young leaders (aged between 15 and 18) should not be left alone in a supervisory capacity with children. They may, however, be counted in the ratios as long as other adult leaders are present and in charge.

Ratios for indoor activities**Under 8 years**

0 to 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children

2 to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children

3 to 7 years = 1 leader to 8 children

8 years and over

8 years and over = 1 leader to 10 children/young people.

There should be a gender mix of leaders with a mixed gender group of children or young people.

Ratios for outdoor activities**Under 8 years**

0 to 2 years = 1 leader to 3 children

2 to 3 years = 1 leader to 4 children

3 to 7 years = 1 leader to 6 children

8 to 13 years

The recommended ratios for children after 8 to 13 years and over are 2 leaders to 15 children. One additional leader for every 8 extra children, or part thereof.

13 years and over

The recommended ratios for young people aged 13 and over are 2 leaders to 20 children (preferably one of each gender). One additional leader for every 10 young people, or part thereof.

::7.3 TRANSPORT

Youth work may involve transporting young people at some stage.



Whether this is by car, coach or minibus and whether it is to and from the church building or an organised outing or residential, safety must be considered a priority at all times.

Drivers

When planning an outing, leaders of organisations must exercise discretion as to who the drivers of the vehicles will be. A driver transporting other people's children must be aware of his/her responsibility towards the passengers and drive carefully within the national speed limit. A driver should know what to do in the event of a breakdown or accident and must ensure that they have adequate and up to date insurance cover. Greater consideration should be given to using 'R' (NI) drivers and recently qualified drivers (RoI) as nominated drivers on an outing or residential due to their lack of driving experience.

In addition leaders should observe the guidelines below which will help ensure protection for both them and the young people.

Minibus drivers

Northern Ireland

Drivers who obtained their full car driving licence before 1 January 1997 may drive a minibus in the UK (until their licence expires) if they hold a valid full driving licence for private cars and if the vehicle is not being used for hire or reward.

Drivers who obtained their full car driving licence on or after 1 January 1997 are only licenced to drive a vehicle with up to eight seats (in addition to the driver). To drive a minibus, such drivers need to gain category D1 PCV entitlement on their licence by meeting higher medical standards and passing an appropriate test.

However, a volunteer driver is allowed to drive a minibus with up to 16 passenger seats (in addition to the driver) for social purposes by a non-commercial body, provided that the driver has held a full B licence for at least two years, is 21 years old or over and under 70 years old (unless s/he has passed PCV medical and gained restriction 120) and the vehicle meets the weight restriction.

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, a person driving a minibus must have a full category D driving licence for which they must sit a theory and practical test.

Private Cars

Leaders should avoid transporting a child or young person on their own. It is good practice to have another leader or other children in the car. However, if a situation does occur when a leader has to transport a child alone, they should

ensure that other leaders know this is happening and that the child is in the back seat. If possible, parents should be made aware that their child will be in the car on their own with a leader, affording them the opportunity to make alternative arrangements.

Drivers should declare in writing to their insurers that they carry children in their vehicles, and keep a copy of relevant paperwork with their insurance documents.

Seatbelts and child restraints

Organisations or individuals who carry other people's children in cars must make sure they use child restraints for each child carried, or adult seatbelts appropriately. Child restraints are rearward-facing baby seats, forward-facing child seats, booster seats and booster cushions. Seatbelts must be worn for any journey, no matter how short. In Northern Ireland it is legally the driver's responsibility to ensure that seatbelts are worn for all passengers under the age of 14 and in the Republic of Ireland it is the driver's responsibility that seatbelts are worn for all passengers under 17 years old.

Booster seats must be used when travelling by car in line with relevant legislation:

Northern Ireland

Children under 12 years old or less than 4' 5"/135cm in height must use a booster seat.

The exceptions according to the law are:

- ∴ When travelling by a taxi
- ∴ When there are already two booster seats in the back and no room for a third
- ∴ Where there is an 'unforeseen circumstance' eg giving a child a lift home when their parents have not turned up.

Republic of Ireland

Children under 5'/150 cm in height and weighing less than 36 kilograms (generally children up to 11 or 12 years old) must use the correct child seat or booster cushion. The only exception to using a child seat, booster seat or booster cushion is if a child is travelling in a taxi.

Minibuses, buses and coaches

If driving the congregation's minibus(es), drivers must be named on the congregation's insurance policy. Accident/incident report forms and a breakdown logbook should be carried in church minibuses and kept up to date. A first aid kit and fire extinguisher should also be on board and drivers should be familiar with their use.

The law states that it is the driver's responsibility to make sure that each vehicle is in a road-worthy condition before use. Failure to do so may result in the driver being legally liable in the event of any accident. Therefore, each driver must carry out a range of checks to ensure the road-worthiness of the vehicle. If in doubt, the vehicle should not be driven.

In minibuses, children over 3 years old must wear seatbelts or use child restraints if available. In the Republic of Ireland road traffic regulations require the fitting of seatbelts in all forward facing seats in minibuses.

On larger buses and coaches all seated passengers aged 14 years and above must wear seatbelts if they are fitted. The driver must notify passengers when they board that they have to wear their seatbelts and/or signs must be displayed at every seat.

When booking a minibus, bus or coach, make sure it has seatbelts and ask whether child restraints can be provided or whether you can use your own. But be aware that it may not be possible to fit them properly because the seats and seatbelts are different from cars.

Supervision while travelling

Leaders who accompany young people in minibuses/coaches/boats/trains etc should, where possible, sit among the young people and be dispersed in the vehicle. For example, there should be at least one adult travelling in the back of a minibus and preferably near the exit points of the vehicle. Their group members must be in the sight of a leader at all times.

::7.4 RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMMES AND OUTINGS

Churches and organisations can offer a wide range of activities outside church premises. These may include day trips to the seaside, forest parks, theme parks, visits to the cinema, theatre, museums and shopping trips. As well as this, residential programmes often become the highlight of any congregation's youth programme, offering more opportunity to enhance friendships within the group. While recognising the tremendous impact these trips can have on a young person's emotional, physical and spiritual development, the leader in charge ought to note the following:

The Residential Centre

Check your location and accommodation. Ensure that it is adequate for your groups and activity. The centre must have adequate insurance cover for your group and the activities it hopes to engage in. Insurance should in particular cover high-risk activities eg canoeing, rock climbing etc. The centre should inform you of its rules and regulations. Make every effort to be aware of its timetable eg whether it has a lights-out time, meal times, what time it expects the group to arrive and to depart. The centre should provide access to first aid/GP in the event of an emergency. The centre should also provide separate sleeping accommodation for males/females.

Parental Consent

Parents'/carers' consent must be obtained when taking any young person away for a residential or outing. The consent form for special outings /activities /residential programmes should be used (see Section 12).

Before taking a group away, ensure that parents/carers are aware of the following:

- ⚡ The programme/activities their child is encouraged/expected to participate in, especially high-risk activities eg bouldering, canoeing etc.
- ⚡ Whether there will be shopping trips or other free time in town areas and, if so, the level of supervision during such trips.
- ⚡ The names of leaders/helpers accompanying the group and a contact number (Where possible it is advisable to arrange a pre-residential briefing for the parents, giving information and allowing parents an opportunity to meet the leaders/helpers).
- ⚡ The centre telephone number and address.
- ⚡ The group's 'contract' ie what rules the young people will be asked to abide by, and possible consequences if these are broken.
- ⚡ What clothes and other items the young people might be expected to need.
- ⚡ How much pocket money might be sufficient (it is advisable to set a limit on this).
- ⚡ That the names and contact details of all young people and leaders attending a residential/camp etc will be left with a nominated person in the congregation.

Young people

Young people must have parental/carer consent to participate in the residential programme and its named activities. They should be fully informed of the nature of the residential programme, ie what is expected of them. They should never be coerced or forced into any activity with which they are uncomfortable. They should be involved in the drawing up of rules and a contract for behaviour and be made aware of sanctions should they fail to comply.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment will help leaders when planning events, to consider the hazards and risks that the group will come across during the time that the children are in their care.



A risk assessment form should be completed for each outing, residential or community/outreach event eg church auction or Sunday School picnic

(for more information on risk assessment, see Section 9.2).

Checklist

- ⚡ What is the best time to go – time of year, time of week?
- ⚡ How will you get there?
- ⚡ How much will it cost?
- ⚡ Have you completed a risk assessment form? (see risk assessment form in Section 12)
- ⚡ Is the place you are visiting suitable for the age range you are taking?
- ⚡ Is the proposed outing age appropriate, eg is the film, or the theatre show suitable?
- ⚡ Can the venue cater for any children who have special needs?
- ⚡ What food will be provided and will this be appropriate for children who have allergies?

- ⚡ Are there enough leaders?
- ⚡ Is there a good gender mix of leaders (if appropriate)?
- ⚡ Does the outing warrant additional insurance?
- ⚡ Has consent been given by parents/carers? (see special consent form in Section 12)
- ⚡ Has consideration been given to places to stop for refreshments/toilets?
- ⚡ Is there an alternative plan if the venue is weather dependent?

Remember to inform a nominated person from the congregation of your exact location, contact mobile phone number and home contact numbers in case of emergency for all children, young people and leaders (see residential/outing form in Section 12).

When the outing or residential is over, leaders should carry out a review and ask what went really well and what could be improved on.

⚡7.5 CHURCH SLEEPOVERS

Youth groups are increasingly using church halls as overnight accommodation.



Before such a venture is considered, organisers should think through security and safety issues. A risk assessment form is recommended (see Section 9.2).

The following checklist should be used to ensure the accommodation is suitable:

- ⚡ Parental consent must be sought.
- ⚡ Only ground floor accommodation is considered suitable for sleeping.
- ⚡ There should be appropriate male/female segregation and supervision (for ratios see Section 7.2).
- ⚡ Sleeping accommodation for leaders/helpers and young people, where possible, should be separate, but the young people's accommodation ought to be easily accessible.
- ⚡ Leaders/helpers must always avoid staying on their own with a young person. There must always be other leaders/helpers or young people present.
- ⚡ There should be at least one nominated first aider and a complete first aid box.
- ⚡ The accommodation should be suitable for any child attending who has special needs.
- ⚡ There should be adequate mobile phone reception or a landline.
- ⚡ There should be at least two separate routes leading from the sleeping accommodation and out of the building.
- ⚡ Fire extinguishers should be positioned in appropriate and accessible locations.
- ⚡ Doors should be checked for ease of opening in an emergency.
- ⚡ Exits should be clearly marked and unblocked.
- ⚡ Clear instructions in the event of an evacuation should be given to both young people and leaders/helpers.

- ∴ Portable heating appliances should not impede exits and should be turned off during sleeping hours.
- ∴ Leaders/helpers should have torches in case of power failure.
- ∴ There should be a no smoking, no alcohol, drug free rule applied to the premises.
- ∴ A record of sleeping arrangements should be kept detailing the names of children and leaders who stayed over and where they slept.

Once these issues have been considered organisers should only proceed if they are confident that the facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the group.

∴7.6 PHOTOGRAPHS

Since the introduction of the Data Protection Act in 1998, churches must be very careful if they use photographs, videos and webcams of clearly identifiable people.

The following guidelines should be adhered to:

- ∴ Permission (verbal or written) should be obtained of all the people (children and adults) who will appear in a photograph, video or webcam image before the photograph is taken or footage recorded.
- ∴ It should be made clear why that person's image is being used, what use you will make of it, and who might want to look at the pictures.
- ∴ Children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email, phone or postal addresses.
- ∴ When using photographs of children and young people, it is preferable to use group pictures.
- ∴ Carefully consider location and pose.
- ∴ Do not insist that a child participates.



∴ **Obtain a written and specific consent from parents or carers before using photographs on a website.**

Please note that the sample consent form contains a parental consent for use of images of children for general church purposes.

Young people taking photographs of each other

Leaders should encourage young people to be sensible when taking photos or videoing each other, especially if they are to be posted on the internet. Young people should be encouraged to let their friends know if their intention is to post photographs online, giving them the opportunity to object. Young people may need to be reminded that once photographs are on the internet they have no control over where they end up. Organisation leaders may want to include this issue in their code of conduct.

::7.7 WORKING WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS

The church should be a place where all children and their families are welcome.



Organisations within the church have a duty to be inclusive and to provide opportunities for children and young people of all abilities and regardless of any medical conditions or disabilities.

Be informed!

Talk with the parents or carers to find out what a child's specific needs are and how they are normally met at home or at school. Assume nothing and don't be afraid to ask! Some children with special needs may require one-to-one help in a group or organisation; perhaps an extra leader will be needed for this responsibility.

For extra information and advice about working with children who have particular special needs and conditions contact the Taking Care Office. You will find a useful list of websites in Section 12.

Personal care

Children and young people who have a disability can be at greater risk of abuse. They will often require more help with personal care, such as washing, dressing, toileting, feeding, mobility etc, or may have limited understanding and behave in a non-age appropriate way.

If a child needs help with toileting or more intimate care it is important to make sure their dignity is preserved. It is good practice that the same leader as far as possible and the same gender as the child is involved in helping them.

A personal care plan can be drawn up by parents/carers to advise leaders on how to best meet the needs of the child (see Section 12 for an example). Leaders can complete a personal care log (see Section 12 for an example) to record how the needs of the child were met each time they attend the organisation.

Be inclusive!

As far as possible, try to make sure that all children can participate in the activities that you have organised. Try not to rely on one particular method of teaching. For example, a word search is not a suitable activity for a child who is dyslexic; other children may struggle with running or ball games due to poor mobility skills. Biblical teaching can be used to show that we are all different and yet we are all special to God.
