

Screening in Faith – Ministry Guidelines

NURSERY CARE GIVERS, CHURCH SCHOOL TEACHERS, YOUTH WORKERS

Because children are naturally trusting and readily place their faith in adults who care for them, and because they often do not necessarily have the skills, knowledge, or experience to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the adults who care for them, they are particularly vulnerable to abuse. The following guidelines address some of the special considerations that need to be undertaken when working with children and youth. These guidelines protect both the young people and those who work with them.

1. **Children should be always supervised.** When church school is over, children should be escorted to meet their parents or remain under supervision in the classroom until they are picked up. Parishes with large numbers of children in the nursery or church school should implement a more formalized sign in and out procedure, particularly where visitors or infrequent attendees may not be known to the staff.
2. **Children must be supervised by adults or responsible teenagers.** While all church school teachers need a supervisor to whom they can regularly report, teens should have the opportunity to check-in with a responsible adult before or after each lesson. While it is not necessary that an adult always be present in every classroom, at least one clearly identified adult should be readily available each Sunday to handle any emergencies or extraordinary situations that may arise. Periodic check-ins in each classroom by the supervising adult are recommended.
3. **Whenever possible, it is best to have at least two leaders supervising a group of children.** Unfortunately, in many parishes, recruiting church school teachers is difficult. In order that a single teacher is not alone with a group of children, it may be possible to set up a schedule whereby parents take turns assisting the teacher each week. Another possibility is to designate one person to roam among all the classrooms each week, checking on each class, and supplying assistance when and where necessary.
4. **Ontario Daycare Guidelines** suggest a leader to child ratio of 1:5 for infants and toddlers (under 2 and a half years old), 1:8 for older preschool children (2 and a half to 6 years old), and 1:10 for school age children (over 6 years old). Churches are not bound by these ratios, however, where leader to child ratios consistently exceed the suggested numbers, the parish should attempt to recruit more church school teachers. The strategies mentioned above, in point 3, may prove useful when recruiting additional help.
5. **It is best that Church School Classes and Youth Group Meetings take place in public spaces.** The church is better than a private home; a church hall is better than a secluded room. An open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door.

6. **Special events or field trips off church premises must be pre-approved by church leadership.** Parents should be notified well in advance of the outing and written parental approval must be obtained for every participant, without exception. At least two adults should be available to supervise the event and leaders of both genders should be available if working with a co-ed group.
7. **If an event requires a leader drive children or youth,** the leader must hold a valid driver's license and be insured. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. When driving young children, approved child restraints or car seats must be available and used as required by law. Leaders must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. Leaders should avoid being alone with a single child in the car unless under extreme circumstances, such as driving a child home in an emergency.
8. **Church School Teachers and Youth Workers should avoid one on one interaction in an isolated setting with children and youth.** If a child or adolescent requests to speak privately with an adult, it should be done out of earshot but within view of another adult. It is inappropriate for a church school teacher or youth worker to suggest a meeting with an individual child outside of regular group activities.
9. **Encourage parents of young children to take them to the washroom before Church School.** If a child needs to use the washroom during church school, he or she should be escorted by an adult. It is best if the adult remains outside the washroom with the door open. An adult should not enter a cubicle with a child and close the door. If a very young child or a child who has a disability or who is ill requires more toileting assistance, a second adult must be present in or at the door of the washroom.
10. **In general, physical contact should occur only at the child's initiation and never without the child's permission.** Any physical contact with children or youth must be of a non-sexual nature and appropriate to the situation.

Appropriate contact includes:

- Bending down to the child's eye level, speaking kindly, and listening attentively
- Gaining permission before hugging a child and respecting his or her right to refuse a hug
- Taking a child's hand and leading him or her to an activity
- Comforting a child by placing an arm around his or her shoulder and giving a gentle squeeze from the side
- Praising or welcoming a child by holding the child's two hands in yours
- Patting the child on the head, hand, back, or shoulder in affirmation
- Holding a preschool child who is crying, if he or she wants to be held.

Inappropriate contact includes:

- Kissing, or coaxing a child to kiss you
- Extended hugging or tickling
- Touching any area of the body normally covered by a bathing suit, specifically the buttocks, thighs, breasts or groin areas

- Carrying older children, having them sit on your lap, or having them rub up next to you.

- 11. Physical or verbal force should not be used to discipline children.** Gentle physical restraint is appropriate only if a child is in danger of causing damage or injuring himself, herself, or others.
- 12. Sexual contact of any type with a child or youth is always inappropriate regardless of who initiates it.** If a youth initiates inappropriate physical or sexual contact with a leader, it is the responsibility of the leader to stop such contact immediately, explain the necessary boundaries to the youth, then reestablish and maintain the appropriate boundaries. Any interaction in which a boundary may have been crossed should be documented and reported to a supervisor. Note that it is far less likely that inappropriate physical or sexual contact will occur when others are present. To avoid any inappropriate contact, or allegations of inappropriate contact, leaders must try to avoid always being alone with a child or youth.
- 13. Jokes, innuendoes, or compliments of a sexual nature are always inappropriate and strictly forbidden.** Be cautious when children or youth are asking questions or seeking advice around topics of a sexual nature. As a guideline, don't say or do anything you wouldn't want to see reported in the newspaper or on TV. Don't say or do anything that you wouldn't want your family to find out about, and don't say or do anything that you wouldn't want the participant's family to find out about.
- 14. In overnight situations, no adult/leader should sleep in the same space as a participant.** Sleeping and changing areas should be segregated by gender. Leaders and participants should change in separate areas so that one is never naked in the presence of the other.
- 15. There may be times when a Church School or Youth Group Leader suspects that a child has been a victim of abuse or neglect** or is at risk of being subject to abuse or neglect, or where a child or youth discloses such abuse to the leader. In these situations, the leader is required by law to report the case to the Children's Aid Society (CAS). This requirement cannot be delegated to anyone else. The person who becomes aware of abuse or neglect, or who suspects that the risk for abuse or neglect is present must call the CAS or the police.
- 16. If a child discloses neglect or abuses the following steps should be followed:**
 1. Believe in the child and take his or her disclosure seriously.
 2. Listen openly and calmly to the child, but do not ask leading questions.
 3. Reassure the child that you will do your best to get the right kind of help.
 4. Record the facts. Write down the child's name, address, telephone number, the time and place of the conversation, and what the child told you in his or her own words.
 5. Report on the disclosure to the Children's Aid Society or to the police.
 6. Tell your supervisor and the clergy that you have made such a report to the CAS.