

Code of practice for working with young people

In New Life Church

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## 1. An Overview

Being involved in youth ministry it is easy to assume that everyone understands what appropriate supervision is and is working to the same end. It is important therefore, that clear guidance of expectations is given to all workers in order to ensure quality childcare, protection of children from possible abuse and workers from false accusation. Some general areas are outlined below:

- Workers should treat all children /young people with dignity and respect in attitude, language and actions.
- Have a clear strategy for summoning additional adult help, if needed.
- The privacy of children should be respected, avoiding questionable activity such as rough or sexually provocative games, actions and comments.
- Where confidentiality is important (e.g. counselling) and a young person is being seen on their own, ensure that other workers know the interview is taking place and that someone else is in the building. It is preferable that meetings of this nature are 'same sex'.
- No person under 16 years of age should be left in charge of any children of any age. Nor should children or young people attending a group be left alone at any time.
- Ensure that the only people allowed to participate in a children's activity are the workers assigned to that group. Other adults should not be allowed free access.

## 2. Keeping records

### **Register:**

A register of children or young people attending a club or activity should be maintained, together with a register of helpers and any visitors. There may be individuals for which keeping details will be difficult due to personal and family background so there may be exceptions but attempts will be made to monitor attendance offline.

In the case of a fire leaders will be nominated to sweep relevant areas. Recording session's activities with some feedback is a useful exercise.

#### **Unusual or problematic events:**

Workers should write down **unusual** or problematic events or conversations, recording what they witnessed, a copy to be kept by themselves, and a copy to be given to the senior youth leader. This may be very helpful, for example, if workers have to deal with a difficult child who subsequently makes an accusation of assault. Other information might include records of incidents such as fights and the action taken. Logs can protect both children and workers.

#### **Accident book:**

Maintain other records such as the accident book. The experience of CCPAS is that concerns can be raised many years after an event. Records should therefore be kept indefinitely as advised by insurance companies.

It is good practice to keep parents/carers informed of the nature of activities. Ensure that a general consent form is signed and submitted, giving details of parents/carers. In the event of an accident, parent or carer must be informed if the child is under the age of 16. Speak to a parent / carer in the case of any accident and document on the accident form 'informed parent'. Also advise they seek medical attention and document 'advised to go to hospital' on the form.

### **3. Adult to Child Ratios**

As a guide, NLC recommended Youth Ministry ratio is two adults (preferably one of each gender) for up to 20 children, with an additional leader for every 10 children. Following a risk assessment, this ratio would need to be increased for outdoor activities and more so if that activity is considered high risk or dangerous, or when catering for children with disabilities/special needs.

In some circumstances, a worker might be alone with a child. In discipleship situations etc, this will be arranged with a leader of the same sex as the young person.

In situations where a worker is approached by a young person of the opposite sex about an issue or problem they should tactfully and carefully seek to involve another worker of the same sex as the young person in the conversation / prayer etc.

### **4. Transporting Children**

These guidelines apply to all drivers involved in the transportation of children and young people, organised by or on behalf of NLC. They do not apply to private arrangements for transportation made, for example, between parties with parental responsibility.

Advice on transporting children is as follows:

- Parental consent should be given and all journeys should be carried out with the knowledge of the leadership of the church/organisation.

When organisation of transport is the responsibility of a youth worker drivers should be 21 or over and have held a full driving licence for at least two years. The driver and vehicle should be legal. Passengers must wear seat belts.

It is reasonable to expect that they may be alone with a child for short periods e.g. dropping off the last child. Consideration could be given to dropping off the least vulnerable child last and plan routes accordingly.

- It is advisable to be aware of instances where it may be unwise for a particular driver to transport a particular child e.g. where there has been a disagreement or where a child / young person has a 'crush' on a driver.
- When travelling in groups with more than one vehicle it is good practice to insist children stay in the same groups on the out-going and return journey. This will avoid the confusion over whether a child has been transported home or at worst left behind.
- At collection or dropping off points do not leave a child on their own. Make sure that children are collected by an appropriate adult.
- The law no longer permits car drivers who passed their test after 1st January 1997 to drive mini-buses without passing a Public Service Vehicle (PSV) driving test or unless they are driving under a section 19 permit. This does not apply to licence holders who were over 21 years of age in 1997. Check what categories a worker is entitled to drive by examining their driving licence. Whilst there is no law forbidding young or inexperienced drivers from transporting young people, some churches stipulate that they will use legislation relating to minibuses as a guide ie the driver should be 21 or over and have held a full driving licence for at least two years.

## **5. Touch**

- Keep everything public. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be related to the child's needs, not the worker's.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the worker.
- Avoid any physical activity that is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the adult or the child. For example, sitting on the lap, prolonged hugs, cuddling, touching or squeezing knees, stroking bare arms / neck etc.
- Children are entitled to privacy to ensure personal dignity.
- Children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances when they need medical attention.
- When giving first aid encourage the child to do what they can manage themselves, but consider the child's best interests and give appropriate help where necessary.
- Team members should monitor one another in the area of physical contact. They should be free to help each other by constructively challenging anything which could be misunderstood or misconstrued. Go to the person involved in the first instance.
- Concerns about abuse should always be reported.

## **6. Praying with Young People**

- **Introduction**

Some of the main ingredients that underpin any effective ministry to children and young people, including prayer, are:

- acceptance
- respect
- non-judgemental listening,
- sensitivity,
- discernment,
- patience.

In applying these values in the area of prayer, not only will you build trust and respect, but you will also be providing a good 'prayer' model so that children and young people can learn how to pray for others in a sensitive and responsible way.

Although it may seem obvious, it is important that parents/carers are aware that prayer is an integral part of church life (particularly if they do not attend church themselves), and that on occasions you may pray with their child either corporately, or individually at the child's request.

In the unlikely event of a parent/carer requesting that their child does not participate in individual prayer, this must be respected.

- **Praying**

Prior to praying, always make sure you have the child's permission, and always pray in an open area where other workers, and/or children are around.

Ask the child what they are requesting prayer for and remember to listen to their reply. Speak quietly and calmly, never shout or raise your voice. Do not laugh at or dismiss out of hand if they want to pray for something you consider trite or irrelevant (e.g. my cat's poorly). If they do not have specific needs or requests then simply ask God to bless them. Having said this, a child or young person may want prayer for a specific reason.

Those praying with children and young people should always be alert to safeguarding issues and other concerns such as bullying. In these circumstances do not forget about or delay taking appropriate action because you are caught up with praying! Encourage the child to tell their parents / teacher etc as appropriate.

If you have prayed about a specific issue, it may be helpful to write it down afterwards and give it to the child so that they can let their parents/carers know and remember it themselves.

If a child/young person becomes distressed, stop praying. Stay calm and gently ask them what has caused the distress and talk to another leader if appropriate. Before continuing to pray, consider with whom they might feel more comfortable. Are there any gender issues? If unsure or the child/young person remains distressed do not continue praying but stay with them until they are calm, offering them reassurance and complete acceptance. Then talk to the child's parents/carers, assuming you have no safeguarding concerns.

- **Prayer - Practicalities**

Explain what you are doing to the child or young person, and why you are doing it; ask them if they are happy for you to pray for them.

When it comes to praying, consider your body language, particularly in relation to things like your height and the height of the child/young person. Try to ensure you are on their level rather than towering over them perhaps by both of you sitting down; but do avoid crowding.

Be sensitive about placing your hands on a child/young person's head / shoulder as they may find this frightening or threatening. If you think they may appreciate something like an arm round a shoulder or their hand being held always **ask them if this is what they would like before doing it.**

If using anointing oil on the forehead when praying for healing, bear in mind that a child/young person may be uncomfortable with the use of anointing oil so it is important to take care with this and **only go ahead with the child and parents' agreement.**

Remember also that a child/young person may not, for example, understand the use of 'tongues' and it is important therefore not to do anything that may cause confusion or distress. **Do explain** if necessary.

- **Prayer - Language**

Use clear uncomplicated language. **Reflect back what the child has said to you, to show you have understood their prayer request.** Keep the prayers simple and short so you can then be confident the child has understood your prayers.

- **Prayer - Giving Advice**

Avoid giving specific advice about problems involving decisions. A child or young person could be very susceptible to suggestion, particularly if they are distressed. Be careful what you say even if you believe you have heard from God about their situation. It would be far wiser to pray this through on your own or with another leader. **Never advise a child/young person to stop taking medication or cease seeing professionals involved in their care or welfare.**

- **Prayer - Confidentiality**

**Never promise total confidentiality.** Should a child/young person wish to disclose to you a situation such as abuse within a prayer ministry context, you have a duty to pass this on to your church's child protection co-coordinator/social services/police. You may need to gently give clear boundaries but reassure the child that if you share anything about their situation with someone else it will be on a 'need to know' basis only and you will make sure they are supported and cared for.

- **Deliverance**

When consideration is being given to pray for anyone in the area most commonly known as deliverance, they should always be referred to those with authority NLC.

- **Conclusion**

Whatever our view, the **interests and welfare of the child are paramount**. In all your actions towards children and young people the greatest model is that of Christ himself. In all his dealings with children he was approachable, gentle and *never* frightening. In applying this model and following these guidelines on prayer, your ministry to children and young people can prove to be fruitful, effective and enrich the life of NLC.

## **7. Bullying**

Bullying is another way in which children (or adults) abuse other children, and it can be verbal, physical or emotional. Bullying includes teasing, making unkind comments about a child, demanding money, "ganging up" on a child or physically assaulting a child. One might see evidence of torn clothes, bruising, burns, or scratches. A child might be afraid to attend school or other activities if they think the bully will be present.

The effect of bullying on the victim can be profound, both emotionally and physically. New Life Church anti-bullying policy is as follows:

### **Anti Bullying Policy**

The aim of the anti-bullying policy is to ensure that young people are able to engage in the activities of New life Church without fear of being bullied. Bullying is anti-social behaviour and affects everyone; it is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. New Life Church will provide a safe place for the hurting and vulnerable.

Bullying will not be accepted or condoned. All forms of bullying will be addressed. Bullying can include:

- physical pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching etc
- name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing and emotional torment
- through ridicule, humiliation and the continual ignoring of individuals
- racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- sexual comments and /or suggestions

Those being bullied may show changes in behaviour, such as becoming shy and nervous, feigning illness or just leaving the group. Etc.

The youth leadership team must be alert to the signs of bullying and act promptly, calmly and firmly against it in accordance with the bullying policy.

### **Implementation**

The following steps may be taken when dealing with incidents:

- If bullying is suspected or reported, the incident will be dealt with immediately by the leader who has been approached to ensure the safety of the young people involved.
- Subsequent steps will then be taken to investigate and stop any bullying,
  - discussing what happened
  - discovering why the young person became involved

- establishing the wrong doing and need to change

Workers should make a record of incidents and forward them to the persons in overall charge of the youth ministry who will also follow up to ensure the safety of the young person involved.

## **Support**

Young People who have been bullied will be supported by:

- offering an immediate opportunity to discuss the experience with a leader
- reassuring the young person
- offering continuing support and prayer
- restoring self-esteem and confidence
- encouraging the group to speak up about bullying and to model considerate behaviour

The following disciplinary steps can be taken:

Official warnings to cease offending, informing parents or guardians to help change attitudes etc.

Short term (2 week) exclusion from the group

Long term exclusion from the group

**If bullying is seen or suspected concerns must be raised with the youth leader of the appropriate group**

## **8. Peer Group Activities**

All NLC organised youth activities should be overseen by named adults who have been selected in accordance with agreed recruitment procedures. Whilst there may be a valid argument for groups of age 16+ being led and run by their peers, adult workers /Christian parent should always be in the vicinity and should contribute to any programme reviews and planning. The following points should also be taken into consideration:

- If there are children/young people under 16yrs at an activity, adults should be present or within close proximity.
- No person under the age of 16 should be left with the sole responsibility of caring for or supervising other children at an event organised by NLC.
- Young people who are given responsibility should have a mentor relationship with an adult.
- Young leaders – see the current guidelines regarding DBS

## **9. Guidelines for discipline**

Discipline is the education of a person's character. It includes nurturing, training, instruction, chastisement, verbal rebuke, teaching and encouragement. It brings security, produces

character, prepares for life and is an expression of God's love for an individual. (Hebrews 12:5-12 & Proverbs 22:6)

- Ask God for wisdom, discernment and understanding for the children in your care.
- Work on each individual child's positives, do not compare a child with another, but encourage and affirm them, giving them responsibility for simple tasks.
- Build healthy relationships with children and be a good role model by setting an example. You can't expect children to observe the ground rules if you break them yourself.
- Take care to give quieter and well-behaved children attention and resist allowing demanding children to take all your time and energy.
- Be consistent in what you say and ensure that other team members know what you have said. This avoids manipulation.
- If children are bored they often misbehave, so review your programme regularly.
- **NEVER** smack or hit a child and try not to shout. Change voice tone if necessary. Defuse the situation by speaking calmly.
- Discipline out of love, NEVER in anger. (Call on support from other workers if you feel so angry you may deal with the situation unwisely.)
- Be aware of other workers and situations or issues where support may be needed, (especially be aware of younger workers and people in new situations)
- Lay down ground rules e.g. no swearing, racism or calling each other names, respect for property, and make sure the children understand what action will be taken if not kept.
- Every child is unique and will respond in different ways to different forms of discipline. It follows therefore; each child should be dealt with on an individual basis.

Some children have a tendency to be disruptive in a group. Give them a chance, warn them and only separate them from their group if they are disruptive as a last resort.

- Have a disruptive child sit right in front of you or get a helper to sit next to them.
- Be pro-active and encourage helpers to be pro-active rather than waiting to be told to deal with a situation. Be calming and defuse the situation – speak calmly
- Take a disruptive child to one side and engage with them, challenging them to change, whilst encouraging their strengths.
- Remedial action can be taken against a constantly disruptive child. They can be warned that you may speak to their parents/carers about their behaviour; they may be sent back into the church service or, after consultation with a church leader and advising the parent/carer, be banned from attending the group for a period of time.
- Pray with the other workers before the session and take time to debrief before you leave.

## 10. Tobacco and Alcohol.

New Life Church has a no smoking policy at youth events

New Life Church has a no alcohol policy at youth events.

There may be occasions where it is felt necessary to inform parents /carers that a child/young person has been drinking, particularly if they are under the influence at the group or there are concerns for their health or safety. Obviously, this may affect the working relationship with the young person. **If there are concerns for health and safety then parents should be called.**

## 11. Solvents & controlled Substances.

New Life Church has a no drugs policy at youth events. If a young person is found to be in possession of drugs they will be asked to leave.

## 12. Modern Technologies and Safe Communication

Children and young people can find it easier to communicate via email / facebook / personal message etc. because nobody is physically present. Workers therefore need to be careful and transparent in their communication.

- Keep copies or history of online conversations as a safeguard to yourself and tell another leader of any concerns or significant conversations.
- It is important workers use clear and unambiguous language to reduce the risk of misinterpretation, and although it should be obvious when an email is ending, workers should be careful to avoid terms of endearment, e.g. 'lots of love and kisses...' etc.

Be clear if you have any concern that the sender or someone else, particularly a child, may be at risk of serious harm, and that you need to share those concerns. In these circumstances the worker would inform the sender giving details of who would be contacted and what information would be shared. Refer to the Safeguarding Policy.

**Mobile Phones** - Mobile phones are perhaps the most popular way of communication whether by text or other app. It can be done anywhere, at any time and is far more difficult to monitor. Particular diligence needs to be applied therefore when workers use mobile phones to communicate with children and young people.

- Any texts or conversations that raise concerns should be passed on/shown to the worker's supervisor.
- Workers should use clear language, particularly when texting, leaving no room for misinterpretation. E.g. 'lol' or 'luv' etc.

Many mobile phones have digital cameras. Workers should ensure that they only take photographs of children and young people in accordance with their church's policy on photography e.g. ensure that consent is obtained and all images are stored in accordance with Data Protection Act principles. It would be unwise to keep images on a worker's mobile phone. Images should be downloaded to the church computer and kept securely.

**Finally...**

We aspire to make our youth ministry...

Centred on Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Bible

A safe place for all,

Caring about the whole person, spirit, soul and body

Inclusive and welcoming

We value one another, and value the time, commitment, prayer and energy given to serve young people and to show them the love of God.

**Thank you for your commitment.**