

Chapter 9: Working safely with children

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This chapter deals with the practicalities involved in the safeguarding of children and young people.

Joymount Kirk Session must risk assess its own activities and take reasonable steps to keep children and young people safe from harm generally.

Part of keeping children safe and reducing the likelihood of harm is having clear guidelines in place regarding how activities are organised and run.

The following are relevant considerations:

Keeping a register of children and young people who attend activities in Joymount Presbyterian Church

- Have criteria for membership of the organisation

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- Have a registration scheme for children and young people
- Keep details of young people including address and family contact numbers
- Keep medical details, details of individual needs and emergency contact details

Ratios

Indoors	
Under 2 years	1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years	1 leader to 4 children
4 to 7 years	1 leader to 8 children
8 years and over	1 leader to 10 children
14 years and over	2 leaders to 20 children
Outdoors	
Under 2 years	1 leader to 3 children
2 to 3 years	1 leader to 4 children
4 to 7 years	1 leader to 6 children
8 years and over	2 leaders to 15 children
14 years and over	2 leaders to 20 children

- There must be a minimum of at least two leaders/helpers present at all times no matter how small the group
- Young leaders (aged between 16 and 18) can be counted in the ratios but must not be left unsupervised or in charge

Supervision of children

Children/young people are less likely to experience accidents or incidents if they are supervised properly. Activities should be organised to maximise participation, fun and learning in a way that minimises risk. Ensure that:

- A work schedule is displayed so that everyone knows who is on duty or volunteering in an activity
- Children/young people are not left unattended

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- Adequate numbers of workers/volunteers are available to supervise the activities (best practice would indicate that there are male and female workers/volunteers present to supervise coeducational activities)
- Workers/volunteers know at all times where children/young people are and what they are doing
- Online activities are age appropriate and monitored
- Any activity using potentially dangerous equipment has constant adult supervision
- Dangerous behaviour is never allowed

Physical contact

As a general principle, physical contact should be kept to a minimum between leaders/volunteers and children.

Any contact should always be for the benefit of the child and never for the benefit of the adult.

Adults must behave in a manner at all times in which their behaviour cannot be misconstrued.

Children always have the right to say no or reject any physical contact.

- Touch should be initiated by the child and appropriate to age
- Comforting a child who is upset is fine, for example, by putting your arm round them, as is celebrating with a child, for example, by engaging in a brief hug
- Allow children to carry out their personal care if they can
- Avoid being on your own with a child
- Do not make unnecessary physical contact
- Parents' views on the matter should be respected

Health and safety

The general health and safety of the church environment is the responsibility of Joymount Kirk Session and Committee.

All ministries should be taking place in facilities that are safe and well prepared, and there must be risk assessment and management of all of the below health and safety functions.

This is general safeguarding of all who engage with our church and it is mandatory that these issues are regularly attended to as part of the universal well-being of the community.

It is **not** therefore the remit of the PCI Safeguarding Office to oversee:

- Fire safety
- Water safety
- Building maintenance and security
- First Aid arrangements
- Food safety and hygiene
- Financial safety
- Maintenance of equipment
- Transport arrangements

Accidents and incidents

All accidents, incidents, near misses and safeguarding matters must be responded to immediately. They must be recorded, and held confidentially for future reference. The form for recording any accident or incident are available on the [PCI website](#).

For each organisation/activity that is occurring at least one of the leaders should be trained in First Aid.

The church's First Aid box should remain well stocked and checked for out-of-date products. Additionally, any defibrillator on site should be regularly checked for battery life or tampering.

In the event of any accident or incident, leaders should deal with the immediate risk of further harm first, before attending to paperwork.

Parents/guardians should be contacted as soon as practicably possible.

Accident report forms should be readily available on church premises. These should be fully completed and detail the accident/incident including outlining any injuries or treatment, any witnesses, and including all dates on forms and signatures of those involved and the Leader in Charge.

Consent forms should be up to date, ensuring that all relevant information is gathered at the start of the season of the organisation/activity, and be readily available to consult by leaders during the activity times. They must include information on allergies, medical/other conditions, medications in use, disability and consent for treatment.

It should be made clear that during the season if there are any changes in a child's medical status it is the responsibility of the parent to formally in writing advise the relevant Leader in Charge of the organisation/activity.

If in any doubt about a medical issue contact emergency services.

All potential or actual safeguarding issues must also be shared with the congregation's Designated Person, who will make an assessment of who else needs to know.

Photos

Permission for any images (moving or still) should be sought on the seasonal consent forms (i.e. sought every year a child participates in an organisation/activity).

A generic consent form is available on the [PCI website](#).

It is good practice that children, when able, also sign their form of consent for use of their images.

The form must make clear who will be taking images, for what purpose, where these will be shared and how the individual will dispose of them.

It is preferable to use group pictures. However, leaders must be cognisant of the following:

- Are there any looked after children for whom sharing their location would make them unsafe?
- Are there any adopted children (as above)?
- Are there any issues of domestic abuse that would put a family at risk if they were located?

Do not identify children by name or other personal details. Be especially mindful of this in relation to livestreaming. Please consult Chapter 11: Online safety

Carefully consider the location of the images and the pose of the children.

Do not insist that a child or young person participates in any images.

Activities and general safety

General health and safety is not the remit of the safeguarding office; however, it is noted that the premises management and the policies and procedures of the local church must be up to date and fully understood by all in a position of leadership, to ensure the general safety of all children and young people.

Risk assessment is the key measure to ensure that all considerations have been given to any events, activities or organisations that are working with children and/or young people. See Chapter 13 on risk.

There should be a generic risk assessment available that is reviewed annually. This is the responsibility of Joymount Kirk Session/Committee.

Each organisation/activity should then have its own individual risk assessment for their specific activities; these should be shared with the church committee.

These are living documents that are kept up to date and are fully reviewed at least annually.

As a general guide, churches should ensure that all hazards are identified, alongside an assessment of risk and the control measures in place to mitigate the risks.

We can never remove all risks, but must make every reasonable effort to minimise them. Any unmanaged risk of harm to a child or young person will require an organisation/activity to cease until the matter can be addressed.

Residentials

All residentials (including church-arranged sleep-overs) need to be well planned in advance.

Booking systems with consent forms outlining the specific activities and arrangements must be gathered in advance.

All those children or young people attending must have consent or they cannot attend.

The church must ensure that the location has adequate insurance cover and that it has advised its own insurers of the planned residential.

A risk assessment should be completed in advance of the trip.

The Designated Person of Joymount Presbyterian Church must be aware of the trip.

Leader to children/young person ratio should be robust.

Sleeping arrangements should be made clear in advance of the trip.

There must be a plan if the group is an older teenage group consisting of young adults both under and over 18 years old. Eighteen-year-olds are by law adults and should not be sharing sleeping arrangements with children. However, no one young person should be singled out so advance planning is required.

Consent forms

Consent forms are required for all routine activities and any one-off activity Joymount Presbyterian Church is holding for children/young people.

It is vital to find out all relevant information such as contact details, use and administration of medicines etc. Parents are used to filling in these forms for schools and sports clubs – we in the church are no different and we need to know how to keep their individual children safe.

It is critical that Joymount Presbyterian Church has a system for the collection, safekeeping and access of this documentation. It should be destroyed at the end of the season and consent should be gathered afresh at the start of a new season.

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Consent forms are not transferable; each organisation/activity must have its own consent form. This is because:

- no two activities/organisations are engaged in the same events
- there should be restricted access to the forms for each set of leaders, who may need to consult them in the event of an emergency

Information in the consent forms is the responsibility of the parent(s) first and foremost – they must fill them in completely and they must sign and date them and provide their details accurately.

If there is no consent form the child cannot attend the activity. Joymount Presbyterian Church leaders should therefore make every attempt to engage with the parents/guardians of the child to ensure that this is not a barrier to their engagement.

Joymount Presbyterian Church should remain mindful that not all parents can read and write easily.

It would therefore be wise to have a system to support parents to fill the forms in; for example, a soft start evening in which tea and coffee is available for parents, treats for the children, and leaders and helpers present to complete the writing where needed.

Ensure that written consent for photographs forms part of this document, as above. A generic consent form is available on the [PCI website](#).

Communication

Communication with young people

Safe communication with young people is vital in order that they are kept safe from harm and that the actions of leaders can never be misconstrued.

Most young people use social media and messaging forums for large amounts of communication and the good practice guidance on this matter is issued as above.

Communication should always be purposeful and connected to the role and responsibility of the adult leader.

Communication should be open and transparent; parents should be generally aware that their child is engaged in communication with church leaders. Their views on this should be sought and consent given alongside that of their child.

Leaders must ensure that they never give the impression they can keep secrets; this is throughout our safeguarding practices and young people need to know that the leader will have to act if they become concerned about risk or harm at any point in any communication.

Communication should never be an option for only one young person; this should never be an exclusive arrangement. (*See below regarding one-to-one mentoring*)

It is never appropriate to communicate outside of structured activity times with any child under the age of 15.

Please see Chapter 10: Voice of children and young people

Please see Chapter 11: Online safety

Communication with parents/carers

Parents/carers are primarily responsible for their children; leaders should never make significant decisions that would impact a child without consulting with parents.

Leaders should never assume a parent's views on something, and should always respectfully enquire.

Leaders should remain mindful if a child is in foster or residential care – those foster parents/carers often need to consult a social worker before some decisions can be made. Such families need to be given enough advance notice to make some activities possible.

Parents are responsible for advising leaders of any conditions or changes that are significant to a child attending an organisation as the season progresses.

Parents should be clear who the leaders are, including the Leader in Charge of the organisation or activity.

Parents should be clear who the church's Designated Person is, and how to contact them.

Leaders should ensure that parents are advised of all accidents and incidents, no matter how short-lived they were.

Communication with parents about any issues is best done face to face with the Leader in Charge and another leader present. It is not appropriate to communicate significant issues via messaging forums.

Holiday Bible Clubs (HBC)

Holiday Bible Clubs require additional consideration; they are usually a one-off event during the summer months and are widely open to the local community. They can also involve a large influx of children not known to the church.

HBC need to be planned in advance with regard to managing leadership, consent and managing risks.

Leaders

All HBC leaders need to be recruited and vetted as per usual processes in advance of the event.

This is the responsibility of Joymount Presbyterian Church (the hosting church); therefore, if leaders are joining together from several churches or from several denominations, it remains the responsibility of the hosting church to take the lead in safeguarding processes. The hosting church must secure all vetting checks and be confident that training has been adequate.

Leadership must match safe ratios; it is at times difficult to predict attendance and the potential for several children with additional needs attending. It is always better to be over than under with leadership.

HBC leaders should be able to access some back-up people (usually Elders) whom they can call if required. Note that anyone who is asked to help out last minute and, in an emergency, must also be properly vetted.

It is important to keep accurate registration details and consent forms.

Consent

As in the above section on same, and as per all activities, consent must be gained for all children in attendance.

This can be complex as during HBC times it is often the case that children will arrive without being accompanied by an adult.

There is no desire to turn them away and that runs contrary to the mission of the HBC.

- Try advance 'booking' systems including a brief 'open morning' to encourage consent forms filled in in advance
- Have forms available outside the venue in the car park – have a station outdoors for filling them in and ask leaders to be proactive in approaching those adults dropping children off
- In all publicity, ensure that the need for completing a consent form is highlighted along with all the ways in which this can be done
- Send forms and a brief explanation note home with children

Managing Risks

As a one-off event there should be an individual risk assessment for any HBC. They are unique in the life of Joymount Presbyterian Church.

One of the outcomes of this will include ensuring that the local Designated Person is aware of the HBC and is available that week to manage any safeguarding concerns.

One-to-one mentoring and working

Overall, the preferred manner for any leader to engage with any young person is in group settings with at least two leaders present.

Such individual mentoring has the potential to make the child/young person more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust.

Adults working in these situations with young people may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them.

Both possibilities should be recognised so that reasonable and sensible precautions are taken.

It is acknowledged that one-to-one ministry has developed over the time of Covid between youth leaders and young people.

The fundamental principle, both in legislation and in recognised good practice, is that whenever the interests of young people are involved, their welfare must always be paramount.

To that end, one-to-one mentoring and working can occur but only in specific circumstances:

- One-to-one mentoring can only occur with children aged 15+
- It should involve transparency and anyone engaging in it should adhere to the PCI Code of Conduct
- Joymount Kirk Session must be aware of the arrangement and approve of it
- The adult mentor can only be an established youth volunteer/leader who has been through the full recruitment and vetting process
- A fresh vetting check should occur before mentoring commences
- Consent must be gained from the child's parent/guardian
- The consent must clearly document the expected frequency, location, length of session, general purpose of the session and expected outcome of the sessions, demonstrating when they will cease
- Any changes to the original agreement must be discussed and agreed with the parents/guardian of the young person
- The venue must always be a public space; it can never be the leader's own home or an empty church building, for example
- Boundaries should be explicitly discussed with the young person including clearly demonstrating the area of confidentiality and the parameters to this

Diversity

Children and young people may experience diversity in culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, religion and sexual orientation in early years.

We can only safeguard children and young people holistically if we remain mindful of the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Meaningful safeguarding will seek to understand and include all children who engage with our ministries. Child abuse can affect children and young people from any background.

Joymount Kirk Session should ensure that when they are considering their child protection policies and procedures they take into consideration the diversity within the congregation, organisations and ministries, and seek to overcome any perceived or actual barriers that exist for children and young people being able to talk openly about their experiences.

Please also see Chapter 10: The voice of children and young people

Additional needs (special educational needs)

In NI, children and young people with special educational needs are assessed to ascertain if their ability to take part in, and benefit from, education is restricted, due to a continued physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability. Many churches provide important services and supports to these children and their families.

When Joymount Presbyterian Church provide these ministries they should understand that there are extra barriers for safeguarding some children and young people with additional needs, which must be overcome.

Children and young people with additional needs may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- find it difficult to tell others what is happening
- have reduced capacity to resist or avoid abuse because of developmental age or incapacity
- lack knowledge about sex and sexuality
- be assumed to lack credibility as witnesses
- receive intimate personal care that may both increase the risk of abusive behaviour, and make it more difficult to set and maintain physical boundaries
- have fewer outside contacts
- be especially vulnerable to bullying and intimidation
- be more frequent users of the internet

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It is critical that our organisations / ministries are inclusive for all children and young people as far as possible. This is recognised to be complex in our voluntary situation, when finding and keeping appropriate leaders for activities is under pressure. It may be at times that additional personnel are required to ensure that a ministry can run safely seeing to the needs of all the children present.

The strongest way to safeguard children and young people with additional needs is to get to know them and their families.

Understand as well as possible what it is like for them to engage in the local ministries and activities.

Remember that children with additional needs are not defined by a disability only; they also may be experiencing issues related to diversity, their stage (e.g. puberty), their gender, their mental and emotional health, and critically the same struggles with their faith.

Meaningful engagement and communication with children, young people and their families is critical.

Be aware and plan for a child with additional needs beyond their 18th birthday. This is a point of transition between children and adult safeguarding arrangements.

There may be a request to allow the individual child to remain in the children's ministries they have attended and enjoyed for so long. This can, however, put pressures on the leadership team and cause tensions with other parents and has led to a number of safeguarding issues.

Work alongside families and leaders in preparation for this time, and ensure that decisions and preparation is made in an open and transparent manner with all.

Intimate care

Consider the child or young person's individual needs by ensuring that there is appropriate consultation with parents/guardians and children and young people. Consent should be sought for any agreed intimate or personal care practices. Consideration should be given to matters such as appropriate levels of physical contact, how to communicate with the child or young person and keeping parents/guardians appropriately informed. (*See broader intimate care guidance.*)

Supporting our junior leaders

It is critical that we remember that junior leaders are still, under legislation, children (to the age of 18) and should be protected as such.

It is critical that we do not put them into any situation in which they could come to harm or be at risk of allegations.

This applies no matter how well we believe we know a young person, nor how capable they appear to be.

All junior leaders aged 16 and 17 should be formally recruited as per the policy (see Chapter 6) and adequately trained (see Chapter 8).

Any child aged 15 who is coming along to help needs to be supported to understand safe behaviours with children before they engage in any helping activities.

It is the responsibility of the Leader in Charge of the organisation to make sure this has occurred, and Joymount Kirk Session must be assured of the same.

The Designated Person should be made aware of all junior leaders aged 15 to 18 who are engaged in children's ministries.

Junior leaders should never be left alone during activities.

If there has been any accident or incident during an activity and junior leaders have been present or involved, the Leader in Charge of the organisation should ensure, as part of the processes afterwards, that the junior leaders get some time to debrief and talk about what has happened.

As with all leaders, not all young people are automatically skilled to work with children.

It is important that we don't assume that all young people want to, or can, work with children.

We must support all young people to find the best places in our ministries as they grow.

We must ensure that as soon as there are any issues they are addressed openly and transparently with the junior leader, and as they are children, with their parents or guardians.

Use of premises by others or other organisations

Joymount Presbyterian Church allow the use of church premises for uniformed and non-uniformed activities, many of which are provided by third parties. The church may itself use other organisations' premises.

When using facilities or services provided by another organisation it is important to clarify and agree which organisation's reporting procedures for child protection or welfare concerns are being followed. There will be occasions where two or more organisations come together to collaborate or work in partnership and it is important to clarify child protection arrangements.

CHAPTER END