

APPENDIX 2 – SAFER WORKING PRACTICES WHEN MANAGING CHILDREN’S ACTIVITIES

1. Staffing levels

It is the responsibility of the group leader to consider individual circumstances and arrange sufficient supervision to ensure the safety and effective management of all activities.

The following issues must be considered when determining appropriate numbers of helpers:

- the gender of the group – if mixed, then staff members should also be mixed, where possible
- the duration of the activity
- the competence and experience of the staff providing oversight and support
- the age of the group – staff should have the appropriate skills for the age they are working with
- children with additional support needs, such as physical disabilities, behavioural or mental health problems – extra staff may be necessary
- the *size* and layout of the room or outdoor area and any particular issues that may be relevant to that location.
- young people attending who are being encouraged to develop their leadership skills through helping. **They** should always be overseen by an appointed worker who will be responsible for ensuring that good practice and safeguarding procedures are followed and the work they are doing is appropriate to both their age and understanding. Only those over 18 can be counted as part of the staff to child ratio.
- first aid cover
- the nature of the activity, what this involves and what tasks there will be for children
- There should be a minimum of two adults present at any activity (it is recommended that there be at least one male and one female) in line with the ratios below. Staff ratios should also be based on a risk assessment e.g. increased ratios for outdoor or activities.

Required Adult to Child Ratios (as recommended by the NSPCC)		
0 – 2 years	1 adult to 3 children	1:3
2 – 3 years	1 adult to 4 children	1:4
4 – 8 years	1 adult to 6 children	1:6
9 – 12 years	1 adult to 8 children	1:8
13 – 18 years	1 adult to 10 children	1:10

2. Unaccompanied Children

The Methodist Church welcomes those of all ages and is keen to appeal to children and young people.

It is advisable that children under the age of 11 years should be taken to and collected from church or a church activity. If a child is over 11 years of age, it remains the responsibility of their parent/carer to ensure they are cared for, arrive and leave church safely.

2.1 Action on arrival of an unaccompanied child

On occasion, a child may be sent to church on their own without prior arrangement or decide to attend an activity themselves. Where possible, the following step should be taken by a party who has been cleared to work with children in regulated activity.

The following actions should be taken if an unaccompanied child arrives on church premises:

1. Make them welcome and reassure them that they are not at fault.
2. Confirm their name(s) and try to find out who the parent/carer is and their contact details.
3. If the child says anything that suggests there may be a safeguarding issue, the district safeguarding officer should be contacted for guidance.
4. If there are no safeguarding concerns that involve the parent/carer, contact them and discuss the following topics:
 - Confirm the child's location and that they are safe.
 - Provide details of the party who is looking after them and the activity the child has come to attend.
 - Get permission for the child to remain.
 - Provide a consent form and request that they complete it as soon as possible.
 - Obtain contact information for the child's next of kin and details of allergies or other health conditions.
 - Ensure that the parent/carer is made aware of the time the activity finishes and encourage them to collect their child at this time. Highlight the normal dropping off and pick up points for the activity.

2.1.1 Children not collected from an activity

Church leaders should not be expected to be responsible for, or transport, children unless this has been arranged and agreed beforehand. The required provisions around the transportation of children must be followed if this becomes necessary (see 6.10.7).

Where a child is not collected from an activity without prior agreement, the following steps should be taken:

- The parent or carer should be contacted to confirm whether it is safe for them to go home unescorted.
- If both the parent/carer and activity leader deem it is safe for them to go alone, the child should be given details of the activity. The parents/carers should be invited to discuss future arrangements.
- In the event the parent/carer cannot be contacted, follow the above steps 1-3. The police should be called and the child reported as missing from home. If there are safeguarding concerns explain these to the police. Keep trying to contact the parent/carer unless the police advise you otherwise.
- Two church leaders should always remain with a child in these circumstances if it is not possible to contact parent/carer.

Please note: If there is a risk that the child may run away before a parent/carer or social care staff arrive then do not share with child that parent/carer has been called. Make a note of their physical appearance including what they are wearing in case they run away and the police have to search for them. Also, consider

moving to a place in the building that is less open so they cannot easily abscond, and try to think of something to occupy them in the meantime. If the child leaves the building or premises, it is not advisable to follow the child as this can make their behaviour more unpredictable and therefore dangerous e.g. with traffic etc. in their attempt to get away. Church staff should not leave until all children have departed.

2.1.2 Involving other agencies

In certain situations, there may be a need to involve other agencies. If a child were very young, it would not be appropriate for them to attend church or any activities on their own. This would be regarded as neglect on the part of their parent or carer. If a child is already at church or the activity and the parent/carers is insistent that their child can attend and return home on their own and you do not feel that this is appropriate you should contact your DSO. They will give you advice on what to do next. If you are unable to get in touch with your DSO, and the situation cannot wait, children's social care should be contacted for advice. Firstly, however you should let the parent/carers know of your intention to get in touch with children's social care. This will help to maintain a positive working relationship with the family and may encourage the parent/carers to collect their child.

There may be occasions when a child tells you something that means they may be at risk of harm/further harm and you need to respond immediately. For example, if a child has a visible bruise or injury and tells you a parent/carers caused this, or if they disclose another form of abuse. In these circumstances, you should contact your DSO immediately for advice and support. Should you be unable to contact your DSO, or if the situation requires urgent action, contact children's social care. They operate an out of hours' service. If you are unable to get in touch with them, phone the police who will be able to give you guidance. Always make sure you inform your DSO.

2.1.3 Children under 11 who regularly attend on their own without prior arrangement

If there do not appear to be any safeguarding issues and the child is routinely attending church on their own, parents/carers should be contacted so a discussion can take place. The reasons for their lone attendance should be discussed and any safety implications. Other options for escorting them should be explored.

If it is not possible to avoid lone attendance, a risk assessment should be undertaken in conjunction with parents/carers and the DSO to consider whether this can be supported in the local church. The following areas should be considered:

- how the child would get to and from church
- their level of maturity
- the child's wishes and feelings
- the views of parents/carers
- the availability of staff or volunteers who are cleared to undertake regulated activity to escort the child
- any risks that may arise from lone attendance and how they might be minimised
- consideration of any persons who might present a risk on site e.g. those with relevant safeguarding contracts.

Where the outcome of the assessment suggests that the organisers of the activity can support lone attendance, arrangements should be agreed and recorded. Parents/carers should provide written consent for these arrangements. If the outcome suggests that lone attendance cannot be supported, other alternatives in the locality should be considered.

2.2 Mixed-age activities

Care should be taken to ensure that children in mixed-age activities such as choirs, music and drama groups are supervised. DBS/PVG checks are not required for adults in those groups who do not have specific responsibility for children.

Separate changing facilities should be provided when needed for adults and children and different genders. Children should be supervised only by those authorised to do so.

2.3 Safe environment

In a prominent place where children and young people can see it, the ChildLine telephone number (0800 1111) and, for parents, the Family Lives number (0808 800 2222) should be on display. Undertake a risk assessment for each activity and in greater detail for an unusual activity or when away from the usual location.

Insurance, first aid kits and fire precautions should be checked and a health and safety check should be completed regularly with reference to the following minimum standards.

When evaluating a venue, the following should be considered:

- The meeting place should be warm, well lit and well ventilated. It should be kept clean and free of clutter.
- Fire exits should be checked regularly and clearly marked. The fire exits should not be blocked or obstructed.
- Electric socket covers must never be used as they present a safety hazard. UK sockets are supplied to the rigorous safety standards of BS 1363 but safety covers are unregulated and can cause permanent socket damage including:
 - socket contact damage - results in overheating and possible fire
 - socket shutter damage - the shutters will not be able to protect children
 - some socket covers make it possible to poke pins and paper clips into the live parts
 - broken plastic pins stuck in the earth hole - prevents shutters from closing
 - wrong size pins can make covers easy to remove, some even pop out by themselves
 - children like to play with socket covers - plugging in upside down opens the shutter and exposes live contacts.
- Toilets and hand basins with hygienic drying facilities should be easily available.
- Appropriate space and equipment should be available for any intended activity.
- If food is regularly prepared on the premises, the facilities will need to be checked by the Environmental Health Office and a Food Handling and Hygiene Certificate acquired.
- Children's packed lunches should be kept refrigerated.
- Drinks should be available.
- Groups must have access to a phone in order to call for help if necessary.
- Adults must be aware of the fire procedures.
- Unaccompanied children or adults deemed vulnerable should be discouraged from walking along dark and badly lit paths in or outside of the premises.
- Suitable provision for first aid must be available.

2.4 Special and additional needs

If a child or adult has special/additional needs, welcome them to the group. Try to make the premises, toilets and access suitable for their needs. Ask the parents/carers how best to meet the person's needs. If premises are being redesigned or refurbished, take the opportunity to anticipate the possible special needs of future children and adults.

Disability legislation requires organisations to take reasonable steps to meet the needs of disabled people, and this includes children.

2.4.1 Children and young people who self-harm or who have mental health needs

Some children and young people self-harm to help them express their emotions. Others may express thoughts of self-harm or suicidal intent. If any child or young person expresses thoughts of suicide, advice should be sought immediately. The group leader should be informed and discussions should take place about the need to inform parents/carers and involve other services. If the situation is not urgent, consideration should still be given to contacting parents/carers and referring to appropriate agencies who can offer support.

2.4.2 Vulnerable Children and Young People

Some children and young people are more vulnerable than others to being victims of child sexual exploitation, human trafficking and modern day slavery. If it is suspected that a child or young person is affected by any of these issues, the group leader should be informed and further advice sought from the DSO and statutory authorities.

2.5 Whistleblowing

Concerns about safer practice and behaviour should always be raised as soon as possible. If any member, volunteer or employee feels that any adult is or has behaved inappropriately towards a child, they should speak to a group leader of an activity in the first instance or a church, circuit or district safeguarding officer or statutory services.

See link to the Methodist Whistleblowing Policy: [Discipleship & Ministries document \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/discipleship-and-ministries/document)

2.6 Drug and Alcohol Use

Drugs and alcohol are strictly forbidden while participating in Methodist activities for young people. This applies to staff, volunteers, visitors, children and young people. If drug or alcohol use is suspected, the group leader and DSO must be informed and a discussion should take place about informing parents/carers. Consideration should be given to the need to inform the police and for a referral to appropriate support services.