



Child Protection Council
Safeguarding Children and Young People


Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie

Best Practice Guidelines

For Diocesan Clergy, Religious, Employees and
Volunteers Interacting with Children and Young People

Safe Environments For All: A Church where God's children can flourish,
where all are welcomed, valued and respected





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Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to inform all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers of the Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie about their interactions with children and young people, to ensure these are respectful, safe and underpinned by best practice principles. These guidelines help to raise awareness, maintain professional boundaries and promote positive relationships in ways that do not compromise children and young people's welfare.

Following these guidelines will not only enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people in the Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie but will also help ensure that the Diocese creates a welcoming environment where children and young people feel respected, cared for and heard.

Background

Diocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers often interact with children and young people on a regular basis. Children and young people have a right to feel safe and be safe and protected at all times and it is the responsibility of the Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie to uphold these rights whenever they participate in church based activities. The Diocese also has a duty of care towards clergy, religious, employees and volunteers, and aims to ensure that all individuals are aware of how to interact with children in a way which keeps both children and young people and themselves safe. This is known as 'protective practice' and it is a way of preventing behaviours that are abusive, could lead to abuse, could be seen as abusive, or could be harmful to children and young people.

Legislation

The guidelines set out in this document are in accordance with the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*(chapter 5, part 1), which states that certain non-government organisations, including those providing religious or spiritual services wholly or partly for children, have a duty to ensure the protection of children and young people through the development, implementation, monitoring and review of appropriate policies and procedures to establish and maintain child safe environments.

Scope

These guidelines apply to all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers of the Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie who engage with children or young people within the Church community. The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount and should be a priority in our interactions with them at all times.

Children and parents may be provided with a copy of these guidelines so that they know what is expected of Diocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers. This empowers children, young people and their parents/ caregivers to recognise abusive behaviours and raise concerns if they feel these guidelines are not being adhered to.

Children and Young People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs

Some children and young people are particularly vulnerable to abuse due to disability, other special needs or their background, and extra care may need to be taken to avoid risk of harm to these children. At times children and young people with disabilities may exhibit challenging behaviours, including sexualised behaviours, which can make ensuring appropriate interaction more difficult. Whilst these guidelines apply in all circumstances and for all children and young people, persons working with children with disability or special needs may contact the Child Protection Council for further guidance and support.

Children and Young People from Different Cultural Backgrounds

The Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie recognises the importance of implementing principles which are culturally competent and sensitive. The diversity of culture is acknowledged, respected and reflected in our approach to interacting with children and young

people. The Best Practice Guidelines aim to ensure the protection of all children and young people through practices which are open, transparent and safe. The Child Protection Council can provide guidance and support if you have any queries about applying these guidelines in a particular cultural community or setting.

Definitions

Children

Persons under 18 years of age. Term may be used interchangeably with 'children and young people' in this document.

Safeguarding

Practices which help to support and protect the health, development and wellbeing of children and young people, including supporting families to provide safe and appropriate care, implementing practices which minimise the risk of harm, and responding appropriately if abuse or neglect of children is disclosed, discovered or suspected.

Child Safe Contact Person

A nominated first point of contact in a parish for concerns about a child, young person or family.



Guideline 1: Physical Contact

Physical contact is important for children – it can help to keep them safe, provide comfort, and enhance the quality of adult-child interactions. Holding a child's hand to cross the road, picking up a crying toddler, or placing an arm around a distressed child or teenager are all appropriate ways of meeting children's physical and emotional needs when the circumstances require it. In some instances however, physical contact with children has been used as a way of grooming for sexual abuse, or has been abusive in itself.

These guidelines are intended to define appropriate physical contact with children, and to keep children safe while also helping our church to remain a welcoming and responsive environment for children and young people.

Do

- ✓ **Use appropriate physical contact to comfort and connect with children and young people, or to keep them safe.**

Examples of appropriate physical contact include:

- A pat on the back
- Holding a hand when crossing a road or to otherwise ensure safety or guide (young child)
- A high five
- Picking up or hugging a distressed young child or young child seeking comfort
- Placing an arm around a shoulder or a pat on the back to comfort a distressed child or young person
- Administering first aid when a child is injured
- Assisting when a child seeks help

- ✓ **Always ask children and young people for permission before initiating physical contact.**
- ✓ **Be alert to and respect signs of discomfort such as shying away, squirming or withdrawing.** Children have a right to determine their own physical boundaries.
- ✓ **If taking a child to the toilet or changing a nappy is necessary,** always discuss this with another appropriate adult beforehand and if possible have another adult accompany you. Inform the child's parent/caregiver as soon as possible that this was necessary, after the event/activity is over. Where possible change nappies in view of another adult. Take children to the toilet in groups of two or more children or have another appropriate adult accompany you.

Do Not

- ✗ **Do not use physical contact in a way that is not necessary, not age appropriate and/or does not meet the needs of the child or young person.**

Examples of inappropriate physical contact include:

- Tickling games
- Kissing
- Rough play
- Pulling or encouraging a child onto your lap when the child has not initiated this contact, or keeping them on your lap longer than necessary to comfort or help them.
- Full body or prolonged hugging (a hug involving only the upper body may be appropriate if a child is distressed, seeking a hug, or briefly as a form of greeting or congratulations).

- ✗ **Do not use any form of corporal punishment.**
- ✗ **Do not restrain a child or young person physically** unless this is necessary to ensure their immediate safety or the immediate safety of other people.
- ✗ **Do not assist children with physical tasks that they are old enough to do alone** unless they ask for assistance. For example, never physically assist a child in toileting unless absolutely necessary and, where it is, this should be done in the presence of another adult.
- ✗ **Do not have any type of sexual interaction with a child or young person under the age of 18.** Such behaviour is legally defined as sexual abuse.

How to respond if a child or young person is seeking physical contact that is not appropriate

If a child is frequently seeking physical contact that is not appropriate, such as full body hugging, excessive touching or touching genital areas, this may be reflective of difficulties or even abuse. Gently redirect the child or young person to appropriate physical touch (as suggested below) and report suspected abuse to the Child Abuse Report Line **(13 14 78)** and to the Child Protection Unit **(8210 8159)**.

Explain to a young child that they can sit next to you and hold your hand rather than sit on your lap.

Hug only with your upper body if a child is seeking a hug.

Explain that certain behaviour is for family and other people that we are very close to and suggest an alternative.

For older children explain that there are rules about physical contact to keep everyone safe. You could ask them and help agree to an alternative with which they are happy, e.g. "we have rules about hugging because not everyone feels comfortable with being hugged, would you feel okay if I put my arm around your shoulder instead?"

Establishing appropriate physical boundaries models to children that they too have a right to say no to physical contact and to determine their own level of comfort.



Guideline 2: General Interacting with Children and Young People

It is important that, in the course of performing official duties, a positive example is set for children and young people, which models kindness, compassion, and respect. Abide by the same rules of behaviour that you expect of children and young people.

Do

- ✓ **Ensure that children and young people know that they have a right to be safe and feel safe at all times and that they can say 'no' if they don't feel comfortable doing something.**

Ways to communicate this could be:

- ♣ **Verbal** e.g. a standard announcement at the start of an activity
- ♣ **Visual** e.g. a poster on the wall of an activity Venue
- ♣ **Written** e.g. part of a permission/consent form or information leaflet

- ✓ **Work in pairs of adults or in clear view of another responsible adult.** Avoid being alone with a child or group of children. If it is not possible to have another adult present try to ensure children are in a group.

- ✓ **Be open and transparent.** Always communicate with another responsible adult and/or the parent/caregiver of the child, particularly in situations where being alone with a child may be unavoidable.

Consider:

- ♣ The physical environment – keep doors open or choose a space that has windows, glass panels or provides a direct line of sight, to ensure clear visibility in the area. **Never lock doors.**
- ♣ Seeking parental permission, making it clear if you will be alone with the child.
- ♣ Giving parents/caregivers as much information as possible about where you will be situated and the purpose of the contact/activity.

- ✓ Ensuring you can be contacted by a parent/caregiver and that the child is able to contact their parents/caregivers at all times.

- ✓ **Treat all children with equal respect and compassion.** All children deserve to feel valued and accepted regardless of their gender, race, cultural background, disability/abilities or sexuality.

Do not

- ✗ **Do not discriminate against children** due to their gender, race, cultural background, disability or sexuality.
- ✗ **Do not single a particular child young person out repeatedly for attention**, either positively (favouritism) or negatively.
- ✗ **Do not use power or influence** to get children or young people to do things they would not otherwise do or could be uncomfortable with, or to intimidate, scare or control children and young people.
- ✗ **Do not make sexually suggestive comments** towards or in the presence of children or young people, even in jest.
- ✗ **Do not carry out your role with children or young people while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.** Do not use drugs (other than prescription medication being used as directed) in the presence of children and young people.
- ✗ **Do not supply children or young people with alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs¹.** If you are a smoker, please ensure you smoke away from children and young people. It is never appropriate to serve or consume alcohol at an event specifically for children and young people, but if children and young people are present or part of an event at which alcohol is served, ensure responsible consumption is practiced by all adults.
- ✗ **Do not make statements (including on social media) or act in a way that condones, or appears to condone, drug use, smoking or excessive alcohol consumption.** Modelling safe and responsible behaviour is important.

¹ It is an offence to supply alcohol, cigarettes, other tobacco products or any illicit or controlled drugs to any person under the age of 18.





Guideline 3: Consent

Seeking parent or caregiver consent for any activities involving children and young people is important, not only to keep them safe but also to build respectful relationships with families. Open and transparent communication is an essential element of a child safe organisation and helps children, parents and caregivers to feel valued, heard and able to speak up if they have any concerns.

With increasing awareness and education about child abuse we now have a greater understanding of the need to seek consent for some things that we may not have in the past, such as taking and sharing photographs or engaging children in discussions which may be sensitive. The reasons for needing this consent are varied and include protecting families who have fled domestic violence, keeping children safe from online predators and recognition of children that may have experienced or currently be experiencing trauma or abuse.

Do

- ✓ **Ensure you have permission from parents/caregivers for any activities that involve any risk to children or that require consent.** This includes but is not limited to: transport, taking or sharing photographs of children, activities which present a physical risk or activities which present an emotional risk e.g. sharing personal experiences.
- ✓ **Obtain generalised permission slips from parents/caregivers at the beginning of each year to cover any impromptu occasions where children may attend and be photographed.** This ensures that necessary permissions are in place and do not have to be sought each time that an occasion of this kind arises.
- ✓ **Where it is age appropriate, seek verbal consent from children and young people themselves before engaging them in an activity.** Always respect a child's wish not to engage in a particular activity or discussion.

Do not

- ✗ **Do not take or keep photographs of a child on your personal device.¹**
- ✗ **Do not publish or distribute photographs or images of children and young people** without first seeking permission from parents or caregivers.
- ✗ **Do not publish or distribute full names or contact details** of children without permission from parents or caregivers.

¹ This rule applies generally to all staff and volunteers but it is recognised that there will be instances where the child is a relative of the adult. It is not intended that these guidelines would apply to prevent, for example, parents and grandparents (and possibly other relatives) having and sharing photos of loved ones, in the context of appropriate consent (as outlined above).

Guideline 4: Social Media and Other Digital Communications

Electronic communications and social media offer many positive opportunities for interacting and communicating with children and young people, an example being the Twitter account used by Pope Francis. It is reasonable that Diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers may want and need to utilise mobile phones, internet and social media in their ministry but it is important that this is done in a way that protects children and young people as well as the individual. Boundaries are important, as is transparency and positive role modelling.

Do

- ✓ **Consider that comments or pictures posted online may be seen by children and young people or their parents / caregivers even if settings are private.** Ensure that communication sets a positive example by being respectful of others, not promoting illegal or abusive behaviours, and not discussing the children or young people you work/volunteer with online.
- ✓ **Use official parish, organisation or group social media pages as an effective and transparent way of communicating with children, young people and their parents / caregivers.** Ensure that any online posts relate to the Church, organisation or group business.
- ✓ **Respond appropriately if inappropriate contact through social media or text message is initiated by a child or young person.** Explain respectfully that you cannot communicate with them this way and suggest appropriate alternative ways to interact. If the inappropriate contact persists, discuss this with the Child Protection Council and keep a record of any communications that occur.

Do Not

- ✗ **Do not interact with or befriend children or young people via a personal social media account, other personal online account, or via individual text message.** Group text messages, parish or group social media accounts, or messages to parents are good alternatives.
- ✗ **Do not post information (names, contact details, personal information) about children or young people you are engaged with through church activities, on social media.** Seek parental permission before posting pictures of children on social media or the internet.





Guideline 5: Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries

Volunteering or working for the church may be different from working or volunteering for another organisation because it is likely you were part of the church community prior to beginning your work or volunteering role. This means that you are likely to know at least some of the children and young people you are working or volunteering with, and there may be times when it is appropriate to interact with them outside of your work or volunteer role. It is however important to maintain appropriate boundaries to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both children and adults.

Do

✓ **Continue any appropriate relationship/role** that you had with a child or young person or their family prior to commencing your official role in the Church, e.g. a family friendship. If you begin a friendship with a family whose child you are involved with via your role please discuss this with the Child Protection Council to clarify the boundaries between your official role and any social interactions you may have with a family.

✓ **Interact with children and young people at Church and organisational events** in the presence of other responsible adults, including parents/caregivers.

✓ **Be open, transparent, and inform others if you feel there is a need to extend/adapt your official role with a child or young person, or their family, beyond what is in your original role description.** This may be appropriate if a child, young person or family is at risk or needs particular support. In this instance any meetings or home visits should involve more than one responsible person and should be carefully planned and documented.

✓ **Keep your interactions within the scope of your role.** If in doubt about whether an interaction is within the scope of your role, refer to your position description. Remember that some issues or concerns raised by children and young people or their parents may be better addressed by a professional such as a psychologist, social worker or health professional. The Child Protection Council can offer advice on referring children and families to appropriate services and ensuring the safety of the child or young person.

Do not

✗ **Do not deliberately pursue interaction or a relationship with a child or young person beyond your official role (other than continuing established relationships as discussed above).** Accepting or extending invitations by or to children to external social events, arranging to meet a child or young person one on one, or offering to care/babysit for a child, are not appropriate interactions if you have come to know the child or young person or their family through your official role. If you feel there are special circumstances that require you to engage with a family or child in such a way, please contact the Child Protection Council to discuss the situation in advance.

✗ **Do not engage in any sexual contact with a child or young person under any circumstances.** It is not possible to have any type of romantic contact between a child and an adult – any sexual interaction between an adult and a child is abuse. This is not limited to physical interaction and includes acts such as showing children pornography, encouraging a child or young person to engage in sexual activity, and verbally interacting with a child in a sexual manner. particular support. In this instance any meetings or home visits should involve more than one responsible person and should be carefully planned and documented.



Guideline 6: Transporting Children and Young People

Transportation of children and young people is not encouraged but may at times be necessary to support children or young people in getting to or from an activity, or as part of an activity. If children are transported by Diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, it is important that both their physical safety, and the risk of abuse is considered. The following points are designed to cover both.

Do

- ✓ **Ensure the vehicle is registered, roadworthy and in safe condition, and that you have a current drivers licence.**
- ✓ **Travel with another responsible adult in the vehicle.** If this is not possible inform at least one other adult and try to ensure more than one child is in the car. If more than one car is involved, travel in convoy in visible sight. If possible, inform the person at the destination when you depart so that they know when to expect your arrival.

- ✓ **Seat children/young people in the back seat** of the vehicle.
- ✓ **Obtain permission from parents/caregivers to transport children/young people.** Written permission is preferable but, at minimum, obtain verbal permission. The only exception would be if a child would be at risk of harm if the transport did not occur, and it is not possible to reach a parent or caregiver to obtain consent.
- ✓ **Discuss details of the transport with a parent/caregiver** e.g. departure time and anticipated time of arrival and who else will be in the vehicle.
- ✓ **Inform another responsible adult** (in addition to the parent/caregiver) when you leave, and again when you return (this can be via phone or text message, or in person).
- ✓ **Follow road rules at all times** when transporting a child or young person, including regulations regarding seatbelts and child seats and speed limits.





Guideline 7: Responding to Allegations, Disclosures or Concerns about Child Abuse or Neglect

All Diocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are mandated notifiers as per the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, and for those engaging directly with children this responsibility is particularly important. As well as a mandatory requirement to report suspicion of abuse and neglect, we also have an ethical / moral and pastoral care obligation to report any concerns about children and young people. This includes concerns about the behaviour or conduct of other Diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers towards a child or young person.

The church is often a closely connected community in which adults have established personal relationships. It can be hard to believe that someone liked and trusted could abuse children. Questioning or reporting the conduct of an individual who may be a friend, co-worker or volunteer can feel very uncomfortable, particularly if you are not sure whether abuse has occurred. Unfortunately this discomfort has in the past protected abusers, and children have remained in situations where they have been harmed.



Do

✓ **Attend a 'Safe Environments for Children and Young People' training session to ensure you are familiar with the signs and indicators of child abuse and neglect, and how to respond and report.** Contact the Child Protection Council if you have not yet undertaken training.

?? **Contact the Child Protection Council for advice** if you become aware of other Diocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers not adhering to these Best Practice Guidelines.

?? **Listen to and support a child or young person if they disclose abuse or neglect to you.** Where possible, mask your own emotions to ensure the child/young person does not become distressed by your reaction. Tell the child or young person that you may have to tell someone what they have told you because you want to help to keep them safe. Tell them that abuse is never okay and that it is not their fault.

?? **You must make a report to the Department of Child Protection (13 14 78) or SA Police (13 14 44) if you believe a child or young person has been abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect.** Refer to the 'Procedure for Mandatory Notification Responsibilities'.

?? **Believe children and young people if they disclose abuse or neglect.** Children rarely lie about being abused and disclosing is a sign of trust that must be upheld for that child to continue to feel safe and heard by adults. Even if you are in doubt, contact the Child Protection Council and err on the side of caution.

?? **Contact and consult with the Child Protection Council if you are concerned about a child or young person.** Even if you don't think you need to make a notification to the Department for Child Protection or SAPOL, there may be other supports that can be put in place to assist a child or family.

Do Not

✗ **Do not hesitate to report abuse** or to contact the Child Protection Council to discuss concerns should you believe someone is acting in a way that indicates they are a risk to children. Individuals who abuse children are often 'charming' and can be trusted members of the community who are seeking opportunities to have direct contact with children particularly in organisations which do not have appropriate policies and guidelines in place. If there is any concern at all it is better to discuss this with an expert to determine whether there is genuine reason to be worried.

✗ **Do not investigate allegations or disclosures of child abuse yourself.** While it may be necessary to try to find out more information, such as a child's full name and address, for the purposes of making a report to SAPOL or the Department of Child Protection, remember that it is not your role to determine whether the concern, allegation or disclosure is true or not.

✗ **Do not promise a child you will keep what they have told you a secret.** If a child discloses abuse or neglect, or something that makes you believe they are at risk of harm, you are obliged by law to report it. Making promises you are unable to keep may damage a child's trust in adults and prevent them from making further disclosures.

✗ **Do not ask leading questions of a child, even if you believe they have been abused or neglected.** Keep your questions open ended in order to allow the child to take the lead, and to ensure you do not compromise any current or future investigations by SAPOL or the Department for Child Protection.

✗ **Do not ignore the signs of child abuse.** Children need adults to speak out for them because they often cannot speak up for themselves. Many children have been made safer because an adult observed and reported abuse. Reporting any concerns to the relevant authority is an important part of our pastoral care of children and young people.





Contact us:

The Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie Child Protection Council shares the responsibility for all safeguarding matters in the Diocese and is staffed by professionals who have experience in working with children and young people.

Contact the Council by phoning **0429 333 720** for further guidance, advice and support.







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