

Safeguarding Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct is an overview of principles, guidelines and standards for safeguarding that all members should use while serving as members of the Organization. The Code of Conduct applies to any child¹ or vulnerable adult² with whom a member or volunteer of the Organization interacts. These principles, guidelines, and standards apply equally to volunteers and children who provide caregiving under the Organization's auspices³.

Principles

Any interactions with children or vulnerable adults will be conducted in a way that minimizes the risk of harm for the children and vulnerable adults by effectively Increasing Visibility, Decreasing Isolation and Balancing Power and Control.

Increasing Visibility

The risk of harm is greatly reduced when you can see and be seen with the children and vulnerable adults for whom you are responsible. **Always ask how you can increase the visibility of children and vulnerable adults in each setting.**

Remember that visibility refers to being able to physically see a child or vulnerable adult in a particular location, but it also refers to seeing them as individuals who are precious in God's eyes. Learning a child or vulnerable adult's name, speaking to them, and getting to know them are three simple ways to increase their sense of belonging and of being seen.

Overcoming Isolation

The risk of harm is greatly reduced when children and vulnerable adults for whom you are responsible are not physically alone or secluded, and instead are included, engaged, have access to peers and near peers, and have the ability to communicate on a heart level. **Ask yourself how you can increase the physical visibility, inclusion and sense of belonging in community for all the children and vulnerable adults in your care.**

Remember, this principle applies to the physical location of a child or vulnerable adult as well as their social-emotional, developmental, and spiritual experience in a location or group. Being included and belonging are important at every age and stage, but children 9-18 must have healthy peer-to-peer relationships to avoid isolation.

Balancing Power and Control

The risk of harm is greatly reduced when you balance the age, size, strength, power, and authority between adults and children and/or vulnerable adults in formal and informal groups. **Ask yourself how you can balance power and control in each setting with children and/or vulnerable adults.**

Remember that balancing power and control creates accountability for children and vulnerable adults in the same way it does for adults. Child-to-child or peer-to-peer harm and abuse is the greatest risk to our children. The highest risk settings for children are unsupervised, multi-age, multi-family, or informal public settings. The imbalances of power and control allow for many kinds of harm and abuse, including bullying, sexual, social/emotional, and physical. See the Safeguarding Caregiving Guidelines for more strategies that balance power and control in ways that foster independence and reduce the risk of harm to children.

¹ For Organizational purposes, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18.

² For Organizational purposes, a vulnerable adult is defined as any person aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness, or by virtue of other recognized factors, is unable to take care of him or herself or is unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

³ No child should ever be made solely responsible for caregiving during Organizational events. See the <Safeguarding Care Guidelines> for all Organizational events.

Guidelines & Standards

Healthy Interactions with Children and Vulnerable Adults

Interacting with children and vulnerable adults in healthy, kind, and generous ways reflects God's love and value for them. Healthy, caring touch and communication are developmentally essential to children. Lack of healthy touch and communication isolates and can directly and negatively impact a child's physical growth, mental and emotional development, immune systems, physical and mental health, and sense of belonging. Vulnerable adults also need healthy touch and communication to thrive. Therefore, members of our Organization, staff, and volunteers are encouraged to thoughtfully and intentionally interact with children and vulnerable adults in safe, kind, and generous ways using healthy touch and communication. This intentionality will help to create strong, caring relationships that increase the health and well-being of the children and vulnerable adults within our Organization.

Relationships with children and vulnerable adults should be inclusive and age-appropriate, encouraging growing and healthy relationships with parents, caregivers, and peers.

Discipline

Members of our Organization should strive to discipline children in loving and effective ways. Discipline by Organization members of children other than their own should focus on safety and well-being using the lowest level of physical intervention necessary and with the permission of the parents when possible. The appropriateness of discipline for a vulnerable adult will depend on their own unique situations and needs and should be informed by the parent or caregiver. Restraint of a child or vulnerable adult should only be used for their own immediate safety and for the shortest amount of time necessary.

Corporal punishment⁴ by any member, staff, or volunteer of any child or vulnerable adult, other than their own, is not permitted. Parents' discipline of their own children is not considered harmful if it is measured, not done in anger, and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Within our Organization, the following actions are deemed harmful, may be considered abusive, are not considered disciplinary, and are not permitted:

- Any form of punishment that is likely to cause bodily injury.
- Derogatory name-calling, ridicule, humiliation, or shaming.
- Publicly singling out a child for negative treatment or exclusion.
- Yelling (loud speech that causes harm by causing humiliation and shame).
- Belittling a child.
- Hostile exclusion or confinement of a child.

Healthy Touch for Children and Vulnerable Adults:

- Is in response to the needs of the child or vulnerable adult.
- Is generally initiated by the child or vulnerable adult.
- Is given with the child or vulnerable adult's consent and is stopped with any resistance.
- Communicates respect, comfort, affirmation, and/or encouragement in age and/or developmentally appropriate ways in a visible area. This may include gently holding a hand, side-to-side or shoulder-to-shoulder hugs, or a gentle touch on the shoulder, back, or head, depending on the cultural setting and the child or vulnerable adult's willingness to receive the touch.

⁴ The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child defines corporal or physical punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.

Healthy touch for smaller children may also include touching faces, shoulders, and arms, wrapping arms around their shoulders, giving them hugs, and holding them when others are present and when considering the cultural setting. This may include gently holding a young child by the shoulders to redirect or focus behaviour that is appropriate for young children.

Healthy touch for vulnerable adults may include therapeutic and personal care, including—but not limited to—bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, and other intimate care. This should always be done with gentleness, protecting their dignity and providing for their cleanliness, comfort, and special needs. Those providing care for vulnerable adults should do so with the accountability to and oversight of appropriate professionals.

Healthy Communication for Children and Vulnerable Adults Includes:

- Using their name, which communicates respect and value for them.
- Expressing warm, sincere praise for their actions, attitudes, skills, effort, and personality.
- Providing verbal support, encouragement and positive reinforcement with good humour.
- Communicating kind, patient, and gentle instruction or correction using age or developmentally appropriate vocabulary and complexity.
- Protecting their dignity, affirming their agency, and modelling God’s love toward us.

The following interactions with children and vulnerable adults are considered inappropriate because they cause harm that can be considered abusive and can have long-term negative consequences:

- Doing things of a personal nature that the child or vulnerable adult can do for themselves, including dressing, bathing, toileting etc.
- Excessive use of physical force or restraint except in safety situations to protect from specific harm.
- Touching the body of a child or vulnerable adult for sexual gratification.
- Showing inappropriate affection when alone with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or vulnerable adult.
- Any comments, negative or positive, that relate to the physique or body development or physical capabilities of a child or vulnerable adult.
- Sharing of strong emotions, problems, or complaints with children or vulnerable adults as peers.
- Flirtatious or seductive looks or touch. Making sexually suggestive comments.
- Any behaviour that could be interpreted as sexual in nature.
- Shaming, belittling, humiliating, or name-calling.
- Using harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate them.
- Making derogatory remarks about them.
- Cursing⁵ in any language is considered inappropriate.
- Telling secrets⁶ or having inappropriate discussions about adult/caregiver situations or conflicts with children or vulnerable adults.
- Any interaction that creates the feeling or obligation that they must meet the emotional needs of an adult or caregiver.
- Favouring or showing preferential treatment to children or vulnerable adults to the exclusion of others, except as is appropriate in family relationships.

⁵ Using inappropriate, coarse, or blasphemous language to express anger or other strong emotions.

⁶ The term “secrets” is often used to refer to something inappropriate that should be kept from peers, parents, or caregivers. It is a common tool for those grooming children because it isolates them. Adults and children are encouraged to use the word “surprise” for fun things being kept for a short while to make someone else happy. A surprise is kept for the purpose of being revealed happily for the benefit of a person and builds a sense of community and belonging.

Guidelines for Internet and Online Interactions

The internet is a high-risk environment for children and vulnerable adults as they are routinely targeted, groomed, and exploited online. Social media, game rooms, chat and discussion apps all provide a lack of visibility, isolation and an easy imbalance of power and control. This makes these forums ideal places to groom, harm, and abuse children and vulnerable adults. The long-term harm to children and vulnerable adults from Image-Based Sexual Abuse⁷ and sexual abuse, online bullying and harassment of all kinds is an epidemic in our world today.

Members, staff, and volunteers of our Organization are expected to:

- Proactively protect children and vulnerable adults from being exposed to pornographic material of all kinds in any form, including movies, pictures, objects, books, and media of all kinds.
- Make every effort to filter and monitor the internet in their homes to protect children who may have access.
- Follow the same safeguarding principles on the internet with children and vulnerable adults as in physical settings by **Increasing Visibility, Decreasing Isolation, and Balancing Power and Control.**
 - Always have a second unrelated adult who is engaged and interacting on any thread or in any chat room with children.
 - Meet with several children of a similar age at once in virtual groups with one adult.
 - Never communicate with children online without their parent's explicit permission.
 - Keep devices with internet access in public spaces where the screens are visible.
 - Ensure you can see the screen of any device on the Internet when allowing children or vulnerable adults in your care access the Internet.
 - Encourage children and vulnerable adults to play online digital games in groups with people they know in the physical world first.
 - Manage time online for children and vulnerable adults, keeping their primary forms of entertainment, education, and play in the physical world.

⁷ Image-Based Sexual Abuse - The creation, theft, extortion, threatened or actual distribution, or any use of sexualized or sexually explicit materials without the meaningful consent of the person depicted.