

Guidance for children and youth workers and volunteers on being alone with young people

All workers should plan their work with children and young people in such a way that they will not normally be alone with children or young people where their activity cannot be seen by others. This will mean:

- A worker should never plan to be alone on church premises with children or young people
- When there are insufficient leaders and workers to have two for each group, doors should be left open, or two groups should work in the same room. (Wherever possible all doors should be fitted with glass panels)
- At least two people should be present before the doors are opened as children and young people arrive for a group and at least two adults should remain until the last child or young person has left the building or room at the end of a meeting.
- A worker should never invite a child or young person to their home alone. It may be acceptable to invite a group if another adult is in the house. Establish that each parent/carer knows where their child is and at what time they should return home.

Case study

A worker befriends a small group of teenage boys whom she invites, from time to time, to come to her house. They listen to music and 'chill out'. Sometimes they play cards. It is later alleged that the worker had sexually assaulted the boys. No-one from the church was aware of the visits to the worker's house and the amount of time she was spending with this small group of boys. The worker herself had grown up in a church where the youth leaders always opened their homes to young people.

- Would the worker's 'open house' approach cause any concern if it came to light in your own context?
- What training on appropriate relationships and boundaries is given to workers in your church?

Unplanned occasions when a worker/volunteer is alone with children or young people

There may be occasions when, despite careful planning, a worker finds themselves in a situation where they are in sole charge of children or young people in the context of a church activity. In these situations the worker should:

- Assess the risks involved in sending the child or children home against the risks and vulnerability of being alone with them

Wherever possible, immediately phone another appropriate person to report the situation. Workers should know who they should phone in such a situation. It could be the **Designated Person for Safeguarding** or the **Safeguarding Trustee/Deacon**.

- Make a **written report of the situation** immediately afterwards and give a copy to the Designated Person for Safeguarding and the Safeguarding Trustee/Deacon. (The report serves two functions. It helps to ensure appropriate accountability for situations where there is increased vulnerability and risk. It also allows for the monitoring of situations where workers are on their own with children and young people. If the same situation keeps recurring, working practices can be reviewed.)

There may be other situations when a child or young person asks to speak to a worker on their own. The most common situation is when a youth worker is offering support or pastoral guidance to a young person where privacy and confidentiality are important. The following guidelines should apply:

- If the worker believes that to speak to the young person on their own would place them (or the young person) in a vulnerable position (for example, because the young person has developed an inappropriately close relationship to the worker) the worker should insist that another worker should also be present
- If it is possible for the conversation to be held in a quiet corner of the room where others are present, but where sufficient privacy can be assured, this option should be taken
- If this is not possible, the conversation is best held in a room with the door left open or where there is glass in the door so that others can see inside the room
- Another adult should be in the building and the young person should know that they are there
- Another adult should know that the interview is taking place and with whom

- A worker should set an agreed time limit prior to the conversation and stick to it! It is the responsibility of the worker, as the adult involved, to set this ground rule and to end the session at the designated time. Make another appointed time to continue if necessary.
- A youth worker should not invite a child or young person to their home alone nor go to the child or young person's home if they are alone.

Children and young people will want to speak to the person they most trust when looking for help and support. It is therefore important that all workers are aware of these guidelines so that they can respond appropriately when the situation arises. However, it should be recognised that these guidelines are specifically designed for workers to respond to requests made by children and young people. If it is felt to be appropriate for workers to be more proactive in working one to one with young people, the guidelines in the next section should be followed.

Working One to One

Most church youth work takes place within a group setting (youth club, small groups etc), however there are times when one to one work with a young person is a necessary part of a good youth work programme. It would be rare for one to one work to be part of the normal pattern of work with children under secondary school age.

Working one to one with a young person can come out of a number of different situations:

- taking time to listen as a young person shares an issue they are facing
- offering ongoing support and advice
- a formal agreement involving a mentoring relationship between an adult and young person
- the need to meet a young person who is facing a crisis in their life
- discipleship of a young person, including accountability, prayer, Bible study

We need to find appropriate and safe ways of coming alongside young people in this way and ensure guidelines are in place to safeguard both the young person and the adult. These guidelines should be clearly communicated to members, workers and parents. Young people need to know that those working with them are dependable, reliable and available, while keeping within appropriate boundaries.

Recognition

Although any youth or children's worker may find themselves in a situation where a child or young person wants to confide in them and a one to one conversation is appropriate there are some for whom it may be appropriate to work more regularly in one to one settings.



Often this is more likely to feature as a component of the work of paid youth workers, but not exclusively so.

We recommend that any who work in this way in the church should:

- have proved their willingness to work within the policy and procedures of the church's Safeguarding Children Policy
- have demonstrated their capacity to respect appropriate boundaries in their relationships with children and young people
- be formally recognised as someone who has the trust of the church to engage in one to one working with young people
- have an enhanced DBS

All workers should be aware that they need the specific permission of the church to work one to one if this is to be a routine part of their interaction with children and young people.

Accountability

A simple log sheet should be kept regarding who, where and when workers and young people have met. This gives opportunities for other workers to raise a concern about a particular worker's allegiance to a young person.

Written notes should be made following the meeting, recording the essence of the conversation, advice given, or recommendations made and what was agreed. Notes should be securely stored, and young people should be aware that they have a right to see any records kept about them.

Supervision

Supervision of workers should be used to monitor the frequency of appointments as well as the content of meetings, ensuring a worker isn't 'getting in over their head', i.e. becoming involved in a situation in which they do not have the necessary skills and that a young person is not becoming overly dependent on the worker.

Maintaining Distance

Workers need to maintain a healthy self-awareness when working one to one. Phrases such as, "You're the only one who understands me," may be flattering but should ring alarm bells. Is there a possibility of drawing someone else in to work alongside you or having a cooling off period of a few weeks whilst they reflect upon advice given to them?

Workers need to maintain a professional distance, and not offer 24/7 availability to any individual young person. Workers need to have adequate knowledge of where to refer on a

young person, if necessary. It is the worker's responsibility to know what to do with the information given to them and when to involve other agencies.

Confidentiality

Appropriate confidentiality is necessary. When young people share personal information, they will need to know that the worker is not going to share that information with others in the church – particularly as the workers can be friends of the young person's parents. However, workers must understand that if they believe the young person they are talking to, or other young people, are at risk of harm then they have a responsibility to pass that information on. Great care should therefore be taken before promising confidentiality.

What is most important is that the young person knows what the boundaries of confidentiality are. There may be times when the worker believes that it would be helpful to talk to others about the matters that have been shared. In this situation, the worker should talk this through with the young person.

Venue

Any contact with young people should be in a public place, at an appropriate time and in view of another adult (i.e. early morning, late night or whilst they should be at school is not appropriate). For example, you could meet with a young person in a one to one situation

- at the end of a youth group event whilst others are clearing up
- during a youth group session, in a side room with the door open and others knowing that the meeting is taking place
- at a coffee shop after school.

One to one work can be an essential part of youth work, but there are risks involved with this type of working for both the young person and the youth worker. One to one work must be practised safely, appropriately and within agreed guidelines. Whatever age group, one to one working must not operate outside of the law.

A good resource for further thinking about one to one working can be found on the NSPCC website using the following link:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/lone-working>

When offering transport to children and young people

Vulnerable situations can be created when workers offer lifts to children and young people, either to take them to and from church activities or to take them on planned outings. Click [here](#) for other **general advice on offering transport to children and young people**.

Some practices can be adopted to mitigate the risks involved:

- although it can sometimes be impractical, whenever possible two adults should be present in a car with children and young people
- parents should give permission for their child to be given transport and should be informed at what time to expect their child home
- where possible workers should avoid giving regular lifts to children or young people on their own to and from church activities
- if the same group of children are regularly given lifts, consideration should be given to picking them up or dropping them off in a different order each week so that the same child is not always the first or the last to be picked up or dropped off
- if a child young person is travelling alone in the car with a worker, the child or young person should be asked to sit in the back seat of the car
- workers should not spend unnecessary time alone in a vehicle with a child or young person - long conversations in the car outside church premises or home, or unnecessary diversions should be avoided
- workers should avoid being alone in a car with a child or young person who is particularly vulnerable; for example, a child who has developed strong feelings for a leader, or a child whose behaviour can be difficult to manage

Case study

A youth leader regularly gives lifts home to a small group of teenagers after the youth club. Due to the rural nature of the area and the distance between the different homes, the young people are always dropped off in the same order. This leaves the leader alone with a girl at the end of the run. After one occasion she alleged that the youth leader attempted to touch her sexually when leaning over to open the car door. The case was referred to the police although eventually it was decided by the police that the evidence was not strong enough to bring a successful prosecution.

- How does this case highlight the importance of following good practice in transporting children and young people?
- Despite the decision not to prosecute would you allow the youth leader to continue in their role?

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