

Child Protection Policy

Mourne Presbyterian Church

Ensuring a safe environment for **children, young people**
leaders and staff.

Policy Statement

This policy statement is aimed at providing a safe environment where children and young people may enjoy social contact and personal and social development. Adults selected to work within youth ministries should be secure in the knowledge that they have the full support of the Kirk Session

1. Adoption of PCI Child Protection Guidelines

The Kirk Session of Mourne Presbyterian Church has adopted the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Child Protection guidelines* (*Taking Care*), approved by the General Assembly and revised in 2011. All organisations are expected to adhere to these guidelines, as agreed by the General Assembly in 2008. The Kirk Session will review the implementation of these Guidelines every 3 years and keep Taking Care on the agenda of Kirk Session meetings.

2. Leadership

The Kirk Session believes that the selection procedures outlined in the *Taking Care guidelines greatly assist the assessment of a person's suitability to work with children and young people. As a result of implementing such procedures, leaders and helpers within the congregation will be more assured of their position and of the confidence placed in them by the Kirk Session.

The following procedures must be followed for the appointment of leaders/helpers who will be 18 years or over:

- ⇒ All leaders will be required to complete an application form, which includes the vetting process.
- ⇒ Applicants will be required to provide 2 references by persons who are not relatives, either of the 2 interviewers, the Minister or the Designated Person. (All confidential records, eg applications and references will be stored safely by the Minister or Designated Person.)
- ⇒ The Kirk Session will appoint 2 interviewers to meet informally with the candidate. (Normally the organisation /group leader and the Minister/an elder/another leader from the organisation.)
- ⇒ At the interview roles and responsibilities will be discussed and a "We Care 4U Too" card and the Child Protection Policy given and explained. Leaders will be required to sign an acknowledgement that they have received the Policy.
- ⇒ Once approved by Kirk Session, completed application forms will be forwarded to the Taking Care Office to enable AccessNI vetting to be carried out.
- ⇒ The applicant will become a leader when the Taking Care Office advises that an appointment may proceed.
- ⇒ All leaders are expected to undergo Taking Care Foundation Training and Refresher Training every 3rd year thereafter. Even those who are not required to be vetted must receive this training.
- ⇒ The Register of Leaders will be completed annually by each leader in charge.

3. Reporting of Concerns.

The leaders in each of our organisations/groups will be fully conversant with the referral procedure where there is a concern about the welfare of a child, as outlined in the *Taking Care guidelines. Leaders must not hesitate to report a concern about a child if they are at any time concerned about their welfare. Information will be treated with the strictest confidence and written reports will be stored in a safe in either the Minister's or Designated Person's home.

4. Good Standards of Practice.

All spiritual programmes of youth organisations will be agreed with the Minister before implementation.

Each organisation /group will be expected to comply with the Good Team Procedures outlined in the *Taking Care guidelines, particularly:

- ⇒ Adequate supervision
- ⇒ Physical contact
- ⇒ Control and discipline, including anti-bullying
- ⇒ General safety

5. Parental Consent Forms.

Organisational /group leaders must ensure that Parental Consent Forms are completed at the commencement of each year's activities for each child attending. Special consent forms will be issued for any "off premises" activity/ residential. Forms will be filed in an accessible and locked place. All documentation will be kept for at least 7 years, but for as long as possible.. Sign-in sheets may be used in clubs that exercise a drop-in policy.

6. Designated Person.

The Kirk Session has appointed Mrs Barbara Turner as Designated Person, working with a sub-committee from Kirk Session, to provide consultation, advice and support to organisations and to the Session on matters concerning the welfare of children and young people. The Kirk Session will keep organisational leaders updated with the name of the Designated Person(s). Any matter brought to the attention of the Designated Person will be treated in strict confidence. Information will only be divulged when there is a legitimate need to know.

7. Health and Safety.

The Kirk Session expects organisations/ groups to adhere to the guidance on safety matters outlined in the *Taking Care guidelines. Risk Assessment forms will be completed by each group annually before the commencement of the year's activities and additionally, as appropriate. Organisations will be informed about fire and first aid procedures annually.

8. Transport.

Organisations /groups are expected to adhere to the Child Protection Guidelines relating to the use of private cars and minibuses for transporting children to and from youth activities, e.g.

- ⇒ Compliance with seatbelt and booster seat legislation.
- ⇒ Insurance cover.
- ⇒ Safety of the vehicle and the responsibility of the driver and other leaders.

9. Residentials and Outings.

Guidance on residential trips and outings, provided in the *Taking Care manual, will be followed on all residential trips and outings organised by any group attached to Mourne Presbyterian Church. The necessary documentation, including risk assessments, will be completed as advised. Contact Form 12.05 will be completed and left with the DP, Minister or other nominated adult before the group leaves.

10. Special / Additional Needs

Organisations must be inclusive and welcome children and young children from all backgrounds, including those with special / additional needs. Organisations will follow guidelines in Section 12.18 of the *Taking Care manual as they plan their programmes. They will note any information on Parental Consent Forms and liaise with parents/carers.

11. Photography, Mobile Phones and the Internet.

All leaders and helpers will be expected to comply with *Taking Care guidelines regarding the use of photographs, mobile phones and the Internet.

- ⇒ Written parental permission will be given before photographs are taken. (Included in Form 12.01)
- ⇒ Only unidentified photographs of children/young people will appear on the Church's website
- ⇒ Leaders will warn children and young people in their groups about the dangers of the Internet.
- ⇒ Each organisation/group will agree rules concerning the use of mobile phones during their meetings.
- ⇒ Leaders will limit the direct Internet communication they have with young people and children in their organisation. All communication must be within an open forum in order to protect both young people and leaders.
- ⇒ Leaders involved in youth and children's work should only have children's mobile phone numbers if Kirk Session has agreed that the nature of their involvement requires them to phone or text the children and parents have given written permission. Such contact must be in line with *Taking Care guidelines.

12. Working Together

It is important that all leaders know the boundaries and rules of their organisation and that these are explained to children and parents. A code of conduct for young people will be drawn up at the commencement of the year's activities in each organisation. This will help to create a safe, secure environment and an atmosphere where children will feel that they can relate to leaders and helpers.

All leaders must abide by the discipline guidelines as set out in *Taking Care .

13. Bullying

All kinds of bullying are wrong and should not be tolerated within organisations connected to Mourne Presbyterian Church. Leaders will pay attention to the Anti-Bullying Policy overleaf.

14. Implementation and Review.

The Kirk Session is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy and will review it at least every three years.

*Taking Care guidelines may be accessed online at www.presbyterianireland.org/takingcare. All forms are available for downloading.

Signed:

W. L. T. B. ... (Minister)

M. A. ... (Clerk of Session)

Date:

20th August, 2014.

::12.26 Anti -bullying Policy (from the *Taking Care Manual*)

All kinds of bullying are wrong and should not be tolerated within organisations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Our organisations should be a safe and welcoming place for all children and young people.

What is bullying?

The government defines bullying as; “Deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time” .

What forms does it take?

- :: Bullying can be name-calling or teasing.
- :: Bullying is often physical; victims are pushed, punched, kicked and hit.
- :: Victims can be forced to do things they don't want to do, are left out of games or ignored by others.
- :: Cyber bullying is when bullies contact their victims via text messaging or via the Internet.

Why do we have a bullying policy?

- :: All leaders, parents and children who attend this organisation should have an understanding of what bullying is and know that it is not tolerated within the organisation.
- :: All leaders should know what to do if bullying arises.
- :: As an organisation we take bullying seriously, children and parents should be assured that they would be supported when bullying is reported.

Why is it important to respond to Bullying?

- :: Bullying hurts.
- :: Everyone has the right to be treated with respect.
- :: Individuals who are bullying need to learn to stop.
- :: This organisation has a responsibility to respond effectively to bullying issues.

Preventative Measures

- :: Leaders should encourage children to befriend others who are alone within the group.
- :: Bullying should be discussed openly within the group, perhaps through activities such as circle time.
- :: Young people should regularly be encouraged to talk to leaders about anything that is bothering them.

What will happen if bullying occurs?

1. Attempt reconciliation by getting the parties together to talk; it may be that a genuine apology solves the problem.
2. If bullying continues or it is serious, leaders should meet with the parent and child(ren) who is/are being bullied.
3. Leaders should also meet with the child(ren) who is bullying and their parent/s.
4. If serious, bullying should be reported to the Designated Person as a child protection issue.
5. Leaders should consider appropriate consequences for the bully and make sure these are carried through.
6. Keep the situation under review.