



DUTY OF CARE

SAFE PRACTICE AND ETHICAL
CONDUCT IN MINISTRY TO
YOUNG PEOPLE



Murray Brown

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FORWARD

Those who work with young people have a duty of care: a responsibility to provide a healthy and safe environment, and to conduct themselves both ethically and appropriately. This training module is designed to help exercise this duty of care well. How often are you faced with decisions that affect young people's welfare or found yourself thinking "Should I be doing this?" or "Is this wise?"

The first section will teach you how to assess and manage risks involved in activities you run so that you minimise dangers to young people.

The second section of this module is about ethics and conduct. It will give you a framework for making wise, ethical decisions in children's and youth ministry. It will help you analyse situations and questions you face and help you know what to do and why.

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INTRODUCTION TO DUTY OF CARE



Have you ever watched an "epic fail" video and found yourself laughing... or at very least suppressing a smile?

Why? Where's the enjoyment in seeing someone make a fool of themselves or even hurt themselves?

Perhaps it's the unexpected that makes us laugh – although some results are predictable even before they happen! Is it that we're simply dumbfounded by someone else's foolishness, and made to feel a little better about ourselves? Maybe what comes to mind are our own epic fails and so seeing that someone else can be as unfortunate or even as stupid as we are, brings a perverse sense of joy.

As amusing as someone else's fail might be, it is not nearly so amusing when we're confronted with a "fail" in real life suffered by one of the young people or children in our care. Rarely do those in leadership set out to deliberately harm a person in their care. A more likely cause of harm is negligence in which we fail to think through the consequences of our action, or our lack of action, in a given situation.

This course is intended to help you to meet your duty to care for young people and to protect them from harm when they take part in your activities and programmes. It will help you to make wise decisions and to follow safe practices in caring for them.

WHY DUTY OF CARE IS IMPORTANT



The children and young people we lead are more than faces in a room or names on a piece of paper. They are young people dearly loved by their parents and wider family. They are also precious in the eyes of God. Therefore there is no excuse for being careless or casual in our dealings with them.

Probably no one reading this would say that acting without care is OK. More likely it is something we tend not to think about as we busily run programmes, make deadlines and provide pastoral care. We somehow just hope and pray that nothing goes wrong under our watch.

Recently more attention is being paid to these issues as new health and safety laws come into effect that require more robust processes and practices to be followed. Yet if these laws and requirements are the only reason for considering our duty of care then that is poor reason indeed and will inevitably lead to oversights and shortcuts.

When the value of the young people in our care is fully grasped, then our motivation changes from wanting to avoid penalty, to doing all we can to ensure our young people are treated well, because they are valuable and deserve our best.

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CATEGORIES OF HARM



In exercising our duty of care with young people in our churches there are four categories of harm to consider

1. **Physical harm** is any act that directly or indirectly causes injury to someone. While seldom deliberate, it may include involvement in activities that are inherently unsafe or unnecessarily risky as well as dangerous situations caused by negligence.
2. **Psychological harm** is any action that causes mental anguish or emotional pain. It may include rejection, isolation, withdrawal of affection, threats, constant criticism, and humiliation.
3. **Sexual harm** or abuse is any act or comment that has the potential to result in the sexually related harm, discomfort or shame to a young person. It may include an inappropriate relationship with them, sexually related innuendo or teasing, and exposure to sexually themed material.
4. **Spiritual harm** is any act that manipulates a person's behaviour and decision making in spiritually related matters. It may include pressure to make certain commitments or to adopt various behaviours in keeping with the leader's own spiritual convictions.

This course directly and indirectly makes reference to caring for young people over all four categories. It does so in two parts:

Part 1: Safe Practice: Identifying and managing the risks young people face when they participate in our programmes

Part 2: Ethical Conduct: Making wise decisions in our dealings with people that work for their ultimate good.

PART 1: SAFE PRACTICE



Our duty of care to exercise safe practice involves risk management. To do this well we need to understand firstly what we mean by "risk" and secondly, what we mean by "management".

When we talk about **risk** what we really have in mind is "acceptable risk". Risk is inherent in life. Wherever we go and whatever we do we are confronted with risks. Catching a bus, running to catch the bus, eating our breakfast, even getting out of bed are all risks we might face every morning because we classify them as "acceptable". Furthermore, some degree of acceptable risk can make life exciting. For example, canoeing rapids, water skiing and rock climbing all carry a degree of risk but people do these things because of the adrenaline rush it gives them. Yes, they are taking a risk, but they deem that it is acceptable to them (though maybe not to you!).

Similarly when we plan our programmes there will frequently be some degree of risk present as young people engage in games and outdoor activities. The sense of risk can contribute to the fun, but it should always be managed so that it can be regarded as an acceptable by all.

When we talk about **managing** risk we have in mind either eliminating a risk altogether, or at least minimising the risk, thus transforming an unacceptable risk into an acceptable one. We do this by first identifying the risk and then having strategies that minimise the likelihood of harm, and strategies that minimise the effect of harm if it does occur.

For example if you plan to take some young people rock climbing you know you can't eliminate the risk entirely but you can minimise the risk by having them utilise safety equipment and having a qualified instructor on hand. You may also have a first aid kit handy to attend to any bruises or cuts that may occur. In doing so, you have managed the risk by minimising it and making it acceptable.

Hazards which present risks fall into three categories:

1. People: Risks due to a person's actions and/or competency
2. Equipment: Risks due to the state and/or suitability of goods utilised
3. Environment: Risks due to factors inherent in the surroundings.

Within these categories, this management of risk takes place at two levels:

1. Level 1: General Risks: These are risks that are present continually in a ministry
2. Level 2: Specific Risks: These are risks that are present in a specific activity.

In this module we will look at risks associated with each category and level and look at ways to manage the risk and make it acceptable.

Managing General Risks: People



We've already learnt that the potential harm faced by young people and children in our churches can be physical, sexual, psychological and spiritual. We've also learnt that a source of this harm can be people - sometimes the very people who are meant to care for them. This harm can be deliberate (e.g. sexual harassment, bullying) or, more commonly, accidental (e.g. immaturity, foolishness or neglect).

In order to manage the potential harm inflicted upon young people by those they come in contact with during church activities, we recommend certain steps be taken. These steps consist of procedures and documentation as follows:

1. **Police Check:** Every leader over 18 who has significant contact with children or young people in the youth programme should undergo a police check to ensure there is no record of convictions for misconduct, including sexual misconduct. It is the responsibility of the church to ensure this is done.
2. **Code of Conduct:** A code of conduct outlines what is expected of leaders. It is not a job description, but rather a statement of how they should conduct themselves and what character qualities they should strive to develop as they spend time with young people. Leaders should be required to read and sign this code before taking on leadership responsibilities. You will examine a suggested code of conduct later in this course. A copy of it appears in Appendix 2 at the rear of this manual.
3. **Training in Safe Practice:** Whereas a code of conduct is read and signed when a leader begins serving, training in safe practice is a way of ensuring this code is followed. The course you are doing now is one way this training can be delivered. There are additional follow up questions for discussion amongst your leadership team at the rear of this manual in Appendix 1. YouthTRAIN also offers face to face training workshops on safe practice. Email murray@youthtrain.com if you're interested in learning more.
4. **First Aid Training:** While it is not essential that every leader be trained in administering basic first aid, sufficient people should have this training in order to be confident that help is present when needed. All leaders should know who has this training and expertise. Refresher courses should be undertaken at least every three years. Talk to a church leader if you'd like to receive this training.

Managing General Risks: Equipment



When it comes to managing risk we need to be sure that any equipment we use is as safe as realistically possible. Each church should have a health and safety policy that outlines their approach to these issues, and an appointed health and safety officer who ensures the policy is followed by identifying and managing risks, and compiling incident reports when there is an accident. This person will identify equipment that is potentially hazardous and do what is necessary to ensure any hazard is removed or minimised. If you're not sure who this person is, ask.

That's not to say however that a children's or youth leader has no responsibility for identifying hazards. You are the eyes and ears of the health and safety officer and will see things they may have missed or will be the first person to be aware of a developing hazard or breakage. When you do, be sure to either inform this person directly, or pass your observation on to whomever you report to in your leadership role.

Specifically, look out for and become aware of the following:

- 1. Safe Equipment:** As you regularly use equipment develop the capacity notice when it may be unsafe. Get into the habit of looking for signs that something is broken, damaged or worn. This can include furniture (chairs and tables), sporting or recreation equipment and electrical equipment.
- 2. Safety Equipment:** Use any safety equipment that is provided for the use within church programmes. The most basic piece of safety equipment which all churches should have is a first aid kit. Know where it is kept and what it contains. If the kit is running low on something let someone know so that it can be replaced. Other equipment might include latex gloves for food handling, igniters for lighting gas elements on a cook top or oven gloves for removing hot dishes from the oven.
- 3. Safely Using Equipment:** Sometimes the equipment we are using is safe but we are using it in an unsafe way or in a manner in which it's not intended to be used. Many church kitchens have equipment such as steriliser units, garbage disposal units and (gas) ovens. Instructions for use should be displayed nearby. If unsure, look for these instructions. If you can't find them and are still unsure don't guess! Find someone who knows. Similarly at times we can be setting up electrical equipment such as sound or lighting. Be sure you know what you're doing or again, find someone who knows. The internet can also be a good resource in finding ways to safely use equipment. For example, if you're using ladders see <https://worksafe.govt.nz/dmsdocument/20-safe-working-with-ladders-and-stapladders>

Managing General Risks: Environment



General environmental risks are those that exist where young people and children usually meet for their programmes. Most often they will be in the church buildings or around the church property. As was the case with equipment, most hazards will already have been identified by your church's health and safety officer and will appear in a hazard register. Keep the following three things in mind when considering general risks within your environment:

1. **Be Aware:** Consult your church's hazard register and find out what risks and hazards have already been identified.
2. **Observe:** Don't assume that because a risk is not recorded then it doesn't exist. A hazard register is a document that needs continual updating. Remember too, that a change in circumstances can create hazards. For example, a ramp may be perfectly safe - until it rains, at which point it can become dangerously slippery. Or an area may be safe during the day, but not at night when there is insufficient light. The age and maturity of those you're working with is a further consideration. For example, a kitchen may be deemed safe, yet you may not want to give children free reign there. Finally look out for obstacles appearing that make a previously safe area, unsafe. For example equipment that has been left in a passageway or chairs stacked too high.
3. **Act:** As you become aware of general risks in your church environment do what is necessary to eliminate or minimise their effect in your church programmes. For example you may need to remove anything that causes a risk or there may be parts of the building or property you declare to be off limits. If you identify new hazards that can't be easily fixed, report them to a key leader or directly to the church's health and safety officer.

Managing Specific Risks: People



Having identified general risks we turn our attention to specific risks. Remember these are risks associated with a single programme or activity.

Just because all the youth leaders are police checked, have signed a code of conduct and have undergone training in health and safety, it doesn't mean they no longer pose risk. When assessing the risk inherent in who is present to lead, consider:

1. **Experience:** For any activity that carries a degree of risk, ensure there are sufficient leaders present with the experience needed. For example, if you're taking young people on an overnight trek in the hills you want to have leaders who are experienced in bush craft. Or if you are swimming in the river you want leaders who are competent swimmers present. If you yourself lack the experience required of a leader advise the person who has oversight of the activity. Don't risk having them assume you are more experienced than you actually are.
2. **Qualifications:** We've already mentioned the importance of having sufficient people qualified in first aid present at your programmes. Other situations may arise where leaders don't have the skills or qualifications necessary. An example would be drivers who are not licensed to carry passengers. Another would be outdoor adventure activities where no qualified instructor is present.
3. **Preparedness:** Do leaders have all the knowledge necessary to perform the tasks assigned to them? Be sure that expectations are clearly laid out - in writing if necessary. If drivers are taking young people to a venue, do they know exactly where to go? If they are handling food are they wearing gloves or have they at least washed their hands with soap and hot water? If not, they pose a risk to young people's health and safety.
4. **Maturity:** Are leaders responsible enough to be trusted to act wisely and with maturity. For example, if you're going on a road trip, they may have a full license but are you confident they will not show off, exceed the speed limit or use their cell phone while driving? If in doubt they shouldn't be driving. Otherwise it's a good idea to at least remind them of these expectations before they leave so as to minimise risk.
5. **Sufficiency:** The acceptable ratio of leaders to participants in an activity or programme depends on a range of factors. Unless your church or denomination has prescribed a ratio, there is no simple answer applicable to all situations but a ratio should be determined in planning an activity - one which ensures that all young people are adequately supervised and can be individually cared for. More than one leader should be present at all events and activities, even if that means inviting someone in as an observer. Not only does this safeguard the leader but if there is an emergency there is one person to deal with the emergency and a second person to supervise the other young people not directly affected.

Managing Specific Risks: Equipment



When we looked at managing general equipment-related risks we considered three things: safe equipment, safety equipment and safely using equipment. These same things deserve consideration when assessing risk for a one off programme or activity.

1. **Safe equipment:** Itemise everything you will use as part of your activity and ask yourself, “Is it safe - and how do I know?” For example, does every car have a current warrant of fitness? Does every flashlight work? Is there enough safety equipment for everyone and is it being worn? Is anything damaged, broken or at risk of being broken?
2. **Safety equipment:** If your activity is taking place at the church, you should already know where the first aid kit is kept. Check that it's still there and is well stocked. If you are going off site make sure you have a first aid kit with you along with a cell phone in case medical help is required. Finally check that everyone has the necessary equipment to keep themselves healthy and safe. If engaging in outdoor adventure activities safety equipment such as life jackets and harnesses will be required and qualified instructors will check these are at hand. But remember too that you need to check young people have “equipment” to keep themselves safe such as warm clothes and suitable sturdy covered shoes.
3. **Safely using equipment:** With activities you organise you may be using equipment that is not inherently "unsafe" but could be used in an unsafe way. For example if young people are wearing blindfolds in a game, think about how you might keep them safe from walking or running into obstacles that could cause them harm. Remember that young people will not always instinctively use equipment safely. Try to imagine what they might (foolishly) do and devise strategies to either stop them doing this or minimise the likelihood of them doing it. And if they do it anyway - think about how to minimise the harm. Again, if young people are wearing a blindfold make a rule that there is to be no running or no interference from those watching – and have leaders watch out for those who might break the rules.

Managing Specific Risks: Environment



Before running a specific activity, leaders should consider what environmental factors pose a hazard beyond any that might be generally present. Again, awareness, observation and action are required. Some things to consider:

1. **Location:** Your activity may be safe but the place you plan to hold it may pose dangers. Do you know where the nearest medical centre is and what their contact number is - and is there even cell phone coverage where you're going?
2. **Terrain:** More than simply location, the terrain to which you are going may pose further dangers. For example, if you are walking in the ranges, how steep are the tracks? Are they likely to be muddy? What are the river levels expected to be? Will they be safe to cross? If you are swimming in the river you'll want to consider the depth of the water, the strength of the current and the cleanliness of the water. If you are going to the beach consider if it is safe to swim. Are there lifeguards and flags present? If not how do you know it's a safe beach and not subject to rips? Even if it is safe, what instructions will you give your young people about where they can swim and how far out they can go?
3. **Weather:** Is the activity weather dependent? If you proceed in inclement weather, what hazards and risks will become evident? Can these risks be safely managed or are you best to abandon the activity? For example, if you are planning an outdoor activity and it is going to be cold and wet will you advise young people to dress in warm weatherproof clothing, or cancel the event? It's a question you need to consider in advance. Remember too that there may be fine weather for your event but previous bad weather may have made a location unsafe.
4. **Circumstance:** These are risks that can come and go and may or may not be easy to predict. For example high traffic density when travelling in rush hour may pose a greater challenge to inexperienced drivers or may cause you to be later than planned, putting your activity at risk. In summer mosquitoes or sandflies may be present or shade may be lacking, making insect repellent and sunscreen necessary. Don't assume young people will think to bring their own.

Finally, if you are travelling to an unfamiliar place it is wise to visit there first and identify any hazards present in the terrain and location, and to anticipate any that may occur related to weather and circumstance on the day.

PART 2: ETHICAL CONDUCT



Working with young people means constantly having to make decisions that affect their well being. Sometimes the decisions are clear cut – it's obvious what we should or shouldn't do. Other times the decisions we make are not so easy and we need to carefully weigh up alternatives and choose a best course of action.

To do this we need to construct an ethical framework that guides us in making good decisions. An ethical framework consists of two elements which some sources use interchangeably but which we prefer to separate and define as follows:

1. **A Code of Ethics:** These consist of underlying **principles** and **attitudes** that govern our decision making. They are broad generalised convictions from which right behaviour can be derived.
2. **A Code of Conduct:** These consist of specific **behaviours** and **expectations**. They explicitly differentiate between what is acceptable and unacceptable in given circumstances.

Whenever we're faced with a decision that is not covered in a code of ethics we examine our code of conduct to learn what we should do. If our code of conduct does not address the issue, we return again to our code of ethics to guide us in deciding what is the right thing to do.

Not only do codes of ethics and conduct help us in knowing the right course of action, but they act as protection for us. At times we face requests from people which cause us to feel uncomfortable about saying "no", for fear that we may be criticised or misunderstood. The codes provide us with an objective rule which we can refer to and respond, "Sorry. Our policy doesn't allow me to do that."

The guidelines that follow are designed to help you make right ethical choices. Through them you will become familiar with key elements of a Biblical code of ethics and elements of a code of conduct for working with young people.

I. CODE OF ETHICS



When it comes to developing a code of ethics we view the Bible as our primary source and authority (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Various denominations, churches and youth/child organisations develop their own code of ethics which generally reflect Biblical truth but our ultimate point of reference remains as Scripture.

Many times the Bible instructs us on how act in an ethical manner. Jesus said that all these instructions can be reduced to just two (Matthew 22:40). In what we have come to call the Great Commandment, Jesus instructed us to "love the Lord God with all our heart, soul mind and strength" (Matthew 22:37,38) so the first question we should ask ourselves when considering an ethical response is "Does this response demonstrate a love for God and does it bring glory to Him?" Jesus went on to add a second command: to "love our neighbour as ourselves" (Matthew 22:39). Therefore the second question we ask ourselves in considering an ethical course of action is "Is the most loving thing to do?" If the answer is "no" to either of these questions then the correct ethical response is apparent.

To develop a more detailed Biblical code of ethics we can look at the many "one another's" of Scripture. These are the commands that instruct us in the right way to treat each other. Below are listed twelve of these.

1. Accept one another

We are to accept all young people equally, regardless of background, behaviour, morals or religious beliefs. Acceptance is not the same as agreement or approval. Acceptance denotes unconditional love and reflects the love God has for us and the young person.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 5:17)

2. Admonish one another

As leaders we have a responsibility to identify harmful actions and point these out to the young person concerned, helping them develop better ways of responding to situations they face. Such admonition must be done in love with the intention of producing behaviour that glorifies God.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

3. Bear with one another

At times leadership will test our resolve yet we will remain patient with young people, treating them with gentleness and not reacting according to our own pain, emotions or agenda at the time.

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

4. Build up and encourage one another

The desire to do what is ultimately best for a young person governs the way we treat them. Our aim is to encourage them and to build them up.

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians. 5:11)

5. Care for one another

As young people and families go through trials we stand alongside them, caring for them and comforting them as we help them bear their burden without assuming sole responsibility for resolving it for them.

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

6. Confess faults to one another

When we make mistakes we admit our error to all concerned and ask for their forgiveness. In doing so, we model humility and a willingness to take responsibility for our faults and errors.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

7. Forgive one another

When a young person admits their guilt, we are quick to forgive and then treat them without resentment no matter how they might have harmed us. Such a response assures them of God's forgiveness and cleansing when they confess their sins to Him.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

8. Be honest with one another

We have a responsibility to be honest in our dealings with young people, not compromising truth for the sake of our own advantage or manipulating them in order to get them to choose what we deem to be best for them.

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices." (Colossians 3:9)

9. Be devoted to one another in love

Devoted love to our young people and their families means we don't give up on them. We continue believing for the best and maintain hope, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. It also means we are committed to those we serve alongside or those in leadership over us, never speaking badly about them.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." (Romans 12:10a)

10. Pray for one another

Regardless of frustration and favour we are to continually pray for young people and those serving with us, even if they act negatively toward us.

"But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" (Matthew 5:44)

11. Serve one another

Serving young people, their families, and those in ministry with us means that we consider them above ourselves, making sacrifices for their sake without compromising our own necessary boundaries that keep us safe and healthy.

"Serve one another in love." (Galatians 5:13)

12. Submit to one another

Submission means respecting those in leadership over us recognising their authority as well as the primacy of the parent child relationship over our own relationship with young people. It also means submitting our own selfish agendas in favour of those that will ultimate benefit the young people, so modelling the sacrificial submission of Christ for His Church.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

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II. CODE OF CONDUCT



The Bible does more than give us ethical principles that make up a code of ethics. It also gives us specific instructions that tell us how to conduct ourselves in given situations. The challenge we face however is that not all situations we face in ministry are explicitly dealt with in Scripture by a simple command. This is where a code of conduct can be helpful, because such a code clearly states what is expected of those in leadership.

A code of conduct can also be helpful to leaders should they be pressured to make decisions that might be deemed unethical or unwise. They can simply say, "I'm sorry but I'm not permitted to do that" when expectations are placed upon them which they feel uncomfortable in meeting e.g. driving young people home alone, keeping confidences when someone is at risk, messaging young people late at night.

A code of conduct will generally cover not only a leader's conduct when attending a programme, but their conduct outside the programme. It does this for two reasons. Firstly it's important that leaders act with integrity and for this to happen their private or personal life away from leadership must be consistent with the life they talk about and live out in front of the young people.

Again, various denominations, churches and youth/child organisations develop their own code of conduct. For the sake of illustration we will present our own recommended code of conduct here for you to study and reflect on. Note however that the code of conduct for your own church or denomination may differ from what is found here so seek to obtain any relevant documentation from your church leaders and familiarise yourself with it. Alternatively you can download a copy of our code and amend it as necessary.

Our code consists of ten pledges covering three areas of focus:

I. Conduct in relation to self

- A pledge of character
- A pledge of compliance
- A pledge of self care

II. Conduct in relation to young people

- A pledge of love
- A pledge of humility
- A pledge of innocence
- A pledge of parental honour

III. Conduct in relation to ministry role

- A pledge of commitment
- A pledge of unity
- A pledge of loyalty

We will examine each of these pledges in more detail on the following pages.

A Pledge of Character



PLEDGE 1: “I will demonstrate Christian character through my behaviour.”

“Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

The first pledge has to do with living an exemplary life both publically when we are with young people, as well as privately when we are alone. The pledge of conduct relates to a number of areas:

i. Relationships

Young people are surrounded with poor examples of relationships through the media and in "real life". Leaders who are in relationship with members of the opposite sex have the opportunity to set an example for young people as to how to properly conduct a relationship. They should show respect to one another at all times and avoid inappropriate physical affection.

ii. Sexual purity

We live in a highly sexualised society where young people are constantly bombarded with sexual messages and temptations. Leaders are to not only set an example to young people when they're with them but should also strive to be pure in thought and action when young people not around.

iii. Social Media

The pervasiveness and reach of social media means that people's lives are not as private as they once were. Leaders should ensure their behaviour would give no cause for embarrassment should it be broadcast and should think carefully about the pages they follow, the posts that they like, and the pictures that that share or comment on. If they're not prepared to be public about these things in church where leaders, parents and young people can see and hear, then they should not engage with this content on social media.

iv. Alcohol

Leaders need to be wise regarding their use of alcohol. It is never OK to drink to the point of getting drunk. Some leaders prefer not to drink at all, limiting their freedom so as not to cause others to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:9). If a leader does drink it should be in moderation and never in front of young people.

v. Language

You can tell a lot about a person by the things they say and the words they use (Matthew 12:34). When leaders use bad language, when they gossip or speak unkindly of others, they reveal the state of their heart and set a poor example to those they should be role models for (Ephesians 4:29,30).

vi. Dress

Leaders also have a responsibility to watch how they dress. Clothes should be “modest and decent” (1 Timothy 2:9). Female leaders especially need to be aware of the example they set for young girls when not dressing modestly, as well as they way their appearance can be a stumbling block to boys wanting to keep their thoughts pure. There is nothing wrong with “looking nice” but avoid a preoccupation with appearance and fashion that gives the impression that “how we look is more important that who we are”.

A Pledge of Compliance



PLEDGE 2: "I will not engage in any unlawful activity."

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. (Romans 13:1a)

The second pledge is hopefully obvious - to abide by the law in all situations. This pledge applies not only to acts deemed "criminal"; it also applies to smaller indiscretions of which we can easily excuse ourselves.

i. Vehicle related issues:

This covers behaviour related to cars and driving. Any actions related to the use of cars which are against the law, are a poor example to young and send a message that such behaviour is OK. This includes wilfully exceeding the speed limit, engaging in risky or careless behaviour behind the wheel, breaking driver's license conditions and driving with an unregistered vehicle or one without a warrant of fitness.

ii. Financial practice

Leaders must also act legally and honestly their handling of money. The nature of their role can mean at times they are handling significant amounts of cash which do not belong to them. Misuse or misappropriation of these finances is illegal. Leaders should also abide by the law not only in their use of ministry funds but also in their private and personal use of money. Illegal actions include filing false tax returns, dishonesty over hours worked and inflated expense claims.

iii. Drug abuse

Clearly the use of illicit drugs such as cannabis/marijuana is unacceptable, but many party pills are also illegal as is the abuse of prescription drugs. There is no place at all for leaders to use drugs illegally, either publically or in private.

A Pledge of Self Care



Pledge 3: “I will pursue health and wellness along with personal growth.”

“Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.” (3 John 2)

The third pledge concerns the importance of caring for ourselves. Long term effective ministry depends on health in all areas of our life. Our, physical, emotional, social and spiritual health are interrelated. When one area suffers all areas are affected.

i. Physical health:

Leaders have a responsibility to care for their physical health. This includes eating healthy food as well as exercising and getting sufficient sleep. When these basics are attended to they will have a positive flow on effect to other areas of life.

ii. Emotional wellness

Just as a leader can become physically exhausted through over exertion they can also become emotionally exhausted when experiencing prolonged stress or upset. To remain emotionally well a leader needs to find ways to relieve that stress through rest and activities that energise them. Having someone to talk through pressures being faced can also be of great benefit. Leaders should also guard against those things that threaten emotional wellness such as unforgiveness, envy, and false guilt.

iii. Healthy relationships

The quality of a leader’s relationships with others reveal a great deal about their ability to be an effective youth leader. Regardless of age they will show honour and respect to their parents in word and action. If married, their relationship with their spouse will be characterised by love and mutual submission. They will have friends with whom they can be transparent and honest, and they will be able to establish appropriate boundaries.

iv. Christian growth

A leader needs to take responsibility for their own Christian growth. This will be evidenced by a consistent personal devotional life including Bible study and prayer; regular church attendance and a willingness to be accountable to others.

A Pledge of Love



Pledge 4: “I will treat all young people with genuine Christian love.”

Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. (1 John 3:18)

The fourth pledge is one of love – an attitude toward young people and a treatment of them that is not dependent upon how they behave or what they believe. Such an attitude and treatment is best illustrated in the life of Jesus and His interactions with people (Luke 5:29-32). There are three dimensions to this pledge:

i. Equality

Treating all young people equally means we do not show bias towards them on the basis of belief, race, gender, sexuality or behaviour. We don’t give in to prejudices, stereotypes or assumptions; we simply accept them at face value. In the process of working with young people we will not always agree with their convictions or values or behaviour. Equality however means we not treat them negatively based purely on these things. We welcome them as we would anyone else.

ii. Dignity

Treating all young people with dignity means we do not primarily define them by a label based on belief, race, gender, sexuality or behaviour. Before they are “atheist”, “gay” or “rebellious” they are individuals created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and loved by Him (John 3:16).

iii Respect

Respect takes equality and dignity a step further. It creates a place where young people are free from bullying, condemnation or manipulation, both from us as leaders and from other young people. As leaders we have the right (and responsibility) to clearly express and justify our own convictions. Respect means we allow young people the right to do the same without us ridiculing their beliefs or trying to win arguments over them. Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who leads people into truth and brings conviction regarding wrong behaviour.

A Pledge of Humility



Pledge 5: "I will not use my position to manipulate or gain advantage."

"Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Philippians 2:4)

The fifth pledge is one of humility – our choice as leaders not to see ourselves as being more important than those whom we lead and to not use our position to have our own needs met. In practice this means guarding against the harmful effects of the following:

i. Deception

Often young people make assumptions about leaders that may not be entirely accurate. They may assume they are better or more "spiritual" than they really are and it's tempting as leaders to allow young people to do so and even use this perception to one's advantage. To avoid this danger, leaders should be honest and transparent with young people about their own weakness and even struggles. (Note however, there are limits to this. There may be struggles that it may not be appropriate to disclose, especially to children or young teens).

ii. Power imbalance

When one assumes a position of leadership over a young person they take on a role that gives them influence. This influence can be used for good or for harm – for the young person's benefit or for the leader's own advantage. It's important for leaders to realise that their role creates a power imbalance in their relationships with young people. Leaders should be careful in establishing friendships with young people because of this power imbalance. It does not make for a healthy relationship based on equality because young people are not the leader's "friends". For this reason romantic relationships between leaders and young people should not be allowed to develop. The power imbalance means that the leader's and young person's judgement can be compromised as roles become confused.

iii. Emotional dependence

An unhealthy emotional dependency is one likely outcome of a romantic connection between a leader and a young person, but such dependence can occur when no such connection exists. It generally takes one of two forms:

- The young person develops a need for the attention and emotional support they receive from the leader.
- The leader looks to the young person to have their own emotional needs for value and significance met.

In both cases the sense of dependence works against solutions being found to the young person's problems. Dependence should be directed towards Christ and the young person's capacity to seek Him for the answers and resources they need.

A Pledge of Innocence



Pledge 6: “I will avoid any behaviour or situation that might be misconstrued.”

“For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. (Luke 8:17)

The sixth pledge is not so much a pledge to not do wrong; it’s a pledge to not give any appearance of doing wrong. It’s been said that young people are good observers but poor interpreters. They are more likely than adults to misunderstand what is intended by a comment or action and so leaders of young people need to be on guard not to give a wrong impression even if they are doing something not inherently wrong (1 Corinthians 8:9). Below are three common areas in which this can occur:

i. Physical touch

A hug or an arm around the shoulder can seem a harmless way to communicate affection or to offer comfort to a young person. Yet a leader needs to be aware that such actions may be misinterpreted. They may see it as an expression of romantic feelings that could either alarm or attract them. They may have a history of sexual abuse or assault and uninvited touch may cause some of the feelings of trauma to resurface. So should we desist from physical affection all together? That’s up to the individual leader. At very least we should be certain our actions will not be misinterpreted. If in doubt, avoid physical touch.

ii. Alone together and unseen

Leaders should avoid situations where they are alone together with a young person in a location where they cannot be seen. When a young person wishes to talk one to one with a leader it should occur in a location where they are in full view of others, or at least in a place where they could easily be seen by someone e.g. a room with an open door. Similarly leaders should exercise caution when driving young people home. As much as is realistically possible a leader should drop members of the same sex home last, or drop home last the person they are most certain would never make an accusation against them. Permission to drive a young person home should always be obtained first from parents or guardians. The reason for caution in these circumstances is not necessarily because the leader cannot be trusted. It’s for two reasons: firstly a leader should avoid any situation where a young person might feel uncomfortable, and secondly even a false accusation of inappropriate behaviour made by a young person deems the leader to be guilty until proven innocent – an innocence can be hard to prove.

iii. Messaging and texting

Leaders should be careful about the messages they send to young people through texts and messaging apps. Inappropriate messaging includes engaging in personal and emotional conversations with members of the opposite sex and sending messages at night – 10pm is a good cut off time. At night tiredness can affect judgement and self control. It’s a good idea to keep a record of conversations with young people and not to delete them as evidence that all messages sent are appropriate.

A Pledge of Parental Honour



Pledge 7: “I will respect a parent’s primary role in caring for their child.”

*[Parents], bring [your children] up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:4b)*

The seventh pledge is essentially a pledge leaders make to the parents of young people in their care. It’s a pledge that recognises the role parents have in relation to their children. Biblically, they are the primary caregivers and disciplers of their children (Deuteronomy 11:19). The role of the leader is to offer support. While it is true that the leader takes on a greater responsibility when a child’s parents are unbelievers, it doesn’t take away the responsibility to honour parents, respecting their values and beliefs. In practice, this covers three areas:

i. Endorse authority and encourage obedience

Assuming a parent is not encouraging their teen or child to do something illegal or immoral, leaders should instruct young people to obey their parents in all things, even when their decisions may seem unduly harsh or strict. Leaders may listen to young people’s concerns about their parents but should be careful not to side with them explicitly or implicitly in any disagreement. If deemed useful they, or a more experienced leader, may assist parents and their teens in resolving issues causing conflict.

ii. Communication

Leaders have a responsibility to get to know the parents of young people in their programmes and to keep them informed about what is happening in the youth programme. This can take the form of term calendars, regular emails, facebook groups, phone calls etc. as well as face to face conversation.

iii. Appropriate confidentiality

Leaders also have the responsibility to inform parents of any issues related to their child. Speak to them about any concerns (or encouragements) you have but do not betray confidences. The exception to this guideline is if the child or someone they know is at risk of harming themselves. If this is not the case and parents ask to know what is being talked about, assure them their child is safe and explain to them that a breach of confidentiality is likely to mean they will no longer open up to you. Leaders need to be accountable to a more experienced leader or pastor to ensure they make wise decisions in this area and to protect them from parents who may still demand to know details. In such situations they should be referred on to this person.

A Pledge of Excellence



Pledge 8: "I will fulfil all ministry expectations to the best of my ability."

"Feed and shepherd God's flock... purchased with His own blood, over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders." (Acts 20:28)

The eighth pledge is the first of the final three that all relate directly to the leader's ministry role. It is a pledge to do one's best in the following areas:

i. Attendance

Becoming a leader means pledging to make attendance at meetings and programmes a top priority. A commitment to be present communicates unity and loyalty to the team as well as love and loyalty to the young people. Of course at times sickness, family commitments or personal workload/stress will mean missing a meeting or programme. In such cases apologies and a reason should be communicated to the team leader as soon as possible.

ii. Preparation

Often leaders will be required to do some preparation before coming to meetings or programmes. This might be preparing games or becoming familiar with Bible study questions. A pledge of excellence means this preparation is done thoroughly, enabling the leader to lead to the best of their ability.

iii. Learning

The best leaders are those with a hunger to learn and improve. Leaders should welcome constructive feedback from those they are accountable to and should take full advantage of training opportunities as they are presented.

iv. Prayer

An effective leader will recognise that no amount of dedication, preparation or skill will ever be a substitute for the transforming power of God acting in young people's lives. They will therefore be people of prayer, who regularly ask for God to help them in their role and to work out His purposes in young people's lives.

A Pledge of Unity



Pledge 9: “I will contribute to the health and unity of the leadership team.”

“Live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church.” (1 Corinthians 1:10b)

Nothing is more destructive to a ministry than division among its leaders. The devil knows that if he can get leaders fighting one another or simply disliking one another, he will have done serious harm to the ministry. The ninth pledge therefore is one of unity and involves striving to do the following:

i. Avoid harmful speech

The author of the book of James reminds us that the tongue is a powerful thing (James 3:1-12). It can be used for both evil and good. If a team is to remain united there is no place for those sins caused by careless use of the tongue. Gossiping, criticism, and slander serve no good purpose. They only breed discontent and division and should be dealt with quickly.

ii. Maintain good relationships

Each leader should do all they can to have good relationship with all other members of the team (Romans 12:18). Inevitably they will feel closer to some team members than others – that’s normal. But should conflict arise and relationships become broken, each leader has the responsibility to do all they can to ensure there is a reconciliation – regardless of who they perceive is at fault (Matthew 5:23-25). If conflict continues a more experienced leader who is independent should step in to assist in mending the relationship. At times like this it’s good to be reminded that the task the team is engaged in is more important than the issue causing disagreement (John 17:20,21).

iii. Encourage others

Whereas conflict divides a team, encouragement unites it. Look for ways to build other leaders up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Notice when they do something well and affirm them. Encouragement is contagious. It can spread to the whole team and on into the ministry. When young people see leaders encouraging and affirming each other it sets a powerful example for them to follow.

A Pledge of Loyalty



Pledge 10: “I will demonstrate loyalty and respect toward the church and its leaders.”

“Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. They watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God.” (Hebrews 13:17)

The final pledge concerns the leader’s attitude to their church and its leaders. Those who lead in church ministries have the responsibility to both model and express a love for Christ’s church, both universal and local, of which they are a part (1 Timothy 4:12). A lack of loyalty and respect for the church whom Jesus died for, is not only contrary to what God desires; it sets a poor example to young people. Loyalty and respect is shown in the following spheres:

i. Leadership

God calls some to be leaders in His church and all church members need to acknowledge this calling and show loyalty and respect to these leaders. That’s not to say they cannot disagree, but disagreement should not lead to a loss of loyalty and respect. Instead contrary ideas and opinions need to be expressed in a spirit of love where the issue remains the focus and not the person. If a leader disagrees strongly with other team members or the key leader, and feel they cannot lead in the environment that exists, it is generally best that they quietly step aside if they have been unsuccessful in efforts to resolve any differences. Remaining on the team only breeds division and resentment and might even split the team as people start taking sides.

ii. The Church

All churches have their faults and sometimes these are easy to spot. Leaders should avoid speaking negatively about their church especially when young people are in earshot. If there are things that need fixing, leaders should resolve to work to be part of the solution. Being publically critical of their church only creates a bigger problem.

iii. Attendance

Belonging to a church and especially providing leadership in a church ministry, rightly carries an expectation that the leader will be regular in attending worship services (Hebrews 10:24,25). This is not simply a legalistic rule but a tangible way to express commitment to other church members – gathering together as Christ’s Body in unity to worship Him. Leaders of course will not necessarily attend every service, morning and night and they may at times visit other churches. However, unless there is a good and acceptable reason for not doing so, they must demonstrate a clear commitment to the church in which they serve as a leader and be seen by the young people they lead to be regular in worship, thus setting an example to be followed.

APPENDIX 1: Questions for Discussion

I. Safe Practice

- i. Think back over what's occurred in your programme over recent weeks. Share and discuss any examples of physical, psychological, sexual or spiritual harm that may have occurred. In doing so consider the definitions provided in the course.
- ii. What steps are in place to ensure leaders don't pose any risks to the young people? What more could be done?
- iii. Walk through your church buildings and around your church property identifying and agreeing upon any realistic hazards that exist and could potentially cause harm to the young people you lead. Include equipment that may be "safe" but not necessarily safe for your young people to use unsupervised. Check to see how many of these are already in the church's hazard register. Discuss any steps you could take to make your church safer.
- iv. Share with each other any qualifications or skills you might have that could be of value when engaged in activities that could potentially involve some risk (e.g. full driver's license, swimming, first aid, bush craft, hygiene, nutrition etc.)
- v. Consider the leader to young people ratio at your regular programmes and recent activities. Has it been acceptable? What is desirable? How can you ensure a better ratio in future?
- vi. For each of the following activities indicate what actions you might take in order to minimise risk. Consider the three categories of hazard: people, equipment, and environment.
 - a. A treasure hunt after dark in and around the local community.
 - b. A bike ride to the beach for a swim.
 - c. A day tramp in the hills
 - d. A sports afternoon at the park
 - e. Playing games after dark in the church carpark

II. Ethical Conduct

Discuss the following scenarios: What would you advise and Why?

- i. A youth leader is a good role model to young people at youth group, but in their own time they regularly hang out with their friends and drink, sometimes to excess.
- ii. A youth leader regularly hugs young people when they arrive at a programme, including members of the opposite sex.
- iii. A youth leader carries out text/messaging conversations with a youth group member of the opposite sex that are unrelated to their role as a youth leader.
- iv. A youth leader starts a relationship with a member of the youth group.
- v. A youth leader drops off young people in their car after youth group. In the process they are alone in the car with a young person.
- vi. A young person asks a youth leader if they can talk alone with them after youth group.
- vii. A young person says they would like to tell you something but first asks you to promise that you will keep what they say confidential.
- viii. A parent knows that their child has been talking to you about their problems. They ask you what their child has been saying.
- ix. A youth group runs what is advertised as a social programme and encourages young people to bring friends. In the process they preach a message and invite people to make a Christian commitment.
- x. A youth leader tells an offhand racist joke. It's all in good fun and no one seems to be offended.
- xi. A male youth leader gently teases a girl about the revealing way she is dressed.
- xii. A young person has a problem and the youth leader tells them what they must do to solve it.

APPENDIX 2: A Sample Biblical Pledge of Conduct for Leaders

I. CONDUCT IN RELATION TO SELF

- 1. A Pledge of Character: "I will demonstrate Christian character through my behaviour."**
"Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)
- 2. A Pledge of Compliance: "I will not engage in any unlawful activity."**
Everyone must submit to governing authorities. (Romans 13:1a)
- 3. A Pledge of Self Care: "I will pursue health and wellness along with personal growth."**
"Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit." (3 John 2)

II. CONDUCT IN RELATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE

- 4. A Pledge of Love: "I will treat all young people with genuine Christian love."**
Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. (1 John 3:18)
- 5. A Pledge of Humility: "I will not use my position to manipulate or gain advantage."**
"Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." (Philippians 2:4)
- 6. A Pledge of Innocence: "I will avoid any behaviour or situation that might be misconstrued."**
"For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. (Luke 8:17)
- 7. A Pledge of Parental Honour: "I will respect a parent's primary role in caring for their child."**
[Parents], bring [your children] up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4b)

III. CONDUCT IN RELATION TO MINISTRY ROLE

- 8. A Pledge of Excellence: "I will fulfil all ministry expectations to the best of my ability."**
"Feed and shepherd God's flock... purchased with His own blood, over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders." (Acts 20:28)
- 9. A Pledge of Unity: "I will contribute to the health and unity of the leadership team."**
"Live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church." (1 Corinthians 1:10b)
- 10. A Pledge of Loyalty: "I will demonstrate loyalty and respect toward the church and its leaders."**
"Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. They watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God." (Hebrews 13:17)

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