

HOWICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Safety and Protection Protocols
of Children and Youth
and those working with
Children and Youth

When you take on leadership, you join a team of people around the country whose work and reputation is affected by your behaviour. The production of codes of ethics by the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in the last five years is a response to the growing public awareness of abuse of privilege by youth leaders, ministers, elders, and Sunday School teachers. Howick Presbyterian Church has developed protocols to ensure the safety and well-being of all the young people and children in our care and to safeguard them from any danger of abuse. They will also safeguard our workers from allegations that can arise from careless and unwise behaviours.

All Church employees, elders and youth leaders are provided with a copy of this document and required to agree to abide by these protocols. Failure to do so will disqualify that person from any form of work with children or young people in this Parish.

Children are defined in this context as being under age 14, and young people, under age 18.

Leadership in the Church

The Session requires that all staff, elders, and leaders of children/young people undergo a screening process. They are asked to declare any past incident where they have been accused or convicted of any inappropriate acts of molestation or abuse. Referees of employed staff will be asked for information in this regard. Potential leaders transferring from a previous church/organisation must agree to references being sought and checked. If incidents are acknowledged, full discussion with appropriate Session representatives and a designated contact person will ensue before any appointment is finalised. Session will have final right to veto an appointment.

It is Session policy that no person with a proven history of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse is to be employed in a role within the parish where that role could lead to further offending. This is for the protection of both the previous offender and potential victims.

Designated Contact Persons:

The Presbytery of Auckland has appointed and trained a range of people of both genders as Designated Contact Persons. (DCP) The role of a DCP is to be available to receive from a complainant or church worker, any reports of mental, physical or sexual exploitation, harassment, molestation or abuse, to record such complaints and to ensure that appropriate action is taken in accord with these and PCANZ procedures.

The list of these people and their phone numbers is on the main church noticeboard.

Using a code of conduct:

The attached code of conduct spells out the expected behavioural limits for youth leaders and elders in Howick Presbyterian Church. Potential leaders are required to sign that they will adhere to this code of conduct, or where a breach occurs that may lead to a complaint, will within three days report that breach to a designated contact person or to one of the ministers.

Reading through a code of ethics, you won't find many specific guidelines on behaviour. Instead you'll find values, principles, important standards that cannot be taken for granted. The reason these are spelt out is the too frequent abuse of these values.

Code of Conduct **FOR THOSE WORKING WITH** **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

As a person working in ministry with children in the Presbyterian Church you are involved in a five-way interaction between the children, the children's guardians, co-workers in children's ministry, the Church and yourself. You are accountable to the Session of Howick Presbyterian Church.

Leader's responsibilities towards children

1. Ensure the safety and well being of all children/youth in your care.
2. Make certain that all activities are undertaken with sufficient suitably qualified supervision and approved resources.
3. Treat all children/youth as individuals, with dignity and sensitivity, avoiding favouritism, respecting their culture, their home background, their age and their physical and mental abilities.
4. Neglect, harassment, bullying, sarcasm, and bad language are unacceptable, as is any degree of physical, emotional, mental or spiritual abuse,
5. Respect the privacy of children/youth at all times, particularly where activities include sleeping, changing of clothing, washing or bathing.
6. Remain in sight of others, even if out of hearing, when dealing with an individual child. Avoid unaccompanied and unobserved activities and inappropriate physical contact.

Leader's responsibilities towards parents/guardians

1. Take the time to try to get to know all parents/guardians.
2. Keep parents/guardians informed about the programmes being provided for their children, and welcome them to participate in or observe what happens.
3. Obtain annual written consent from parents/guardians for children to participate including information about whether children have any special needs or medical requirements.
4. Obtain written consent from parents/guardians prior to undertaking activities off church premises and request their involvement in transport and other arrangements.

Leader's responsibilities to the Church

1. Conduct yourself in a manner in keeping with Christian principles and ethics recognising that you are expected to be a healthy role model for the children.
2. In teaching about the Christian faith, use resources or approaches approved by Session.
3. Keep Session/Learning Team informed about what you are doing with the children and what support you need, and helping them to maintain an effective over-view of children's ministry in the parish.
4. Adhere to practical and legal requirements and follow approved procedures e.g. all activities away from church premises need to be reported in advance to the session/parish clerk; know how to recognise the warning signs and symptoms of abuse and be aware of procedures to be followed; be aware of fire safety and OSH regulations relating to buildings you use; when children are being transported all drivers must be fully licensed and everyone must wear approved seatbelts.

Leader's responsibilities to co-workers and to self

1. Use session/parish council approved material, be well prepared and attend appropriate training and planning meetings.
2. Support your colleagues, and develop good relationships with them.
3. Avoid placing yourself and your co-workers in compromising situations and protect yourself from actions that may be misconstrued.
4. Report to Session, any anxieties you have regarding questionable behaviour of any person participating in children's ministry. This is to safeguard the integrity of leaders from potential accusations of abuse.

Practical strategies for keeping our Ministry safe

Openness with parents and caregivers

- Teach in an open environment to which parents and other leaders have free access. However don't allow visitors free access to young people without supervision.
- Give parents and care-givers full information about the programme, including cost, starting and finishing times.
- Advise parents if the group is going offsite, say, during Bible Class
- Co-operate with parents to ensure that young people are picked up or taken home safely.
- If young people leave during the programme without prior agreement, let the parents/ caregivers know.

Safe environment

- Develop the programme so that young people have enough sleep, food, and time to themselves. (Especially for camping situations).
- Always be aware of where the young people in our care are.
- When transporting young people drive within the speed limit, in a way that is appropriate for the road conditions.
- Insist on the use of seat belts.
- Restricted drivers must not provide transport under any circumstances

Counselling

- Where practicable counselling and prayer for young people should be within the view of another person.
- If in a one-to-one situation with someone of the opposite sex (and maybe someone of the same sex as well) leave the door open and remain visible.
- If someone needs to be referred, ask their permission. Tell them what you feel you need to do, and check it out with them.
- No worker will attempt to counsel in areas in which he or she is not qualified, or has not received appropriate training.

Protection from suspicion

- The principle of team teaching should be encouraged where at all possible.
- If a male is running a group on his own, a female parent needs to be present each week.
- If the leader provides transport, if at all possible pick up those of the opposite sex last and drop them off first.
- Any incident that could be misconstrued needs to be reported straight away. Make sure it is documented.
- At camps, always have teams of leaders of both sexes. Warn against late night walks or talks with people of the opposite sex where the two are alone.
- Remain in view where people can observe your behaviour. Don't take young people alone in a solitary or dark place. Avoid visiting a young person at home while he/she is alone at home.

Practical strategies continued

Sexual safety

- Avoid excessive physical contact with young people outside organised games and welcome, farewelling or consoling hugs, particularly with those of the opposite sex.
- Discourage boyfriend/girlfriend relationships developing between leaders and the young people. If a leader feels this situation has already begun, that leader should disclose this fact to their minister or supervisor.
- Avoid all forms of physical contact that could be construed as sexual (eg. kissing, cuddling, fondling).
- Avoid all forms of sexual harassment, sexual joke or innuendo, and use of pornography.

Any of the following situations are unacceptable with respect to both young people and other leaders, other than that which is appropriate between married couples, or parents and their own children:

- Any sexual comments about a person's body or suggestion about sex.
- Any disrobing or nudity in front of another person, or watching another person disrobe, bathe or go to the toilet, other than that which is unavoidable in a camping or similar situation, or the case of a preschooler needing supervision.
- Touching children or young people in areas that would normally be covered by swimming togs.
- Sleeping with another person in the same bed or sleeping bag, other than that is necessary in a life-threatening situation such as hypothermia.
- A registered medical practitioner, registered nurse, or the young person's parent should do any medical examination of a young person's breasts or genitals, including applying ointment etc.

Reporting Abuse

Notwithstanding a person's right to make a direct report to the authorities e.g. DSW or Police, it is the responsibility of any person suspecting abuse, to report the matter to a Designated Contact Person, Minister or Youth Leader of Howick Presbyterian Church. If it is believed there is good reason to suspect a worker or church member has committed physical or sexual abuse on a child or young person, the church will report the matter to the correct legal authority.

The Designated Contact Person/s may act on behalf of the complainant at the outset of their complaint to provide a safe "listening post" or refer them to appropriate help and record the details of the complaint and action taken.

If disclosure of an incident is made:

- No worker will ask a child/young person to repeat a story or insist a child tells more than he or she is willing.
- No worker will attempt to counsel in areas in which he or she is not qualified or has not received appropriate training.
- The worker will treat the matter in a sensitive and confidential manner.
- The worker will assist the complainant to access the Designated Contact Person/minister.
- The worker will offer reassurance and friendship in a sensitive way.

HOWICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Declaration of Commitment

To be signed by all Church employees, elders and leaders of those aged under 18 years.

Name of worker

Position

Declaration

I declare that:

1. I am able to accept the leadership of the Session (ministers and elders) as the appointed authority under which I will be working.
2. I have read, understood and agreed to work within the Safety and Protection Protocols and Code of Conduct of Howick Presbyterian Church
3. If a breach of the code occurs that may lead to a complaint, I will report that breach to a designated contact person or to one of the ministers will within three days.
4. Tick one:

I have not been accused or convicted of any offence involving mental, physical or sexual abuse, harassment or molestation of children or young people

OR

I have been the subject of such a charge and make myself available to discuss the matter further.

Signed

Date

Attested by minister, Session Clerk or team leader:

Signed.....

Position.....

Date.....