

Safe Church Guide

Parents and Church Members



Introduction

Orange Evangelical Church 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 guide 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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1. Commitment to Safe Ministry

Ministry to children and young people is vibrant and exciting work, and 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 or any of the other Safe Ministry Contacts (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 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 considered
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. For more resources and information about the standards refer to <https://www.ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources/child-safe-standards>

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 Orange Evangelical Church's requirements.

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 is delegated to the OEC Office.

b. Safe Ministry Requirements

A volunteer or paid leader must undertake online Safe Ministry training prior to starting their ministry, followed by refresher course every three years. We use a course run by Safe Ministry Check (<https://safeministrycheck.com.au/>) that presents guidelines for working with children safely, and how to respond if there are any concerns. Equivalent training from other church organisations will be accepted with evidence of completion (eg a certificate) and signing the Leaders Declaration. Every leader must provide details for two referees that can confirm the volunteer is safe to work with children.

It is recommended that all volunteers are a member of a congregation for at least 6 months before undertaking ministry to children or youth. 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**:

- Be committed in the ministries they have been appointed to, being faithful to their appointed tasks and acting in the best interests of those they serve
- Treat children, young people and adults with respect and value and without favouritism
- Commit to ensuring that the spaces and activities they are responsible for are safe and not putting people at significant risk of harm
- Interact with people under their leadership with transparency and integrity, including wise use of electronic communication
- Commit to listen to people's concerns with a willingness to support and help them
- Adhere to OEC Safe Ministry policies and procedures, including the Safe Church Guide relevant for their Ministry area

- Commit to report any concerns or suspicions about harmful behaviours and significant risks to OEC Safe Ministry Contacts

A children's or youth leader **must not**:

- Condone or participate in illegal, unsafe, or abusive behaviour towards anyone, including bullying, physical, sexual, psychological or spiritual abuse, ill-treatment, neglect or grooming
- Ignore, disregard, or trivialise child abuse issues
- Use hurtful, discriminatory, or offensive behaviour or language with anyone.
- Offer young people alcohol, cigarettes, e-cigarettes (vapes) or other drugs
- 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
- Take 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

There are good reasons for this Code of Conduct. Those who seek to abuse children may use group-based activities 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 a Safe Ministry Contact 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 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 1:4 (one leader for every four children) and primary age 1:8 (one leader for every eight 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 consider 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.

Parents or guardians should be asked for information about any physical/medical needs (such as allergies) or safety needs of the children attending children's ministry activities in the initial registration process. For activities where parents are not on site during the ministry program (eg. Adrenalites, youth group), an annual registration is necessary to ensure this information is up to date. These details are processed by the OEC office and will be available to the team leader electronically. 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 are asked to complete a registration form at the beginning of every year

- names, addresses and phone numbers of child and parents,
- name and phone number of a contact person in an emergency,
- important medical information, eg. allergies, disabilities, special diets,
- names of people not allowed to collect the child

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 youth group age (yr 6) sleeping over at events. At these events 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.

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.

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, 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

TOP COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

example, communicating regularly or late at night. Even if a leader's motives are pure, misunderstandings can arise.

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. 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 ENGAGE IN 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. Leaders should not engage in social media friendships due to the lack of transparency in this setting.

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

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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.

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

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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
Phone calls	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 with parental permission.
Text messages	X	For logistical purposes, copying in another leader	For logistical purposes, copying in another leader
Email	X	For logistical purposes, copying in another leader	For logistical purposes, copying in another leader

Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Discord etc)	X	For logistical purposes on church account Not for private messaging	For logistical purposes on church account Not for private messaging
Video calls/ conferencing	Only with parental permission and in a group setting, not one to one.	Only with parental permission and in a group setting, not one to one.	Only with parental permission and in a group setting, not one to one.

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 Thurs 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. 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.

Online Gaming

- Some online gaming platforms, such as Xbox Live and Minecraft have private chat functions. The principles of transparency apply in this space in the same way as other social media.

i. 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 generally 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 Orange Evangelical Church. This will prevent the photographs from being used in other publications and contexts without proper consent. These photos are to be sent to OEC Office (office@oechurch.org.au) and deleted from the photographer's camera as soon as possible.

j. 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 (eg. needing assistance with transport or child-minding). In these situations, leaders need to continue to uphold the principles of transparency and careful interaction with children outside of regular programs. It is strongly encouraged for a ministry leader to document and let their team leader know of occasions where they may be alone with a child outside of the ministry program.

Guidelines for ministering to Years 7-9

It is not appropriate for a youth leader to meet socially with youth in year 7-9 without written or verbal permission from parents and without discussing it with the ministry team leader. 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

Groups

Leaders may choose to meet casually with mixed groups of youth in years 10-12 (eg at Maccas after Church@6:30). While they are not responsible for the youth in these contexts, it is expected that they still have a duty of care to act responsibly. For example, if an adult's behaviour poses a threat to a young person in a social context, a leader should take initiative to ensure the safety of the youth where possible and raise any concerns with a team leader.

In these social contexts, leaders are to continue to apply the principle of transparency with issues such as transport. For example, when driving a youth to Maccas from church, leaders should avoid having one leader in the car with one youth.

Individuals

Leaders may also engage in one-to-one meetings with members of the same gender. These meetings should be in a public place wherever possible, and parents and Ministry Team Leader should be aware of this contact (and its purpose) outside of programmed events.

Safe Ministry Contacts

If you have any questions or require any further information, please speak with the Safe Ministry Coordinator (Karina Blanch).

If you have any safety concerns, get in touch with a Safe Ministry Contact.

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