



# Seriously important things you need to know

A guide for safe youth ministry  
in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

This resource has been prepared by the Archdiocesan Office for Youth in consultation with the Professional Standards Unit.

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# Quick reference guide

## Leadership

Thank you for your commitment to safe youth ministry. The safety of young people in your ministry starts with your leadership team.

### 1. Youth ministry basics

Define the **purpose** and **parameters** of your youth ministry, guided by *Anointed and Sent*.

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### 2. Your leadership team

Know the **key principles of youth ministry leadership**. Leaders should be **recruited carefully**. All leaders must have a **Working With Children Check**, and some will need a **Police Check**. Commit to ongoing **training and formation** to provide a safe environment in your ministry.

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### 3. Codes of Behaviour

Leaders should be aware of **legislation** and **church requirements** in place to keep young people safe, especially in the areas of reporting suspected abuse or harm and engaging with young people. Have a **code of conduct** in place for all leaders and young people.

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## Young people

Your youth ministry should be a place where all young people and the people who care for them feel known, welcome and safe.

### 4. Knowing your young people

Value working with the **parents** of young people in your youth ministry. Know the young people are in your care, and be confident that you are equipped to care for them by **collecting information and consent** annually and before any excursion or camp. Identify young people who may have **special needs**.

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### 5. Communicating with young people

Think about the way your youth ministry uses **social media** to engage with young people and obtain permission for **photos and video**.

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## On the ground

For regular activities, excursions or overnight activities, consider the following:

### 6. Supervision

Know who is present at any time by adopting a **sign in** system. Consider a suitable **ratio** of leaders to participants and make additional provisions for **overnight stays**.

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### 7. Venues

Assess the suitability of **regular gathering spaces** and select experienced and accredited venues for **excursions and camps**.

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### 8. Medical needs and first aid

Have a **trained first aider** at any gathering with access to a **first aid kit** and phone. Collect information about known medical issues including management plans for **asthma and allergies**.

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### 9. Food safety

Whether you are providing or selling food, be aware of **food safe practices** and local requirements. Carefully consider the serving of **alcohol**.

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### 10. Transport

If you are providing transport, ensure your drivers are safe, have permission, and drive roadworthy vehicles.

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### 11. Activities

Review all content for **regular gatherings**. If you are engaging in **higher risk activities** assess and work to minimise the risks involved.

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## When serious things happen

Sometimes despite our best efforts things can go wrong: accidents happen or we may encounter young people at risk of harm.

### 12. What to do when serious things happen

Have plans in place to respond to **accidents, mental health issues**, or known or suspected **abuse**, including an awareness of your legal responsibilities.

File an **incident report** for any significant incident with your parish. **Pastoral support** is available to you or others involved in a significant incident.

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If you need assistance implementing this guide or responding to a situation in your youth ministry, the Archdiocese is here for you. Contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth on +613 9287 5565 or the Archdiocese's Office of Professional Conduct & Ethics on +613 9926 5677.



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## Introduction

Engaging young people in the life and mission of the Catholic Church is a fulfilling ministry. With this important work comes a serious responsibility to care for the wellbeing of all young people who come into contact with our parishes and communities.

This guide helps you as a volunteer or paid youth ministry leader in the Archdiocese of Melbourne keep the young people in your ministry safe from physical, emotional and personal harm in every way you and your team engage with them. This guide has been developed for the parish context, but contains many best practice suggestions which can be applied to any youth ministry setting. In this document, young people refers to people aged under 18 years.

This guide is based on Victorian State Legislation around child safety as well as the requirements set by 'May our Children Flourish' which is the Archdiocese's code of conduct for caring for children. The requirements of the Archdiocese meet, and sometimes exceed, the requirements set by legislation: we've presented them here in a way that's practical for you to apply to your youth ministry.

### Using this guide

Start on page 2 where you will find a snap shot of different areas you need to consider if you lead a youth ministry which includes young people aged under 18 years. Follow the prompts for detailed information and practical suggestions for applying safe practices to your ministry.

If you ever need advice or help in responding to a situation, the Archdiocese is here to support you. For assistance, contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth on +613 9287 5565 or the Archdioceses' Professional Standards Unit on +613 9926 5621.

### Child Safe Standards (CSS)

The Victorian government has adopted mandatory child safe standards for all organisations working with children. There are seven child safe standards:

1. Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety through effective leadership arrangements
2. A Child Safe Policy or Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
3. A Code of Conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
4. Screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
5. Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
6. Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
7. Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

In each chapter of this document, you will find a summary with action points link to the child safe standards.

*Example: Leaders are recruited carefully CSS4*



## 1. Youth ministry basics

Youth ministry exists to:

1. Foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person
2. Draw young people into responsible participation in the life and mission of the Catholic faith community
3. Empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in today's world

These goals come from *Anointed and Sent*, the Australian vision for Catholic youth ministry.

As you start thinking about how to do youth ministry safely, take a step back and consider the big picture of youth ministry with your leadership team. Evaluate the **purpose** of your youth ministry, and identify the values and **parameters** that define your ministry:

- Which community do we serve? If you are a parish-based ministry, you can call upon your parish priest or Parish Child Safety Officer (or equivalent) for guidance to assist you in implementing the recommendations in this guide.
- What age group is this youth ministry for? Having a defined age bracket will guide your planning. If your group includes under 18s, there are specific legislative and diocesan requirements around safety which are explained throughout this guide. An advertised upper age limit clarifies that older people should only be present if they are identified as leaders or parents and understand the principles of safe youth ministry presented here.
- What do we do? *Anointed and Sent* offers eight focus areas to help shape a balanced ministry. Reviewing your youth ministry with these eight focus areas will help you identify how your ministry can serve the growth of each young person to participate in the life and mission of the church and as disciples in the world. These focus areas are:
  - Prayer and Worship
  - Evangelisation
  - Catechises
  - Pastoral care
  - Community life
  - Justice and service
  - Leadership Development
  - Advocacy

### Summary

- Reflect on the purpose of youth ministry as defined by *Anointed and Sent*
- Your parish priest or Parish Child Safety Officer should assist you in implementing the recommendations in this guide CSS1
- Define age limits for participation in your youth ministry CSS6
- A balanced approach to youth ministry includes the eight focus areas of *Anointed and Sent* CSS7



## 2. Your leadership team

It's a privilege to accompany young people in their faith journey. To minister to young people safely, leaders need to be spiritually mature, have practical nous and demonstrate a commitment to protecting anyone who is vulnerable. There are also minimum requirements set in place by the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Victorian law.

### **Key principles of youth ministry leadership**

Understanding the role of a youth ministry leader will set the tone for the way you interact with young people, and help your leadership team determine what is and isn't appropriate behaviour. Here are some principles to think about for the way your ministry approaches leadership:

- ❑ *We are disciples too:* Youth ministry leaders accompany young people in their faith journey. To do this, you must be committed to growing in your own spiritual life and strive to be a witness to Christian values. It also means that all your interactions with young people in your ministry are about bringing them closer to Jesus – fostering their growth, drawing them into the life and mission of the Catholic Church, and empowering them to live as Jesus' disciples.
- ❑ *Always a leader:* Sometimes you or your leaders may be very close in age to the young people you are ministering to, or you might interact with young people in a social setting outside the parish or youth group. Inside or outside of scheduled youth ministry, you are *always* a leader. Wherever you are, you should feel confident that your behaviour is consistent with the values you are witnessing to. Your friendship with the young people you minister to is different to your friendship with your peers, because as a leader you hold a position of responsibility, trust and authority.
- ❑ *We take leadership seriously:* Taking leadership *seriously* means doing your best to take advantage of formation and training opportunities so that you continue to grow in your skills and knowledge as a leader. It also means that you support other leaders to grow in leadership and promote an environment where your leadership team can openly share concerns.

## Recruiting leaders

If you are responsible for recruiting leaders, you need to know who they are. Often leaders will come directly from your ministry and you will feel like you know them well, but it is a good idea to ask them specific questions about their motivation and understanding of leadership:

- Why would you like to be a leader?
- What do you think the leader role involves?
- What are some of the ways we keep young people safe in our youth ministry?
- How might some of your relationships with young people in our ministry change if you become a leader?

Do reference checks with someone who has personal experience of that person in a setting with young people, such as a teacher, coach, chaplain or employer. Ask the following questions:

- How have you observed this person interacting with young people?
- Would you feel comfortable in having that person spend time with young people when they are indirectly supervised (for example, leading a small group on their own)?
- Does this person work well in a team? Are they happy to take on feedback?

It's ok to have a time of discernment for potential leaders before they commit fully. Before they commence formally as a leader, they must have applied for a Working With Children Check (and, if applicable, a Police Check). Make time with new leaders to discuss the principles of safe youth ministry and the expectations and processes in place at your youth ministry.

## Working With Children Checks

The Working With Children Check helps protect children by identifying those who pose a risk to children based on their criminal records or reported professional misconduct related to the safety of children. It is a Victorian state requirement that anyone engaged with child-related work have a Working With Children Check (some exemptions apply).

All youth ministry leaders in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are required to have a Working With Children Check, whether they are volunteers or paid staff, unless an exemption applies such as for registered teachers. Applying for or renewing a volunteer check is free. There is a fee for an employee check which your parish may cover.

To apply for a Working With Children Check:

1. Go to [workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) and fill in the online application form. You will need to print an Application Summary once the online form is complete. Indicate your parish as your organisation in your application.
2. Take your Application Summary along with proof of identity documents, and application fee (if applicable) to an Australia Post service to lodge. You will receive a receipt to show you have lodged your application.
3. Your Working With Children Check card will be posted to you, and a copy sent to your parish.

The status of Working With Children Checks can be checked at [workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au). Keep a record of your leadership team's Working With Children Checks on file with your Parish Child Safety Officer and note expiry dates.

If you already have a Working With Children Check from other volunteering or employment, you should update your details at [workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](http://workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) to include the parish where you will be serving. This means that your parish will be automatically updated of any changes to your check status.

## Police Checks

In addition to Working With Children Checks, the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne requires that key leader and any leaders transporting young people or participating in overnight activities with young people have a Police Check or current Victorian Institute of Teaching registration. A Police Check informs if a person has committed various offences that can be disclosed from their national criminal record. There is an application fee for both volunteers and employees which your parish may cover.

To apply for a Police Check as a volunteer:

1. Go to the Victorian Police website [police.vic.gov.au](http://police.vic.gov.au), and navigate to Police Record Checks> Online application for the National Police Certificate (use Internet Explorer not Google Chrome to open the link for better results).
2. Fill in the online form, as follows:  
**Section A: Type of Check Required:** National name check  
**Section E: Purpose of Check:** OPTION 2 - Volunteer / authorised student placement/Family Day Care resident > Tick box 'Other' and specify type as 'Religious'  
**Community Volunteer Fee (CVF) details:** Ask your parish for these details. If your parish does not yet have a CVF number, refer them to the Office of Professional Conduct & Ethics.
3. Take the completed form along with original identification documents and photocopies for certification by an authorised certifier such as a Justice of the Peace, registered teacher, priest, pharmacist or registered medical practitioner.
4. Mail the completed application form, certified photocopies and fee to the address on the form.

Police checks do not expire, however a new check is required whenever someone commences a new role in the Archdiocese. Keep a record of these on file with your Parish Child Safety Officer along with Working With Children Checks.

## Training and formation

All volunteers and employees in the Archdiocese of Melbourne are required to participate in an induction and child safety training. Each parish is responsible for their induction and ongoing training program. Contact your parish for information.

The Archdiocesan Office of Youth hosts training on running safe youth ministry through its Blueprint Workshop Days. These are typically held twice a year.

### Summary

- Leaders are disciples too CSS1
- Always a leader CSS1
- Leaders take leadership seriously CSS1
- Leaders are recruited carefully CSS4
- All leaders have a valid Working With Children Check (or current Victorian Institute of Teaching Registration) CSS4
- Key leaders and leaders who transport young people or supervise overnight activities have a Police Check (or current Victorian Institute of Teaching Registration) CSS4
- All leaders participate in induction and ongoing training and formation CSS4



## 3. Codes of behaviour

### Victorian legislation

There are some key pieces of Victorian state legislation which have implications for the way we minister to young people.

#### Mandatory Reporting

Since the early 1990s, certain professions including teachers, doctors, nurses, and police officers are mandated by law to make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services if they have formed a reasonable belief that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm through physical injury or sexual abuse.

#### Failure to Disclose Offence

Since 2014, any adult must make a report to police if they have formed a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by another adult against a child under the age of 16\*.

\*Certain exemptions apply. See website or contact the Office of Professional Conduct & Ethics.

#### More information

If you know or suspect that a young person is at risk of harm, you must report to the relevant authority. See page 29.

#### Grooming

Since 2014, it is an offence for an adult to engage in grooming behaviour with a child or their caregivers with the intention of facilitating sexual conduct with the child.

#### Failure to Protect Offence

Since 2015, it is an offence for someone with a position of authority in an organisation that works with children to negligently fail to remove or reduce the substantial risk of a sexual offence being committed against a child aged under 16 by an adult associated with that organisation.

## Catholic Church requirements

The Archdiocese of Melbourne has a code of conduct called *May our Children Flourish* which reflects legislative and Archdiocesan requirements around caring for children as well as guidelines around appropriate behaviour in ministry with children. The Catholic Church in Australia has another set of principles called *Integrity in the Service of the Church* which applies to lay people (priests and vowed religious have their own set of principles called *Integrity in Ministry*).

Both the Catholic Church in Australia and the Archdiocese of Melbourne require that anyone working with children be familiar with both documents. You can contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth for printed copies or find online versions at:

Title	What is it?	Where can I find it?
May our Children Flourish	Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Code of Conduct for Caring for Children	<a href="http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents">http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents</a>
Integrity in the Service of the Church	Principles and Standards for lay workers in the Catholic Church in Australia	<a href="http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents">http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents</a>
Integrity in Ministry	Principles and Standards for clergy and religious in the Catholic Church in Australia	<a href="http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents">http://www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Policy-Documents</a>

We've created this guide to summarise the seriously important things you need to know. By following this guide carefully, you'll be in a good position to fulfil what you need to do to keep young people safe.

## Key principles for engaging with young people

*May Our Children Flourish* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church* offer sound principles for maintaining healthy relationships with young people when you, as a leader, are in a position of responsibility, trust and authority. Here are some principles to consider:

- Never alone:** For the protection of young people and leaders, avoid having a situation where an adult leader is alone unsupervised with young people. Always stay in line of sight of other adults. If a young person would like a quiet chat with a leader, they can maintain privacy by moving to a quiet area but remaining within sight of other adults. If a young person needs a lift, have another adult present in the car. If you are dropping two or more children off to the same address (and won't be left alone with one child in the car), this would be a reasonable exception.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries:** While it's important to show young people we care for them, it's important not to form exclusive relationships between a young person and any particular leader. These include romantic or sexual relationships, but also relationships where a leader or a young person is emotionally dependent on the other person. Some signs of a potentially exclusive relationship include:
  - Ongoing private communication between a young person and a leader, including through social media
  - Arranging to meet outside of scheduled youth ministry events
  - Gift giving
  - Showing greater attention to a particular young person (for example, seeking a specific young person out when forming small groups)
  - Having private nicknames and in-jokes
  - Having a young person feel you are the only person they can trust (for example, encouraging a young person to keep secrets, or discouraging them to share with another adult)

- Inappropriate or prolonged physical contact including touching or hugging.

While some of the above actions could be initiated by a young person, it is always the responsibility of the adult leader to redirect their interactions with the young person in an emotionally positive way. If you are feeling confused or unsure about your interactions with a young person in your group, seek some guidance from a fellow leader, your parish priest or the Archdiocesan Office for Youth. Similarly, if you see some of these exclusive behaviours among others in your ministry, seek some guidance about how to address the situation.

- *Uphold the dignity and privacy of young people:* Every young person who comes to your ministry must feel valued and affirmed as a child of God. Part of this is upholding their dignity and respecting their privacy. You can encourage an environment which protects the privacy and dignity of young people by:

- Always addressing young people by their name
- Not forcing young people to give personal sharings (for example, in small group settings)
- Not forcing young people to participate in games which are embarrassing or degrading
- Not posting photos on social media without permission
- Never using physical violence to discipline a young person
- Never gossiping about young people in your ministry or unnecessarily passing on personal information shared with you or in a small group setting
- Being attentive to and affirming of the different gifts of each young person
- Welcoming all young people, including young people from diverse religious or cultural backgrounds or young people with disabilities.

## Codes of conduct for leaders

Every youth ministry should have a code of conduct for leaders. A code of conduct provides guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, protects young people and protects leaders from situations where their actions or integrity could be called into question. It is always the responsibility of leaders, and not young people, to model appropriate behaviour and set boundaries. When recruiting new leaders, a code of conduct will help in having a discussion with them about expectations for behaviour.

Your code of conduct can be *May Our Children Flourish*, your parish's code of conduct or a customised document for your own youth ministry which captures your mission and how you try to live this in your interactions with young people. Whatever code you use must be in line with *May our Children Flourish*.

### More information

For more information on upholding the dignity and privacy of young people in a social media setting, see page 16.

### More information

For more information on welcoming young people with special needs, see page 15.

### More information

Sample codes of conduct for leaders and young people are available at [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth), under Child Safety.

## Codes of conduct for young people

Maintaining a safe environment for young people also relies on young people understanding how their behaviour can contribute to the well being of others in the group. Young people in your ministry should know what the expectations are around their own and leaders' behaviour, and should feel comfortable sharing concerns with leaders.

## Breaches of the code of conduct

Depending on the severity of a breach in your code of conduct, a breach by a leader or young person could be addressed within your ministry's leadership or by your parish priest. If you need guidance, speak to the Archdiocesan Office for Youth or the Professional Standards Unit.

Significant breaches which may be criminal should be reported to the relevant authority. See page 27 for information about reporting serious incidents where a young person is at risk of harm. A serious breach of the code of conduct may be grounds for a leader to be removed from the ministry.

### More Information

For more information on responding to persistent breaches of your code of conduct by a young person, see page 14.

### Summary

- Leaders are aware of Victorian legislation in place to protect children CSS3
- Leaders are aware of *May Our Children Flourish* CSS3
- Leaders are aware of *Integrity in the Service of the Church and Integrity in Ministry* CSS3
- 'Never alone' CSS3
- Maintain appropriate boundaries CSS3
- Uphold the dignity and privacy of young people CSS3
- Code of conduct for leaders CSS3
- Code of conduct for young people CSS3



## 4. Knowing your young people

### Working with parents

In your youth ministry, the greatest support you can have is from parents. Parents and caregivers know their children best, and by working cooperatively with parents and keeping them involved, you gain extra support for your ministry. The Church teaches that parents are always the primary educators of children; always speak respectfully about parents and your own family relationships to encourage young people in their own.

### Information collection and consent

When a young person first becomes involved in your ministry, collect the following information and have it accessible (but securely kept for privacy reasons) whenever you meet. If the young person is under 18 years this information will need to be collected from a parent or caregiver:

- The young person's basic details
- Medical information
- Dietary requirements
- Emergency contact details.
- Permission to take photographs and video
- Regular transportation arrangements

It's a good idea to re-collect this information annually at the start of your youth ministry year, along with a re-commitment to your code of conduct.

If you are running any activities off site (for example, an excursion or camp) prepare a separate consent form. This will update any information you may already have. As well as the information listed above, provide and seek information about the following:

- Transport arrangements
- Planned activities
- Special instructions regarding the distribution of food or medication
- Leader contact details for the duration of the activity

### More information

Sample information collection and consent forms are available at [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth) under Child Safety.

In addition, seek parental consent any time you are planning to touch on any sensitive topics in your ministry (for example, running a session on the church's teachings on sexuality) where parents may prefer that their child not participate. If you are planning to show any movies rated PG or higher, seek parental permission.

All information collected should be filed electronically and stored indefinitely. Seek assistance from your Parish Child Safety Officer for records to be stored permanently with the parish office.

### **Young people with special needs**

All young people need to be welcomed in the church, including young people who have special needs or disabilities. If a young person in your ministry has special needs, have a discussion with the young person and their parents or caregivers about how to help the young person fully participate in your youth ministry. Be honest about what you can and cannot do – for example, it is never appropriate for a youth ministry leader to assist with personal care tasks such as feeding, changing clothes or toileting. If special care is required beyond what your leaders can provide, invite the parent to find a suitable carer to accompany their child during your activities or to come along themselves (these accompanying adults will need to have the same checks as other leaders and be inducted into the expectations around safe ministry).

### **Young people with behavioural issues**

If you are encountering persistently challenging behaviour which contravenes your youth ministry's code of conduct, initiate a conversation with the young person's parents or caregivers. They may be able to provide insight into strategies that can help the young person behave cooperatively, or identify what situations or triggers are likely to lead to challenging behaviour. This does, however, need to be approached sensitively if you suspect there are issues in the young person's home environment contributing to their behaviour. In this situation seek guidance from a fellow leader or your parish priest.

#### **Summary**

- Collect information and permissions for every participant in your youth ministry and update annually, including parental permissions for young people aged under 18 CSS6
- Collect additional information and permissions any time you run an off-site activity CSS6
- Discuss special needs with the young person concerned and their parents or caregivers CSS6+7
- Sensitively discuss challenging behaviour with parents or caregivers CSS7



## 5. Communicating with young people

For most young people, mobile devices are a normal part of their social landscape, and for most youth ministries it is important to have a presence in this space. While communicating in person will always be the best way of building positive relationships with young people, electronic communication can be a helpful way of staying in touch with young people and promoting your activities.

There are different risks associated with different forms of communication. Here are some recommendations for appropriate ways of using different media to communicate with young people in your youth ministry:

Type	What for?
Phone calls	For logistical purposes during normal waking hours. Long conversations to be avoided.
Text messages	For logistical purposes and encouragement, during normal working hours
Email	For logistical purposes and encouragement
Social media	Use with discretion during normal waking hours
Video calls / streaming	Never

(Adapted from Professional Standards Unit, Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney)

### Using social media

Each social media platform comes with its own conditions around privacy and usage. Don't be naive about the way other people typically use a particular platform – for example, some apps may expose young people to sexually explicit content. All of this means discretion is required when choosing to be present on a social media platform. Here are some ways the key principles of leadership and engaging with young people translate in a social media setting:

- Always a leader:** If you have a personal profile on any social media platform, consider whatever you post on that platform to be public. You should be confident that everything on your profile reflects the values you share in a youth ministry setting. If you would be embarrassed for a young person in your ministry or your parish priest to see something on your profile, then don't post it.
- Never alone:** It is recommended that a youth ministry engage with young people via a group page or shared group profile which is administered by a number of adult leaders. Avoid having private correspondence. If a young person initiates an important discussion about a pastoral matter (such as a problem they are struggling with) via chat, gently defer the conversation until you can meet in person.

- ❑ *Maintain appropriate boundaries:* Don't use social media as a place to cultivate in-jokes or single out young people.
- ❑ *Uphold the dignity and privacy of young people:* If you are sharing photos from a youth ministry activity, share photos which focus on groups rather than individuals – and never post something you would find embarrassing yourself! Don't tag young people or otherwise personally identify young people, but it's ok for young people to tag themselves.

## Photographs and video

If you are planning on taking photograph or video of young people, ensure you have collected permission from them or their parents first.

When taking photos focus on groups rather than individuals. Ensure that anyone being photographed is appropriately dressed (for example, not in bathers or pyjamas).

### More information

A provision for collecting and publishing photos and video is included in the information collection form sample at [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth) under Child Safety.

### Summary

- ❑ Use different modes of communication appropriately CSS6
- ❑ Apply the key principles of leadership and engaging with young people to social media settings including by:
  - o Having a social media presence consistent with the values you witness to as a youth ministry leader
  - o Engaging with young people transparently, preferably through a group page administered by other leaders CSS1
  - o Maintaining appropriate boundaries with young people online CSS6
  - o Upholding the privacy and dignity of young people online CSS6
- ❑ Collect permission before collecting or publishing photos or video CSS6



## 6. Supervision

### Signing in

For the duration of your youth ministry activity, you are taking on the duty of caring for each young person. To be clear about when that duty begins, have a sign in system for all your activities, including regular gatherings. This can be quickly referenced to account for all people present in case of an emergency, and can help parents feel sure about where their child is and who is looking after them.

At the same time, don't forget to have young people sign out as well. As part of your information collection, you should have instructions about regular transport arrangements for each young person, and whether there is anyone who does not have permission to pick up a young person. Signing out can prevent a young person from leaving an activity unaccompanied or being collected by an unauthorised person - if you're in doubt about releasing a young person to someone unknown to you at the end of an activity, contact parents to confirm.

### Ratios

There should always be more than one adult leader supervising a youth ministry activity. If the participants include both males and females, male and female leaders should also be present. Some of the things to consider when determining the number of leaders you need to supervise any activity include:

- The age and number of young people
- Any young people present with special needs
- The duration of an activity
- The nature of any planned activities (for example, higher risk outdoor excursions may need more leaders to be present).

A suggested supervision ratio for regular onsite events at your parish is 1 leader to every 10 young people (after the minimum of two adult leaders is met).

### More information

A sample sign in sheet is available at [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth) under Child Safety.

## Overnight stays

On overnight stays, there should be increased capacity for supervision.

If supervision is required in sleeping areas, always have at least two adult leaders of the same gender as the participants present.

### More information

For more information on organising venues and activities for overnight camps see page 20 and page 24.

### Summary

- Sign in and sign out CSS6
- A minimum of two leaders supervising any activity CSS6
- Male and female leaders to be present when there are male and female participants CSS6
- Increased supervision for higher risk activities, excursions, overnight stays and activities which include participants with special needs CSS6



## 7. Venues

### Regular gathering spaces

If you are running a regular youth ministry gathering, assess the suitability of the space you are meeting in. Consider the following:

#### *Suitability of the space*

- Are sufficient toilet facilities available?
- Is the space accessible to people with physical disabilities?
- Is the floor non-slip and splinter-free?
- Is the space kept clean by other groups which have access to it?

#### *Safety of the space*

- Is there a safe distance between any outdoor areas you may use and roads?
- Is the space removed from places where people may engage in unsafe behaviour (such as drinking alcohol)?
- Are there any balconies or windows which pose a risk?
- Is there adequate heating or cooling which is safe to use?
- Is there regular maintenance on the space, including for electrical wiring and appliances?
- Have outdoor areas and bathrooms been checked for hazards such as broken glass or needles?
- Is furniture and other equipment such as sporting equipment in good condition, and appropriate equipment provided to help with setting up? (for example, trolleys to wheel stacks of chairs)

#### *First aid and safety*

- Is there a smoke alarm?
- Is there an accessible fire extinguisher and fire blanket?
- Is there a first aid kit on site?
- Are all leaders aware of fire safety and evacuation procedures?

*Adapted from Professional Standards Unit, Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney*

If you are concerned about the suitability of your meeting space, discuss this with your parish priest.

## Excursions and camps

Excursions and camps are always a highlight of any youth ministry. If you are organising an excursion or camp, select venues which are experienced in hosting young people. Camp sites should be accredited by the Australian Camps Association (see [auscamps.asn.au](http://auscamps.asn.au)).

When selecting a venue for an overnight activity, consider the following:

- Males and females must have access to separate sleeping areas
- Males and females must have access to separate showering and toileting facilities
- Participants aged over 18 and under 18 should be allocated to separate sleeping areas
- Participants aged over 18 and under 18 should be allocated to separate showering facilities. If this is not possible, roster access at different times.

In addition, think about the suitability of the venue for any young people in your ministry who have special needs. Seek advice from the young person and their parents or caregivers.

If leaders are supervising in a sleeping or bathroom area, they must be of the same sex as the participants in that area. As at all other times, an adult should never be alone when supervising in a sleeping or bathroom area with young people.

When arriving at a venue, be aware of emergency exits and evacuations. Ask the venue staff to brief your group about relevant safety issues.

### Summary

- Assess the suitability of regular gathering spaces CSS6
- Use accredited venues for excursions and camps CSS6
- Consider the needs of young people with special needs when selecting venues CSS7+6
- Provide a safety briefing on arrival at new venues.
- For overnight stays:
  - o Separate male and female access to separate sleeping areas CSS6
  - o Separate male and female access to showering and toileting facilities CSS6
  - o Participants aged over 18 and under 18 to be allocated to separate sleeping areas CSS6
  - o Participants aged over 18 and under 18 to be allocated to separate showering facilities or have rostered access at different times CSS6
  - o Supervisors in sleeping or bathroom areas to be the same sex as the participants and accompanied by another leader CSS6



## 8. Medical needs and first aid

At least one leader at any youth ministry gathering should be trained in basic first aid. Have a working phone and first aid kit accessible at all times. St John Ambulance Australia conduct regular first aid training and can recommend a suitable kit for your group (go to [stjohn.org.au](http://stjohn.org.au)).

Leaders should all be aware of any young people with asthma or allergies. Most young people with asthma or allergies will already have a management plan (templates are available through [nationalasthma.org.au](http://nationalasthma.org.au) and [allergy.org.au](http://allergy.org.au)). Have these on file so that you are prepared to respond in the event of a reaction.

### Summary

- One leader with first aid training to be present CSS6
- Access to a phone and first aid kit at all times CSS6
- All leaders to be aware of people with asthma, allergies or other health issues CSS6
- Collect asthma and allergy management plans CSS6



## 9. Food safety

### Food safety

Leaders should be aware of any young people with food allergies or particular dietary requirements. Depending on the young people in your ministry, it may be best to discourage any food sharing and communicate any allergies to the whole group.

- If you are ever providing food through your youth ministry, be aware of safe food handling practices. The Victorian Government website 'Do Food Safely' is a free online course with introduction to basic safe food handling practices.
- If you are *selling* food (for example, as a fundraiser) you may additionally need to lodge your event with your local council. The Victorian government website [communityfood.health.vic.gov.au](http://communityfood.health.vic.gov.au) will help you assess your obligations. Streatrader is a helpful website that you can use to notify you council of your planned event: [streatrader.health.vic.gov.au](http://streatrader.health.vic.gov.au)
- If food is being supplied for you (for example, by parents or at a venue) ensure you let the caterers know of any allergies and dietary requirements in your group. Request a list of ingredients that can be displayed with food served.

## Alcohol

Alcohol should never be part of ministry focussed events or activities such as regular youth group or a camp. The only youth ministry setting where alcohol may be served with discretion are social gatherings (such as fundraisers) where:

- The majority of attendees will be aged over 18 and
- Any participants aged under 18 will be with a responsible adult and
- Your parish priest has given approval.

If alcohol will be sold, you need to apply for a liquor license and ensure any people serving have received training in Responsible Service of Alcohol.

If you are socialising with young people outside a youth ministry setting (such as at a birthday party, remember that you are always a leader. Never supply alcohol to anyone aged under 18, and if you choose to drink alcohol, ensure you do this in a responsible and moderate manner.

### More information

Information about liquor licensing and Responsible Service of Alcohol is available through [vcglr.vic.gov.au](http://vcglr.vic.gov.au).

### Summary

- Food allergies – if necessary, discourage food sharing or limit available foods CSS6
- Safe food handling practices CSS6
- Register any food selling with local council CSS6
- Seek permission and use discretion when considering alcohol at youth ministry events



## 10. Transport

It should be standard that parents or caregivers arrange transport for young people to and from regular youth events unless other arrangements are in place. If leaders will be providing transport to young people, ensure that:

- Written permission is obtained from the young person's parents or caregivers
- Drivers have a police check as per Archdiocesan policy
- Drivers are accompanied by another adult
- Drivers are fully licensed or hold a green P-plate
- Drivers observe all road rules
- Vehicles are registered and roadworthy
- There are no unplanned stops along the way!



## 11. Activities

### Regular gatherings

Planning youth ministry activities which help young people grow in their faith is a rewarding part of youth ministry! This is where you can be creative and share with young people the joy of our faith.

When planning activities, consider the age of the youngest person in your ministry. Some things to keep in mind are:

- Review the content of any media you are using to ensure it is consistent with Christian values – this includes youtube clips, DVDs, graphics or lyrics. For example, if you need a backing track for a social night, you may need to create your own play list instead of just selecting a random Spotify playlist.
- If you are watching TV shows or films, follow the guidelines issued by the Office of Film and Literature Classification. This does not mean that you can never show an M rated film, but it does mean that you should seek parental consent for anything rated PG or higher.
- If you are planning to explore potentially sensitive issues (for example, Church teaching around sexuality) let parents know ahead of time and tailor your activities appropriately for different age groups. It may be appropriate to separate the session by age.

### Higher risk activities

Higher risk activities involve a greater likelihood of an accident occurring which could injure or harm someone. Higher risk activities include:

- Swimming and any water related activities
- Outdoor activities (for example. bushwalking, hiking)
- Sports
- Any crowded events

When planning activities such as these, consider the different needs, interests and abilities of the young people in your ministry. Young people should not be forced to participate in activities which make them feel embarrassed, uncomfortable or afraid.

Ensure parental permission is obtained for all participants in any higher risk activity, and gauge whether there is anyone who shouldn't participate in the activity because of their skill level or existing medical conditions. Offer alternative options for those who may be unable or unwilling to participate in the activity.

Finally, think about how to minimise the risk of participants getting injured or harmed. To help minimise physical risks:

- Talk to participants ahead of time about the activity, and your expectations around their behaviour
- Address any concerns raised by other leaders or participants about the activity
- Insist on being sunsmart – remind young people to wear hats, sunscreen, cover up, and stay hydrated
- Only ever swim in pools or beaches which are patrolled
- Wear protective gear for sports
- Think about communication options where mobile reception may be difficult, such as a walky-talky
- Review your first aid response and emergency evacuation plans.

Preparing a risk management plan will help you identify risks associated with the planned event or activity. File this plan with your Parish Child Safety Officer.

### **Summary**

- When planning activities, review all content CSS6
- Seek parental permission for
  - o Media classified PG and above
  - o Planned sensitive topics
  - o Higher risk activities
- Create a risk management plan to assess the risks associated with higher risk activities and plan accordingly to minimise
- Give a record of your risk assessment management plan to your Parish Child Safety Officer for filing
- Offer alternative activities for young people who are unwilling or unable to participate in higher risk activities CSS7



## 12. What to do when serious things happen

Sometimes despite every effort to keep young people safe, things can go wrong and accidents do happen. Young people may also inform you of situations where they are at risk of harm in their personal life.

### Accidents and mishaps

1. Remove the danger if possible, or remove people from the dangerous situation
2. Contact 000 immediately in the case of an emergency
3. Contact the parents of any young people involved; if you need support to do this contact your parish priest
4. Notify your parish priest about the accident
5. Complete an incident report, taking note of the circumstances of the incident and your response. Do this as soon as possible after the incident occurs, when the details are still fresh in your mind.
6. The incident report should be filed at your parish.

### Incident reports

As soon as possible after an incident write down what has happened in an incident report. This report is the record of what has happened as well as your ministry's response to the situation. Incidents can include an accident, an alleged or actual significant breach of your code of conduct, or disclosure by a young person about their mental health or an abusive situation. Your incident report should include:

- Date, time and place of the incident
- Who was involved?
- What happened? What was said?
- What response was made by your ministry?
- For suspected abuse, list any grounds for forming belief that abuse has occurred.

Just include the facts of the incident, without commentary or your own opinion. If multiple leaders were involved, each person should write an incident report which captures the incident from their point of view. The incident report should be signed and dated, and filed with your parish.

### More information

A sample Incident Report template is available at [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth) under Child Safety. There is a version to cover accidents and mishaps, and a version to cover disclosures of abuse or significant breaches of your code of conduct.

## **Mental health issues**

Adolescence is the peak age of onset for mental illness. It is very possible that a young person in your ministry is struggling with a mental health related issue, and the friendship and positive environment of your youth ministry can be an important source of support to them.

The Archdiocesan Office for Youth has a comprehensive guide for responding to mental health concerns, whether they are known or suspected by you. This can be downloaded from [cam.org.au/youth](http://cam.org.au/youth) under Youth Ministry Resources.

Serious matters such as a young person speaking about suicide, self harm, or eating disorders must be reported to your parish priest and filed in an incident report. Parents should also be notified.

There are a number of resources available to help you identify and respond to mental health issues in young people. Have available a list of services located near your youth ministry every time you meet.

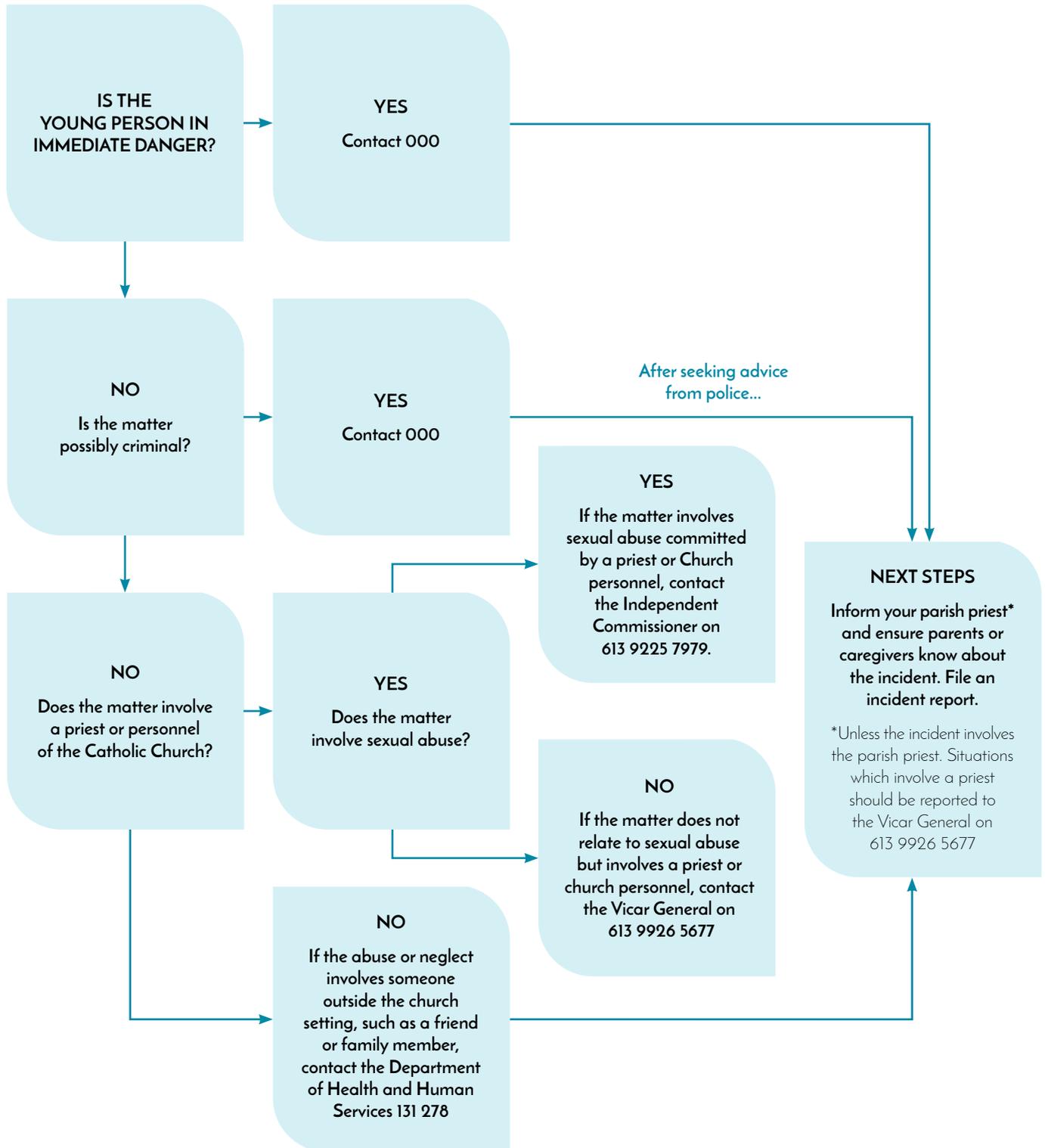
## **Abuse**

Information about abuse or risk of harm cannot be kept confidential. If a young person shares with you that they or others are in an abusive situation or at risk of harm:

- Allow the young person to speak freely. It may have taken them a long time to feel secure in sharing this information with you.
- Avoid asking questions which try to elicit specific information about the abusive situation. Focus questions on the current wellbeing of the young person: 'How is this affecting you?', 'How do you feel about going home tonight?'
- Explain that you will not be able to keep what the young person has shared a secret, but that you will be careful in only speaking with the people who can assist.
- Thank the young person for sharing with you, and affirm their decision to seek help.

As a youth ministry leader there may be situations where you suspect without certainty that a young person is at risk of harm. It is not your role to investigate a situation, but there are legal responsibilities to report any known or suspected abuse to the relevant authority. The chart below provides a guide for reporting known or suspected abuse and harm:

## Reporting concerns



It can seem difficult and daunting to report known or suspected abuse or harm, but you will be doing the right thing by sharing what you know with the right authorities who can protect a young person and help them, their friends or family get the support they need. As a first step, and if the young person is not in immediate danger, you may speak to a senior leader in your youth ministry, your Parish Child Safety Officer or your parish priest who can report the abuse or harm on behalf of your ministry. If you do not feel satisfied that your concerns will be referred to the relevant authority, then you should make the report yourself. The preceding chart traces the options available for making a report.

Remember that we are also here to support you if you are unsure about any situation and need guidance. If you need support or advice at any time, contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth on +613 9287 5574 or the Archdioceses' Professional Standards Unit +613 9926 5621 or 0407 694 900.

## **Pastoral care**

Being involved in, or responding to a serious incident can be distressing for young people and leaders involved. Counselling support is available to you through the Archdiocese. Contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth on +613 9287 5574 or the Archdiocese's Professional Standards Unit on +613 9926 5621

### **Summary**

- In emergency situations contact 000
- Incident reports should be filed for any accidents, significant breaches of codes of behaviour, or disclosures made by a young person CSS5
- Be aware of resources to assist you in responding to young people with mental health issues
- Report any suspected or known abuse of a young person to the relevant authority CSS5
- Seek pastoral care if you, your leaders, or young people are involved in any incident.

## Summary Checklist:

### Youth ministry basics:

- Your parish priest or Parish Child Safety Officer should assist you in implementing the recommendations in this guide CSS1
- Reflect on the purpose of youth ministry as defined by Anointed and Sent
- Define age limits for participation in your youth ministry CSS6
- A balanced approach to youth ministry includes the eight focus areas of Anointed and Sent CSS7

### Key principles for youth ministry leadership:

- We are disciples too
- Always a leader
- We take leadership responsibly

### Key principles for engaging with young people:

- Never alone
- Maintain appropriate boundaries
- Uphold the dignity and privacy of young people

### Forming your youth ministry leadership team:

- Leaders are recruited carefully CSS4
- All leaders have a valid Working With Children Check or current Victorian Institute of Teaching registration CSS4
- All key leaders and any leaders who transport young people or supervise overnight activities have a Police Check or current Victorian Institute of Teaching registration CSS4
- All Leaders participate in induction and ongoing training and formation CSS4
- Leaders are familiar with Victorian legislation including:
  - Mandatory Reporting
  - Failure to disclose offence
  - Failure to protect offence
  - Grooming
- Leaders are familiar with Catholic Church codes of conduct including:
  - *May our Children Flourish*
  - *Integrity in the Service of the Church*
  - *Integrity in Ministry*
- Leaders have signed a code of conduct

### **Information collection:**

- Collect and update information and permissions for every participant annually, including parental permissions for young people aged under 18 CSS6
- Collect additional information and permissions for every off-site activity CSS6
- Discuss special needs with the young person concerned and their parents or caregivers CSS6+7
- Sensitively discuss challenging behaviour with parents or caregivers CSS7

### **Communicating with young people:**

- Use different modes of communication appropriately CSS6
- Apply the key principles of leadership and engaging with young people to social media settings including by:
  - Having a social media presence consistent with the values you witness to as a youth ministry leader
  - Engaging with young people transparently, preferably through a group page administered by other leaders CSS1, CSS6
  - Maintaining appropriate boundaries with young people online CSS6
  - Upholding the privacy and dignity of young people online CSS6
- Collect permission before collecting or publishing photos or video CSS6

### **Supervision:**

- Sign in and sign out CSS6
- A minimum of two leaders supervising any activity CSS6
- Male and female leaders to be present when there are male and female participants CSS6
- Increased supervision for higher risk activities, excursions, overnight stays and activities which include participants with special needs CSS6

## **Venues:**

- Assess the suitability of regular gathering spaces CSS6
- Use accredited venues for excursions and camps CSS6
- Consider the needs of young people with special needs when selecting venues CSS7+6
- Provide a safety briefing on arrival at new venues.
- For overnight stays:
  - Separate male and female access to separate sleeping areas CSS6
  - Separate male and female access to showering and toileting facilities CSS6
  - Participants aged over 18 and under 18 to be allocated to separate sleeping areas CSS6
  - Participants aged over 18 and under 18 to be allocated to separate showering facilities or have rostered access at different times CSS6
  - Supervisors in sleeping or bathroom areas to be the same sex as the participants and accompanied by another leader CSS6

## **Medical needs and first aid**

- One leader with first aid training to be present CSS6
- Access to a phone and first aid kit at all times CSS6
- All leaders to be aware of people with asthma, allergies or other health issues CSS6
- Collect asthma and allergy management plans CSS6

## **Food safety**

- Food allergies - if necessary, discourage food sharing or communicate allergies to the group CSS6
- Safe food handling practices CSS6
- Register any food selling with local council CSS6
- Seek permission and use discretion when considering alcohol at youth ministry events.

## **Transport**

- Written permission is obtained from the young person's parents or caregivers if the youth ministry is providing transport
- Drivers have a police check as per Archdiocesan policy
- Drivers are accompanied by another adult
- Drivers are fully licensed or hold a green P-plate
- Drivers observe all road rules
- Vehicles are registered and roadworthy

## Planning activities

- Review all content CSS6
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- Give a record of your risk assessment management plan to your Parish Child Safety Officer for filing
- Offer alternative activities for young people who are unwilling or unable to participate in higher risk activities CSS7

## Responding to accidents and serious incidents

- In emergency situations contact 000
- Incident reports should be filed for any accidents, significant breaches of codes of behaviour, or disclosures made by a young person CSS5
- Be aware of resources to assist you in responding to young people with mental health issues
- Report any suspected or known abuse of a young person to the relevant authority CSS5+6
- Seek pastoral care if you, your leaders, or young people are involved in any incident

### More information

For assistance implementing these guidelines, contact the Archdiocesan Office for Youth on +613 9287 5665 or the Office of Professional Standards Unit on +613 9926 5621.





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This resource has been prepared by the Archdiocesan Office for Youth in consultation with the Office of Professional Conduct & Ethics, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The Archdiocese is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity of all children and vulnerable adults.

t. +61 3 9287 5565  
e. aoy@cam.org.au



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