



Code of Ethics

**A Policy & Procedure Handbook for
Youth and Children's Ministry Workers
involved in Youth and Children's
Activities**

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Code of Ethics Policy & Procedure Handbook

This Code of Ethics has been produced with the aim to protect both the young people that we work with as well as those in Leadership Positions.

To help you understand the application of this Document, please note the following;

- ☒ When the term “Leader” is used it refers to anyone in a leadership position working with Youth or Children at the Elizabeth Church of Christ.
- ☒ When the term “Young Person” is used it refers to anyone aged between 0yrs and 25yrs who attends any Youth or Children’s events at the Elizabeth Church of Christ.

INTRODUCTION

To be a ‘Leader’ in a ministry situation with youth and children is a tremendous privilege. There is both the reward of personal fulfilment, as well as a sense of partnership in the activity of God as He transforms the young people’s lives to whom we minister. Along with this privilege, there is also an awesome responsibility inherent in being a Leader in ministry with youth and children. This document is to help Leaders understand and meet these responsibilities.

Two foundational concepts have guided our understanding of what the responsibilities for Leaders of Elizabeth Church of Christ Youth and Children’s Ministry events ought to be. These concepts are:-

1. Each youth and child is precious, unique, and made in the image of God who loves them infinitely and eternally.
2. Every youth and child has a right to expect that the Elizabeth Church of Christ will provide a secure environment for them where they are safe from exploitation, manipulation, neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

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A: Expectations of Youth and Children's Leaders

Youth/Children's Leaders are expected to be aware of the potential risk for young people involved in youth activities and programmes, and take seriously the need to provide a safe and secure environment for young people where they are safe from exploitation, manipulation, neglect or abuse of a physical, emotional or sexual nature.

At Elizabeth Church of Christ, Youth Leaders are expected to:

- Display the same Christ-like attitude and behaviour which we attempt to encourage or instil in the youth and children in our care
- Model equality of treatment of all youth and children regardless of race, colour, creed, or social status.
- Be involved in Youth Leadership within their local church and supporting the ethos of Elizabeth Church of Christ.
- Treat youth and children with dignity and respect.
- Express as a high priority the giving of time and attention to the youth and children in our care.
- Commit to a process of encouraging, building up, and affirming the work, competencies, and opinions of youth and children.
- Work as part of a team.
- Attend all planning and preparation meetings.
- Attend the whole event/program.
- Pay the cost of event/program attended.
- Accept the authority of the Eldership, Board and Ministers of Elizabeth Church of Christ, in determining policy for the safety of Children/Youth.
- Participate fully in any programme.
- Abide by decisions, policies and guidelines etc made by the Eldership, Board and Ministers of Elizabeth Church of Christ, concerning the Care and Safety of Youth/Children
- Keep matters discussed within the Youth Children's Leadership team confidential.
- Not to develop relationships with young persons or participants in programmes which may compromise your role as a leader, or the integrity of the youth/children's ministry programs.

B. Policies and Procedures Relating to the Care and Supervision of Youth & Children

In order to provide the best possible environment for the youth and children in the care of Elizabeth Church of Christ, the following policies have been formulated.

1. Physical and Moral Health and Safety

- 1.1 The physical environment should always be such that the safety of children and youth is paramount, eg: any electrical equipment used is in safe working order, floors are kept free of slippery surfaces, any food is handled with the utmost care to avoid contamination, poisons (cleaning agents, garden products etc) must be kept out of reach of children/youth.
- 1.2 Any faulty equipment which constitutes a hazard to the safety of the child/youth should be immediately removed, where possible, or its condition reported to the appropriate person, without delay.
- 1.3 Leaders must familiarise themselves with the layout of the building, and the placement of exits. A fire response and evacuation policy should be formalised, and all Leaders and children made aware of it. In the event of a fire, the Leaders first responsibility is to the youth and children - the Leaders will move everyone away from the danger and notify the fire brigade, before making efforts to control the fire within a safe manner.
- 1.4 At least one Leader must have a first aid certificate. Leaders must ensure a well-equipped first aid kit is available at every venue. In the event of an injury to a child or youth, Leaders will attempt to contact the parents. A doctor or ambulance will be contacted before the parents if the situation is urgent. The parents should be kept informed.
- 1.5 Parents/Guardians of young persons should be requested to inform the Leaders of any health problems which might arise during any camp or event activities. For example, a child/youth suffering from asthma may require Ventolin. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that any medication or health maintenance regime is provided and clearly understood. Opportunity for parents to convey this information should be provided on an appropriate form to be updated regularly.
- 1.6 When a young person is travelling in a vehicle driven by a Leader, parents are entitled to expect that the vehicle will be **driven carefully, observing the legal speed limits and road laws, at all times by a fully licensed driver. The car must be road worthy, registered, and insured (minimum third party and property insurance). At no time should there be more passengers in a car than the number of seat belts which are in good working order and available for use.** Anyone who cannot/does not drive responsibly must not transport children. Drivers must give an undertaking to take children/youth directly to and from arranged venues and not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements without parental consent, or informing the activity Leader before hand.

- 1.7 Youth workers and helpers should stick to timetables to the best of their ability. If an activity is running significantly overtime, parents should be telephoned and told as soon as possible of the new anticipated time that their children/youth may be expected to be picked up or delivered home.
- 1.8 **Alcohol must not be consumed during Elizabeth Church of Christ youth activities. The use of drugs, other than those prescribed for medical conditions, is illegal and will not be permitted or condoned. In addition, no Leader is to provide transport if there is any possibility that he/she maybe driving while under the influence of alcohol/drugs.**
- 1.9 Youth Leaders should ensure that any television programme, computer entertainment or video shown as part of the group's activities is suitable in content and appropriate to the age group represented, with due regard to a Christian understanding, as well as understood community norms.
- 1.10 Every youth worker is expected to maintain a high moral code. **Foul or inappropriate language is not to be tolerated.**
- 1.11 Any person who is concerned about the behaviour of any youth worker should refer the matter to one of the Minsters or Elders of the Elizabeth Church of Christ.

2. **Counselling**

When a youth worker is required to provide counselling, the team Leader or another responsible person should always be informed of where they are planning to talk, with whom they are going, for how long, and the purpose of the interaction (it is not necessary to divulge the nature of the discussion, which would breach confidentiality). When counselling a young person, best practice would suggest the advisability of having a third person involved in the session. However, the choice of whether a third person is present and whom that person might be, should be the right of the person being counselled or, at least, by mutual agreement. **In general, Leaders should always work with children/youth in a location with other people present, whether counselling or any other activity.**

Any form of touching (including massage) which could be misinterpreted, either by the one being touched or by an observer should be avoided at all times.

3. **Discipline and Safety Procedures**

This section provides basic standards for maintaining appropriate behaviour and managing inappropriate behaviour, allowing for the obvious differences that will apply when the diversity of age ranges of children/youth in the group is taken into consideration.

Group Leaders will decide upon an appropriate written disciplinary strategy (taking into account the age and developmental stage of the children/youth in the group) which will be made available to parents of group members if requested.

The strategy will include the following requirements:

- At no time will a Leader physically strike a child/youth, with their hand, or any other part of their body or with an implement
- Physical force or restraint shall not be used unless it is believed to be the only means to prevent a child/youth causing injury to himself/herself or another person. In the case where physical restraint must be used, it shall be of a level sufficient to restrain the child/youth without causing them injury.
- In devising a disciplinary strategy, group Leaders will ensure that a child, at no time, be put at physical or emotional risk by the disciplinary action.
- If isolation of the child/youth from the group is included as an option, the child must be isolated within an area which is deemed to be safe and within easy supervision of a least one group Leader, preferably of the same gender as the isolated child.
- In circumstances where the immediate safety of the child/youth and/or other group members permits, the child/youth who is deemed to require a disciplinary action will first receive a warning. This warning will outline to the child/youth the nature of the disciplinary action that will follow if they continue to misbehave.
- At no time will disciplinary action be carried out without adequate explanation being given to the child/youth regarding the reason for action.
- In the event of a child/youth continuing to misbehave, the child/youth's Parent/Guardian will be asked to come and pick the child/youth up from the event. If it is necessary and with parent's permission, a responsible youth leader may take the child/youth home.

4. **Toileting small children**

When a small child needs assistance in toileting, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Where practicable the parent should be responsible for attending to the child.
- If this is not practicable, the child should be encouraged to manage him/herself to the fullest possible extent, according to ability.
- When crèche helpers or other workers must assist a child, another adult helper should be informed upon leaving the activity and upon returning wherever this is possible.
- **No touching, handling or inappropriate action will be tolerated.**

C. Understanding & Responding to Child Abuse Issues

Improper Behaviour

Children and youth have the right to be emotionally and physically safe at all times. It is the responsibility of all adults within the family and the community, including youth Leaders, to preserve this basic right for all children/youth.

1. What is Child Abuse?

The abuse or “neglect” of a child (in South Australia a child is legally defined as a person under the age of 18 years) according to the Children’s Protection Act 1993 means -

1.1 sexual abuse of a child; or

1.2 physical or emotional abuse of the child, or neglect of the child, to the extent that -

- the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, physical or psychological injury detrimental to the child’s well-being; or
- the child’s physical or psychological development is in jeopardy.

Physical abuse occurs when any non accidental act is inflicted on a child which results in injury to the child eg. bruises, burns.

Sexual abuse is any sexual behaviour imposed on a child. This includes any form of sexual touching, exhibitionism and suggestive behaviours or comments.

Emotional abuse is defined as “a chronic attitude or behaviour directed at a child, or the creation of an emotional environment, which is detrimental to and impairs the child’s psychological and/or physical development.”

Neglect refers to any serious omission or commission which jeopardises or impairs the child’s psychological, intellectual or physical development. It is particularly important to be aware of issues of neglect in children under five, as this may result in death or have other serious implications, and also because children in this age bracket do not appear in the public eye.

2. General Comments About Child Abuse

Child abuse happens. Every day children in our community are bruised, beaten, burned, sexually exploited, rejected, belittled, humiliated, shown no love, starved and abandoned.

When a child is abused it is often by someone they know, such as a parent, a care giver, a baby-sitter, or a relative. In most situations, child abuse is not an isolated incident but a pattern of behaviour occurring over a period of time, the effects of which are cumulative.

The effects of child abuse can have deep and long lasting effects on the child, the family and the whole community.

Child abuse occurs in *all social* classes and any location.

Child abuse can be prevented.

Mandated Notification - Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

As a children's/youth leader there is a high likelihood that at some stage you will meet one or more children/youth who have been abused. Children may find it difficult to say that abuse is occurring, especially when they've been told not to tell anyone (as this is often the case). They will, however, often find a way to let you know that something is wrong. You need to know your responsibilities and the correct procedure when this situation arises.

1. What Are Our Responsibilities as Leaders?

Youth Leaders are mandated notifiers. This means by law we have to notify Children, Youth and Family Services when we have reasonable grounds to suspect that a young person is or has been abused or neglected.

Reasonable Grounds may include when:

- A young person tells you they have been abused.
- Your own observations of a young person's behaviour and/or injuries lead you to suspect that abuse is occurring.
- A young person tells you he or she knows someone who has been abused (a young person could actually be referring to him or herself).
- When someone tells you who is in a position to provide reliable information (ie. relative, friend, neighbour, sibling of the child).

2. Why Should We Notify?

- To enable early intervention which will assist the child and their family.
- To prevent further abuse and perhaps even death.
- Because we have a legal obligation to do so.
- Because the well-being of the child is paramount

3. Process for Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Disclosed by a child/youth within the programs of Elizabeth Church of Christ:

If you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a young person has been abused or neglected you must notify Children, Youth and Family Services via the Child Abuse Report Line, which is a 24hr/day service. The number is **13 14 78**.

4. If You Have To Make a Notification To Children, Youth and Family Services:

- You do not have to have proof.
- You are immune from civil liability when you are reporting in good faith.
- You will be required to make a statement of the observations, information, and opinions upon which the suspicion is based.
- You are entitled to receive feedback from Children, Youth and Family Services on how your notification is being dealt with.
- You don't have to decide what happens.

5. **Things To Remember If A Child Discloses Or If You Suspect Abuse:**

5.1 **Support and Reassure The Child.**

- It is incredibly important to be supportive towards the child, and to reassure them that you are glad that they are telling you about this problem.
- Remain calm, and treat the child as you normally would.

5.2 **Do Not Ask Direct and Leading Questions.**

- It is important that you keep any questions very general, for example;
 - Are you all right?
 - Are you having any problems?
- It is not in the child's best interests for you to seek out details or ask direct questions.

5.3 **Treat the Situation with Confidentiality.**

It is in the child's best interests that the issue is kept as confidential as possible i.e. you do not need to tell other group members, nor even other leaders. **You need to inform a Minister or an Elder after notifying Children, Youth and Family Services.**

5.4 **Protect Yourself.**

If you are not of the same gender as the child who is disclosing to you, **you should** involve someone who is of the same gender. eg. "I really want to help but the best way I can help is if is here with us"
See section C. Taking Care of Yourself on page 10.

6. **What Can I Say and Do To Help The Child**

Some suggestions for responding to the child who discloses, include:

- listening to the child;
- controlling expressions of panic or shock;
- expressing your belief that the child is telling the truth;
- using the child's language or vocabulary;
- telling the child that this has happened to other children, and he or she is not the only one;
- reassuring the child that to disclose is the right thing to do;
- emphasising that whatever happened was not the child's fault, and that the child is not bad;
- telling the child that you know some adults do wrong things;
- acknowledging that it is difficult to talk about such things;
- telling the child you will do your best to support and protect him or her;
- indicating what you will do, for example: "I will find out who else can help with this problem. Finding out who else can help is part of my job".

It is important for you to remain calm and in control of your feelings when the child discloses to you. **Your role at this point is to support and reassure the child.**

7. **Do NOT:**

- make promises you cannot keep, such as promising you will not tell anyone (you are required by law to notify suspected child abuse);
- Seek details beyond those that the child freely wants to tell you. Your role is to listen to the child, not to conduct an investigation. Beware of asking any direct questions of the child as this may prejudice any subsequent investigation.

8. **How Do I Approach the Child Whom I Suspect is Being Abused?**

In your efforts to establish whether you have a suspicion on reasonable grounds, your immediate response may be to talk with the child. This may not be advisable, initially, because the child may be afraid to disclose for the following reasons:

- fear of being hurt by the abuser;
- belief that the abuser will go to jail;
- fear that something will happen to him or her, such as: removal from the home
- loyalty to the caregiver and family - no matter how bad the situation may be;
- the child may feel that the abuse is deserved;
- abused and neglected children may be unaware that their situation is not unusual;
- while some children may be relieved by the outlet of talking with a sympathetic adult, others may feel threatened and withdraw

The best action is to ask the child whether he or she is having any problems, but do not pressure the child to respond. Assure the child that you can be approached when he or she needs to talk, and do listen to the child when he or she does attempt to talk with you.

Note: Be aware of asking direct and leading questions as this may prejudice any subsequent investigation.

9. **What Can I Expect From a Child When He or She Discloses Abuse to Me?**

The child may feel:

- **Guilty**
Children often blame themselves for the abuse.
Children often feel guilty for telling someone about the abuse.
- **Ashamed**
Children are often ashamed about the abuse itself, particularly sexual abuse.
- **Confused**
Children are often confused about their feelings for the perpetrator.
- **Scared**
Children are often fearful of the repercussions of telling. They may be scared of the perpetrator, scared that the abuse may re-occur, or that their family will break up.

The child will need reassurance and support

D: Taking Care of Yourself - Protective practices for Leaders

Youth and Children's activities provide an opportunity for young people to develop their relationship with God and with other people, in a friendly, caring and affirming environment. A key responsibility of leaders is to ensure that their relationships with youth are built on integrity and cannot be misconstrued as to their intent. Leaders are therefore expected to adopt "protective practices" to maximise their protection from a misconstrued act. Whilst the following list is by no means exhaustive, it is given as a starting point for leaders to meet this expectation.

1. **DO NOT** engage or let others engage in any of the following:
 - abusive initiation ceremonies
 - forcing young people into macho type activities
 - getting undressed in front of young people
 - invading the privacy of young people whilst they are showering or toileting
 - photographing undressed young people
 - sleeping in a tent or room with one young person
 - rough, physically hurtful or sexually provocative games
 - making sexually suggestive comments about, or to, a young person
 - **inappropriate and intrusive touching, massaging, hugging, cuddling or kissing (a guideline for determining if touching is inappropriate is to ask yourself the question - "could this touching be misinterpreted by the one being touched or even by an observer?")**
 - Scapegoating, ridiculing, rejecting, isolating or taking 'the Mickey' out of a young person

Whilst many of the above may not be legally abusive, they don't belong in Elizabeth Church of Christ activities. They are hurtful, intrusive, set a bad example and don't promote safety.

2. Have an 'open door' policy. Declare all meetings open to parents, and other leaders. Ensure others (young people, parents, friends, or leaders) are with you when in any situation that could be construed as compromising or questionable (eg camping, outings, private interviews, or when transporting young people).
3. If the camp/event/activity involves young people of both genders, ensure that leaders of both genders are present.
4. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. Treat all young people (and others) with respect and dignity befitting their age. Watch your language, tone of voice, and body gestures.
5. **Confront others. Develop a group protocol that allows for leaders to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out to each other any inappropriate attitudes or behaviours. Don't tolerate abusive or inappropriate behaviour - deal with it quickly. If in any doubt to the actions of another leader's behaviour then notify a Minister or an Elder or the Chair of the Board and the State Youth Minister.**

6. Encourage, don't pressure. Be sensitive to each young person's individual capacity for physical activities and protect them from any unwarranted pressure to participate.
7. Encourage young people to trust their own feelings about a leader's behaviour and to assert their right to determine what behaviour they are comfortable with.
8. Respect a young person's privacy. Expect them to respect yours.
9. Develop a healthy lifestyle outside of activities with young people and with adults your own age. Encourage the lonely and isolated leader to do the same.
10. Do not let young people involve you in excessive attention seeking behaviour that is overtly sexual or physical in nature. Be particularly careful with the very needy young person. Redirect the behaviour into 'healthy' activities and provide caring attention before it is asked for.
11. Don't bring individual youth to your room, home, flat, or elsewhere without parental approval and without another adult present.
12. Act your age. Maintain an adult role model with young people. Be friendly, courteous and kind. **You have a position of power and influence. Don't abuse it.**
13. Mixed teams of men and women may provide a safer, healthier climate for the leaders and participants.
14. **When in doubt - ask. One leader's poor behaviour reflects on all leaders. Denial of one's uncomfortable feelings is the single most common behaviour that leaders, friends, parents and children report on after an abuser is finally apprehended** (eg 'We thought something funny was going on but didn't feel right about saying anything'; 'Oh, he's a really good leader with the young people, he couldn't do anything like this. He's so dedicated'; 'I didn't want to make trouble for anyone').
15. Discipline and manage behaviour. Don't abuse. Be clear that when a young person is difficult, it is the behaviour that is 'Not OK', and that the young person is 'OK'. Attack the problem, not the person. Our task is to build self-esteem and not shatter it. Be firm and fair. Avoid favourites and do not give anyone person more attention than the rest of the group. Likewise, avoid concentrating only on disruptive behaviour. Learn disciplining and appropriate behaviour management skills.
16. Encourage open discussion, particularly with older age groups, about what young people like and dislike about your behaviour. Just as you give 'feedback' about how young people behave - invite and reward feedback about how they see you behaving.
17. Don't exaggerate or trivialise abuse issues.
18. Be aware of policies regarding 'Protective Practices' and how to use them. For example, young people have a right to feel safe; there is nothing so awful that you can't tell anyone; select four people you can trust to approach with any problem; complain about abuse until you are heard.

19. Consider doing training for areas like Behaviour Management, Mandatory Reporting etc. Contact the State Youth Minister for further information about suitable courses.

E: Leader Relationships

At Elizabeth Church of Christ we want to encourage healthy, wholesome and safe relationships. We believe that a leader pursuing a romantic relationship with a young person at a Elizabeth Church of Christ is inappropriate and is compromising their position and suitability as a leader. Because of this, Elizabeth Church of Christ has set the following guidelines for Young person - Leader relationships within our Youth/Children's Ministry Programs.

All decisions as to who is eligible to be leader at Elizabeth Church of Christ are at the discretion of the Minister/s, Elder/s. It is expected that all Youth/Children's leaders Elizabeth Church of Christ events support the ethos of Elizabeth Church of Christ.

Leaders

Generally if a leader is having a romantic relationship (going out) or pursuing a relationship with a young person, they are unable to be a leader of youth programs.

The process in dealing with a complaint (of inappropriate behaviour of a youth/children's leader which is not of an abusive or unlawful nature):

If at any time during a Elizabeth Church of Christ Youth/Children's activity there is a complaint to be made against a leader, the process is as follows:

If the conflict or issues can be worked out by approaching the person involved then we encourage this first (Matthew 18:15-17). If this is not possible then make your complaint to a Minister or Elder.

F: Appendix – Available on request

- 1) Torchlight Children's Ministry Policy and Procedure – Draft Only
- 2) MOPS Information & Polices

G: Bibliography

Sections of this Handbook have been adapted from the work of other organisations striving to create safe environments for youth and children.

Adapted from:

Claire Lunnay, "**Duty of Care Handbook**" South Australian Baptist Union July 1997

R Maston, "**Taking Care of Yourself**" Scout Association Child Protection Policy and Training Manual, 1995

Uniting Youth (SA), "**Volunteer Leaders form for Uniting Church Camps, Events and Activities with Young People**", 1997

The Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania, "**A Code for the Protection of Children Within Our Churches**", 1997

H: Agreement Form – Church Copy

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| AGREEMENT FORM FOR YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S LEADERS - Church Copy - |
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1. I recognise that every child/young person has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and to expect trustworthy and responsible leadership.
2. I have read and understood all of the information in the Elizabeth Church of Christ Code of Ethics for Youth and Children's Ministry Workers outlining my role and responsibilities.
3. I commit myself to work within the guidelines laid down in the policy agreement.
4. I realise that I am in a position to be a role model to youth and children and will therefore seek to conduct myself properly at all times.
5. I agree to give priority to attendance at leaders' meetings or training sessions which are a part of the youth and children's programme in which I am involved.
6. I recognise that child abuse is a serious matter and that any suspicions that a child is the victim of any form of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) or neglect should immediately be reported to the Child Abuse Report Hotline. I also understand that if any person in a supervisory or caring role within the leadership team is suspected of abusing a child, this matter will be reported to a Minister or Elder.
7. I understand that any person with any recorded history of any form of abuse of a child is precluded from seeking or accepting any casual or regular supervision and care of youth and children in any Elizabeth Church of Christ Youth/Children's activities or ministries. While this may sound strict, its purpose is to act pastorally not only to the youth and children in our care, but also to the person with the history. It is in that person's interests not to be placed in an area of potential difficulty or in a position where there may be subsequent allegations based on a previous history.
8. I understand that I have a duty to fully disclose anything that might affect my ability to fulfil my responsibility and duty of care in my capacity as a youth/children leader or worker.
9. I agree to:
 - A. Completing a National Police Check
 - B. Attending Mandatory Notification Training
 - C. Attend and complete ongoing leadership training as required

Name (please print):

Signed Dated

(Please sign and keep for your own personal record)