

Code of Conduct issued by the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service

The Code of Conduct is not exhaustive and cannot cover every eventuality. It is intended to provide a minimum framework for good practice when providing activities and events specifically for children and young people. The Code of Conduct has been displayed on the notice board near the Thomas More Room, where activities involving children take place.

Code of Conduct for adults involved in contact with children & young people.

You must:

- operate within the Church's principles and guidance and any particular procedures of the Diocese, Religious Congregation, Parish or Club.
- treat all children and young people equally and with respect.
- engage and interact appropriately with children and young people.
- challenge unacceptable behaviour and provide an example of good conduct you wish others to follow - an environment which allows bullying, inappropriate shouting or any form of discrimination is unacceptable.
- respect a child or young person's right to personal privacy.
- recognise that particular care is required in moments when you are discussing sensitive issues with children and young people e.g. maintain appropriate boundaries.
- avoid situations that compromise your relationship with children and young people, and are unacceptable within a relationship of trust. This rule should apply to all such behaviours including those which would not constitute an illegal act.

You must not:

- discuss topics or use vocabulary with children and young people which could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents or another adult.
- arrange an overnight trip with a child or young person without ensuring that another approved person will be present and parental consent has been given.
- take a chance when common sense suggests another more prudent approach.
- physically, emotionally or sexually abuse, maltreat or exploit any child.

Discipline

Discipline should be viewed as a way of helping children achieve self-control and not as a punishment. Group leaders should agree consistent approaches to discipline. Under no circumstances is physical chastisement acceptable.

Physical contact

Physical contact between an adult and a child should reflect the child's needs and not the adult's.

Although generally speaking physical contact between adults and the children or young people with whom they are working will not be appropriate, there are occasions when it may be entirely appropriate and proper. It is crucial, however, that they only do so in ways appropriate to their role.

A 'no touch' approach is both inappropriate and impractical.

There should therefore be a culture of 'limited touch'.

This means that when physical contact is made with children or young people this should be in response to:

- a. their needs at the time.
- b. of limited duration.
- c. appropriate given their age, stage of development, gender, ethnicity, and their cultural and religious background.

Appropriate physical contact will occur most often with younger children and with children or young people who have additional needs.

Those working with children and young people must **always be prepared to explain actions and accept that all physical contact be open to scrutiny.**

All groups should have a system for recording any physical contact with a child that may be different in some way from the normal or may be considered to be open to criticism, and adults involved will ensure that they record any such physical contact.

Guidance on Physical Contact between Children and Adults

- a. Any physical contact should take place in public except in a situation where this would be undignified or insensitive, for example, a young child attending a Children's Liturgy Group who urgently needs to use the toilet and there may not be time to seek the assistance of the parent. It will be necessary in that situation to act immediately and in as dignified a manner as possible.
- b. Children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others (except in exceptional circumstances when they need urgent medical attention).
- c. Physical contact should never be secretive, nor for the gratification of the adult. It should always reflect the child's needs and not the adult's.
- d. Even well intentioned physical contact may be misconstrued by the child, an observer or by anyone to whom this action is described. This is especially so where a child has experienced previous abuse or neglect. The child may associate physical contact with these past experiences and may wrongly interpret otherwise appropriate physical contact.
- e. Never touch a child in a way that may be considered indecent.
- f. Avoid any physical contact that is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the adult or child.
- g. Never indulge in horseplay, tickling or fun fights.
- h. If it is necessary for physical contact to occur regularly with an individual child or young person, for instance a very young child or a child with additional needs, this should be agreed with the parent and the group leader. Otherwise there is a danger that this regular contact may be misinterpreted.
- i. When physical contact is considered appropriate, seek the child's permission, where feasible, before initiating contact. Listen, observe and take note of the child's reaction or feelings and - so far as is possible - use a level of contact that is appropriate to the situation and acceptable to the child, for the minimum time necessary.
- j. If you are helping, comforting or reassuring a child who is in distress and this requires physical contact, remain self aware at all times and ensure that the contact is not threatening, intrusive or subject to misinterpretation. Discreetly inform your co-worker

or group leader and do not isolate yourself from your co-worker or group leader.
Record any situation that may give rise to concern.

- k. A child may sometimes seek physical contact from an adult inappropriately. This may happen, for instance, where a child has suffered previous abuse or neglect. The adult must deal sensitively and appropriately with this, helping them to understand the importance of personal boundaries, and inform the group or activity leader.
- l. Some children who have learning difficulties or learning disabilities are very affectionate, even to strangers. The adult must deal with the situation gently and sensitively and inform event leaders.
- m. In a group, team members, as part of good practice, should monitor one another in relation to physical contact. They should feel able to help each other by pointing out anything that could be misunderstood or uncomfortable for a child/young person.
- n. If an adult engages in inappropriate touch with a child/young person this must be challenged. If there are concerns about an adult's contact with a child or young person, advice must be sought through the Local Safeguarding Representative from the Safeguarding Coordinator/Officer.