



NorthernLife Baptist Church Hornsby

Guidelines for Activities with Children & Young People

Adopted by NorthernLife Diaconate on 15 September 2020

This document is based on recommendations from Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT regarding principles and guidelines for how we protect children, young people, and leaders. At NorthernLife we have built on these recommendations and outline here how we approach activities with children and young people.

Principles

Risk management

It is not possible to eliminate all risk from activities. However, we have a responsibility to be aware of possible risks and to take appropriate action in response. This is what risk assessment involves. Identify possible risks and consider how likely they are, how serious they are and how difficult they are to avoid. For example, a risk of minor injury or inconvenience does not require as much precautionary action as a risk of serious injury.

Never alone

Leaders should never be alone in private (outside of line of sight of another person) with any child or young person unless they are family members. This protects the child or young person from risk of harm, and it also protects the leader. This rule is applicable for NorthernLife programs and social contact outside of church programs.

Exception may be made for family or domestic arrangements which are distinct from any role at the church, such as babysitting, if this is authorised by the parent or guardian responsible.

Accountability

We also maintain accountability in our kids and youth ministries. This often takes place through visibility (for example clear panels in doors) and communication (for example documented reporting procedures).

Documenting any potential incident as soon as possible provides both accountability and protection for those involved.

Awareness

We regularly raise awareness of the potential for healthy relationships to be misunderstood as an inappropriate grooming relationship. Similarly, staff and volunteers should remain alert to potentially dangerous grooming behaviour by any other staff or volunteer. In the kids and youth ministry teams, we talk about these issues regularly throughout the year to be aware of the seriousness of inappropriate behaviour to children, young and vulnerable people.

Particular issues

Attendance, permission and roll keeping

Permission for children and young people to participate in our programs is gained from parents/guardians via a registration form as they join a program. Registration is valid across suitable programs until the child turns 18. Parents can update details at any time, especially when personal details of their child changes (e.g. health and medical issues).

Attendance of all leaders, children and young people are recorded weekly. In the Friday afternoon kids club (Charged), parents are required to sign out their child. At Sunday morning kids ministry (NL Preschool and NL Kids) parents/guardians must collect their child. Attendance records are archived and stored digitally.

All permission/ registration forms and attendance records for every activity/event are held on file for at least 45 years.

Leader / participant ratios

We strive to have a leader-participant ratio of 1:5.

Driving

Licences and Drivers

Permission notes seek parental permission for leaders to drive their child to offsite events.

No leaders will be alone with a child unless, in specific and extenuating circumstances, a parent gives consent (e.g. an older youth in yrs10, 11 or 12 cannot be picked up by the parent and need to be driven home. In these rare cases, the youth leader will be the same gender as the child).

We do not have P Plate drivers drive children unless a parent gives consent.

Overnight activities

Overnight activities for children and young people are not currently part of our program. However, these events may be planned in the future. Therefore, where there are activities involving overnight accommodation, consideration will be given to additional risk factors involved, including

- transport arrangements
- sleeping arrangements
- bathroom configuration
- safety and instruction on activities
- third parties involved
- physical safety of external locations

Decisions regarding these issues depend on various contextual factors such as the physical location and facilities of the campsite. A thorough risk assessment, including consideration of the items listed, will be conducted and recorded. The list of activities, leaders and sleeping arrangements will also be recorded and stored, with permission and attendance records for the event, for a minimum of 45 years.

Social contact

In-person communication beyond church programs

Fruitful Christian ministry with children and young people involves healthy, appropriate relationships. This can at times involve contacting them outside of church programs and can include meeting in person. However, it is important that relationships between staff/volunteers and children/young people are transparent, and that parents, families and program leaders are appropriately informed and have given permission for this contact.

Staff and volunteers, when meeting with a child or young person, should:

- have parental or guardian consent, where practicable
- meet with them in a public place (for example, a café) in line of sight of other people
- not have children or young people alone in their home, or visit children or young people alone in their home when no other adult is present
- make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any face-to-face meetings with any child or young person.
- have at least two leaders in a group chat with youth on social-media platforms for weekly reminders and youth-related communications

Kids' leaders are not allowed to have social media contact with children in primary school or under

Telephone and online communication outside church programs

For many church programs, telephone and online communication are a useful tool for building community and pastoral care and support. However, telephone and online communication may be used by those seeking to harm children, young people and vulnerable people. Telephone and online communication may be used to test or step over relational boundaries. We need to be mindful of the positional power dynamic that exists between staff and volunteers and the children and young people under their care.

Contact with all children and young people

Where possible and practical, parents will be informed of any possible telephone or online communication with children and young people.

Staff and volunteer leaders must not engage in any telephone or online communication that:

- constitutes unlawful discrimination
- attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else
- is harassing, threatening or derogatory
- is obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic
- is inappropriately personal or intimate
- is defamatory.

Contact with primary-aged children

Telephone contact

When contact needs to be made with children and young people, our protocol is to contact the parents first and then, if appropriate, speak with the child. If the child answers the phone, we ask to speak to the parent first and explain to the parent why we are calling. We never call a primary-aged child on their mobile phone (unless there is a serious emergency relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child).

SMS (or other messaging service) contact

Must be limited to conveying information about church programs.

Online contact

Must be limited to conveying information about church programs. Staff and volunteers should never communicate directly (privately or one-or-one) with primary-aged children on a social networking site.

Email contact

Must be limited to conveying information about church programs. More significant conversations should be held in person.

In-person contact outside of programs

It is never appropriate to meet primary-aged children socially without written or verbal permission from their parents or carer. It is also important to ensure that a leader is never alone with a child (see the principles above).

Contact with children in years 7 and 8-

Phone contact

Staff and volunteers should first contact the parents or carer of the child and then, if appropriate, speak with the child. If the child answers the phone the staff member or volunteer should ask to speak to the parent first and explain to the parent why they are calling. Staff and volunteers should never call a child in years 7 or 8 on their mobile phone (unless there is a serious emergency relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child).

Email contact

Should be limited to conveying information about church programs and basic encouragement. More significant conversations should be held in person.

In-person contact outside of programs

It is never appropriate to meet children in years 7 and 8 socially without written or verbal permission from the parents and discussing it with your ministry supervisor first. Private video calls (facetime/WhatsApp) are not appropriate for children in years 7 and 8.

SMS (or other messaging service)

Contact must be limited to conveying information about church programs.

Online contact

Caution must be used when participating with children on social networking sites. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it. Staff and volunteers should consider limiting social media contact with children in years 7 and 8.

However, if social media contact is made with children in years 7 and 8 the following guidelines are recommended:

- Limit contact to group discussions that can be read by others.
- Consider gender dynamics. For example, you should never have a group discussion where the group of students are all the opposite gender (for example a male leader should not have an online chat with four of the year 8 girls).
- The history of the chat should be kept. Staff and volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.
- Consider privacy settings which prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with child contacts connected to your ministry.
- Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Private contact or conversations with children in years 7 and 8 should be limited to conveying information about church programs and basic encouragement.

Contact with young people in years 9-12

Phone contact

Phone contact is permissible.

SMS (or other messaging service) contact

Is permissible and can include conveying information about church programs and encouragement (e.g. "praying for you this week"). Messages should be retained for accountability.

Email

Can include logistics and private conversations. If possible, more significant conversations should be held in person. Messages should be retained for accountability.

In-person contact outside of programs

Leaders may meet with same gender students or in mixed groups in public places (e.g. café). Parents and the relevant ministry leader should be informed of this meeting occurring ahead of time.

Private video calls (facetime/WhatsApp) are not appropriate; however, group video calls may be appropriate in some circumstances (e.g. small group Bible study context).

Online contact

Caution must be used when participating with young people on social networking sites. You must maintain transparency and be accountable for what you say. You must also take care with the message you intend to communicate through both the words and images you use as it may be perceived differently by those who view it.

If social media contact is made with young people in years 9-12 the following guidelines are recommended:

- Ideally, communicate through group discussions that can be read by multiple other people
- Consider gender dynamics. For example, you should never have a group discussion where the group of students are all the opposite gender (for example a male leader should not have an online chat with four of the year 8 girls).
- The history of any chat should be kept. Staff and volunteers should not communicate using social media which cannot be retained.
- Consider privacy settings which prevent personal contacts from seeing or interacting with child contacts connected to your ministry.
- Ensure any text is beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.
- Ensure all photos are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued.