

Redemptorist Best Practice in Working with Children and Young People

(Adapted from *Our Children, Our Church*)

1.1 Introduction

The participation of children and young people in the pastoral ministry of Redemptorists and their co-workers spans a wide range of activities and levels of engagement, including involvement in the celebration of the sacraments, altar serving, childrens' liturgies, youth ministry, choirs, membership of youth clubs, sports, school retreats, pilgrimages, and other activities.

To enhance and encourage this participation, it is important that children and young people feel that their contribution will enrich these activities, and that their voices will be heard and valued. It is also important to reassure them that their safety and well-being is a paramount consideration at all times.

Likewise, it is essential to reassure parents and guardians that all steps have been taken to ensure best practice in relation to the care of their children. Their confidence in the safety of such pastoral activities is of critical importance. Consultation with and involvement of parents and guardians and families is a necessary ingredient in the engagement of children and young people in the pastoral activities of Redemptorists and their co-workers.

This document gives general guidance on good practice for ensuring a safe environment for children and young people. Any group operating in a Redemptorist setting, including visiting groups, should be made aware of the policies and procedures for child protection in operation in the Dublin Province of the Redemptorists and should be asked to confirm that it will implement these policies and procedures.

1.2 Code of Good Practice

Children and young people need warmth and security in order to thrive. Fostering a nurturing and affirming environment is therefore an essential element of Redemptorist, and Redemptorist sponsored, pastoral activities. This should always be reflected in the practice of those who work with children and young people.

The following is a basic **Code of Good Practice** for all activities involving children and young people undertaken by Redemptorists and their co-workers. The aim of this Code is to ensure the safety of children and young people, to enhance the work practices of Redemptorists and their co-workers, and to reassure parents and guardians, as well as children themselves, that there is a commitment to best practice.

The Code recognises the imbalance in power inherent in adult–child relationships. It affirms the importance of:

- listening to children and young people
- valuing and respecting them as individuals
- rewarding their efforts as well as achievements
- involving them in decision-making (where appropriate)
- encouraging and praising them.

Each Redemptorist community, parish, retreat house, or school should designate a **Local Safeguarding Representative** and should make known it widely known, including to children and parents, who this person is. The **Local Safeguarding Representative** will have initial responsibility for dealing with matters relating to child welfare and protection.

1.2.1 Code of Behaviour for Redemptorists and their co-workers

The Code of Behaviour for Redemptorists and their co-workers working with children, outlined below, is a general guide. Although it may need to be adapted for particular situations and particular communities, its key principles should be adhered to as far as possible.

This Code of Behaviour should be read, understood and signed by all personnel, including volunteers, on joining or participating in the activities of a Redemptorist community or parish. The Code should include a disciplinary procedure to be used in the event of a worker or volunteer breaching any of its requirements. It should also include a complaints procedure.

General conduct

- **Physical punishment** of children is not permissible under any circumstances.
- **Verbal abuse** of children or telling jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of children can never be acceptable. Great care should be taken if it is necessary to have a conversation regarding sexual matters with a child or young person.
- **Being alone** with a child or young person may not always be wise or appropriate practice. If a situation arises where it is necessary to be alone with a child, another responsible adult should be informed immediately, by telephone if necessary. A diary note that the meeting with the young person took place, including the reasons for it, should be made.

- Best practice in relation to **travel with children** and young people should be observed. Redemptorists and their co-workers should not undertake any car or minibus journey alone with a child or young person. If, in certain circumstances, only one adult is available, there should be a minimum of two children or young people present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency, where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a child, a record of this should be made and the child's parent or guardian should be informed as soon as possible.
- Children and young people should not be permitted to work or remain in a Redemptorist church, monastery, retreat house, parish property or school unless there are at least two adults present.
- All children and young people must be treated with equal respect; favouritism is not acceptable.
- Redemptorists and their co-workers should not engage in or tolerate any behaviour – verbal, psychological or physical – that could be construed as bullying or abusive.
- A disproportionate amount of time should not be spent with any particular child or group of children.
- Under no circumstances should Redemptorists or their co-workers give alcohol, tobacco or drugs to children or young people.
- Alcohol, tobacco or drugs must not be used by Redemptorists or their co-workers who are supervising or working with children and young people.
- Only age-appropriate language, material on media products (such as camera phones, internet, video) and activities should be used when working with children and young people. Sexually explicit or pornographic material is never acceptable.

Respect for physical integrity

- The physical integrity of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Redemptorists and their co-workers must not engage in inappropriate physical contact of any kind – including rough physical play, physical reprimand and horseplay (tickling, wrestling). This should not prevent appropriate contact in situations where it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of a child (for example, where a child is distressed).

Respect for privacy

- The right to privacy of children and young people must be respected at all times.
- Particular care regarding privacy must be taken when young people are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers and toilets.
- Photographs of children or young people must never be taken while they are in changing areas (for example, in a locker room or bathing facility)
- Tasks of a personal nature (for example, helping with toileting, washing or changing clothing) should not be done for children or young people if they can undertake these tasks themselves.

Meetings with children and young people

- If the pastoral care of a child or young person necessitates meeting alone with them, such meetings should not be held in an isolated environment. The times and designated locations for meetings should allow for transparency and accountability (for example, be held in rooms with a clear glass panel or window, in buildings where other people are present, and with the door of the room left open).
- Both the length and number of meetings should be limited.
- Parents or guardians should be informed that the meeting(s) took place, except in circumstances where to do so might place the child in danger
- Visits to the home or private living quarters of Redemptorists and their co-workers should not be encouraged, nor should meetings be conducted in such locations.
- When the need for a visit to the home of a child or young person arises, professional boundaries must be observed at all times.

Children with special needs or disability

- Children with special needs or disability may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, and so sensitivity and clear communication are particularly important.
- Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a child with special needs, this should be done with the full understanding and consent of parents or guardians.

- In carrying out such personal care tasks, sensitivity must be shown to the child and the tasks should be undertaken with the utmost discretion.
- Any care task of a personal nature which a child or young person can do for themselves should not be undertaken by a worker.
- In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents should be fully informed as soon as is reasonably possible.

Vulnerable children

- Since especially vulnerable children may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, sensitivity and clear communication are of utmost importance.
- Redemptorists and their co-workers should be aware that vulnerable children may be more likely than other children to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse, and may also be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.
- It is particularly important that vulnerable children should be carefully listened to, in recognition of the fact that they may have difficulty in expressing their concerns and in order that the importance of what they say is not underestimated.

1.2.2 Code of Behaviour for Children

Developing a Code of Behaviour

Children and young people feel more secure when they know the limits of and boundaries appropriate to their own behaviour and that of others. In recognition of this, and in order to create an environment in which children feel valued, encouraged and affirmed, it is important to develop an appropriate Code of Behaviour for Children.

To maximise the sense of ownership of a Code of Behaviour, it is recommended that children and young people be consulted and included in the development of the Code for their own particular group. Age-appropriate language should be used as it is essential that children and young people can understand what is and what is not acceptable with regard to their behaviour and that of others.

Key Elements

- The Code of Behaviour should reflect the dignity and rights of each child and should encourage respectful behaviour.
- The issue of appropriate response to breaches of discipline and to disruptive behaviour, including bullying, should be covered in the Code.
- The Code should make clear that discipline problems will be handled in partnership with parents and guardians.

- The Code should make reference to the complaints procedure of the Dublin Province of the CSSR and how to use it.

Implementing the Code

- A copy of the Code should be given to all children and young people participating in activities, and to their parents or guardians.
- The Code should be clearly explained to each child or young person and should be signed by them (where appropriate).
- All Redemptorists and their co-workers should be fully conversant with the Code of Behaviour for Children and its application.

1.2.3 Parental consent

- Redemptorists and their co-workers should ensure that signed consent from parents or guardians is obtained prior to the participation of children and young people in events, activities and groups.
- Parents or guardians should be asked to indicate if their children have any specific dietary requirements, medical needs or special needs.

1.2.4 Record keeping

- An accurate record should be kept for each child and young person participating in activities, including, but not limited to, attendance, programme details and medical information.¹ This record should include copy of the consent form or letter signed by the parent or guardian. It should also contain details of emergency contact numbers.
- A written record of organisers, supervisors, employees and volunteers in attendance at events, such as meetings, choir rehearsals, sports activities, should be kept.
- An Incident Report Form should be completed in the event of an accident or incident relating to a child.

1.2.5 Complaints procedure

- The Dublin Province of the CSSR should develop a clear complaints procedure for use by young people or by parents who are dissatisfied with any aspect of activities or services provided.
- Children and young people and their parents or guardians should be given a copy of the complaints procedure and should be made aware of the procedure for making a complaint.
- All staff and volunteers should be informed about the complaints procedure.

¹ The requirements of the data protection legislation of the relevant jurisdiction must be adhered to in retaining records – in the Republic of Ireland, the Data Protection Act, 1998 and the Data Protection (Amendment Act) 2003 and in Northern Ireland, the Data Protection Act 1998. For further information, see www.dataprotection.ie and www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

3.2.6 Disruptive behaviour

- Should a child or young person display challenging or disruptive behaviour, it should be dealt with by more than one worker.
- A record should be made describing what happened, the circumstances of the incident, who was involved, whether any injury was sustained, or property damaged, and how the situation was resolved.
- In particular situations, further measures may need to be taken and parents or guardians may need to be involved.

3.2.7 Health and safety

- Adequate and appropriate supervision must be provided for all events and activities organised for children and young people (see Appendix Four for recommended ratios).
- Arrangements and procedures for leaving activities or centres should be explicit.
- In places such as changing areas, toilets and showers, separate provision should be made for boys and girls.
- There should be adequate and gender-appropriate supervision of boys and girls in such areas.
- A clear policy should be agreed with parents and guardians on the taking of photographs and the making of video recordings of children or young people involved in Church-related activities or events. This should also cover the generation of computer images. In addition, the policy should address the question of where and for what purpose photographs and images may be displayed.
- There should be regular health and safety reviews of facilities, procedures and practices.

3.2.8 Use of computers

Every Redemptorist community should have a clear policy in place regarding the use of email and the internet.

- Where a computer is used by more than one person, each person should be obliged to have a unique username and password, or where this is not possible, to maintain a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.
- Where a computer in a Redemptorist community can be accessed by children or young people, it should be accessible only through the use of a username and password unique to each child. Where this is not possible, the children or young people should be obliged to provide a signed record of the date, time and duration of their use of the computer.
- Computers which can be accessed by children or young people should always have appropriate filtering software.
- All computers in Redemptorist communities should be monitored regularly to ensure that they are being used in accordance with the stated policy. Where there is

any suspicion or doubt, a person with specialist knowledge of computer hardware and software should be asked to assess the purposes for which the computer has been used.

1.2.9 Trips away from home

- All trips, including day trips, overnight stays and holidays, need careful advance planning, including adequate provision for safety in regard to transport, facilities, activities and emergencies. Adequate insurance should be in place.
- Written consent by a parent or guardian specifically for each trip and related activities must be obtained well in advance.
- A copy of the itinerary and contact telephone numbers should be made available to parents and guardians.
- There must be adequate, gender-appropriate, supervision for boys and girls.
- Arrangements and procedures must be put in place to ensure that rules and appropriate boundaries are maintained in the relaxed environment of trips away.
- Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the privacy of young people is respected when they are away on trips.
- The provision of appropriate and adequate sleeping arrangements should be ensured in advance of the trip.
- Sleeping areas for boys and girls should be separate and supervised by two adults of the same sex as the group being supervised.
- At least two adults should be present in dormitories in which children or young people are sleeping. Under no circumstances should an adult share a bedroom with a young person.
- If, in an emergency situation, an adult considers it necessary to be in a children's dormitory or bedroom without another adult being present they should (a) immediately inform another adult in a position of responsibility and (b) make a diary note of the circumstances.

3.2.10 Pilgrimages and retreats

Pilgrimages and retreats are an important part of the Church's pastoral and spiritual engagement with children and young people. Those involved in the planning and delivery of pilgrimages and retreats should adhere to the same guidance as outlined for other activities with children and young people within the Church.