

## Developing a Code of Conduct with Children (6 – 12yrs.)



### Introduction

Every group of people has a set of rules to guide their behaviour. This 'code' may be stated explicitly or else it's something you pick-up and begin to understand after being in the group for a while. When working with children or young people in a church context it is important to make the rules or code clear to everyone from the outset. In fact, it is even better when the group members help to create the code themselves. This can lead to greater individual ownership of how all the members should be treated. It makes clear what is expected of each member and importantly, what each member can expect. Personal safety and group safety go hand in hand. When something out of the ordinary happens, everyone should know how and where to find help.

Here is one way of drawing-up a Code of Conduct. Please adapt to suit the group's developmental needs.

**Purpose:** To promote a sense of personal responsibility, safety and positive wellbeing among the group members as they participate in church ministry.

**Time Duration:** 30 – 40 mins.

**Materials:** Flipchart & paper, coloured markers, blank A4 pages, Blu Tack, pens & a small soft ball.

### Process:

1. Invite the children to sit in a circle on the floor using cushions, mats or seat them on chairs. Make sure everyone can see everyone else and the Flipchart. Use name badges if there are any new member in the group.
2. Explain to the children that because we will be meeting on a regular basis (e.g. Children's Choir; Prayer Group; Altar Servers) it is important that we look after each other. Remind them that this is what we already do when we are at home, in school, playing with friends and when taking part in sporting activities.

The question for everyone to think about today is (display on a flipchart page):

*How can we look after each other when we are here together in church?*

3. To ensure all members have a chance to speak, explain that the person with the soft ball is the only one who can speak at that time. The leader can get the 'ball' rolling by carefully throwing it to the first person who wishes to speak. After that, the ball can be passed or carefully thrown to another member of the group to hear his or her views.
4. Draw everyone's attention to a blank Flipchart page. Use Blu-Tack to attach it to the wall if you do not have a free-standing chart. If the group has a name, then write that

on the top or the centre of the page. If the group is unnamed, then you can ask the participants for ideas as part of this exercise.

5. Hand out a blank A4 page and a pen to each participant. Ask each to write some words or draw some pictures as answers to the question (allow 5 mins. to complete):

*How can we look after each other when we are here together in church?*

6. Start to gather their ideas and thoughts by inviting each to share their responses once the ball has been given to the first person. As the ideas are mentioned record the key words or phrases on the Flipchart page. You can make a list or scatter them around the page using different coloured markers.

Examples will include, among others: arriving on time; bringing subs; signing-in; listening to each other; having good fun; not having any mobiles; sharing jobs; being kind; asking for help; following the leaders' directions; talking to my parents if I am unsure about anything.

The 'Code' should cover what happens if someone accidentally or intentionally breaks a 'group rule' (e.g. they will be asked to stop; to take a break from the practice but sitting in view nearby; the Group Leader will speak with their parents as there can be no secrets). Remember to keep the Prior/PP informed and to seek his advice before any final decision is made. See Appendix 1 for further examples.

7. Once all the material had been written-up explain that a smaller version will be prepared for the next session. Be careful to include the children's own language so that they recognise the finished version. The members may like to have the Flipchart page on display during future meetings or practice sessions. Remember to agree and/or include the Group's name on the poster.

Two copies will be given to each member to bring home for each child and their parents/guardians to co-sign. A copy is to be returned to the Group Leader for safe keeping in the church office and the other is to be held by the child/parents. See Appendix 1.

8. Thank everyone for creating the Code of Conduct and, if time allows, ask them how they found the task and how they think it will come across to somebody new joining the group.

End.

## Appendix 1 – Sample Code Content

I / We will.....

- Be friendly to each other.
- Welcome new members.
- Make the group a fun place to be.
- Be respectful in what I do and what I say about others.
- Be loyal and give friends a second chance.
- Play a part in keeping myself and everyone safe.
- Speak-up when something is not or does not feel right.
- Listen to Group Leaders and co-operate with them.
- Take care of the meeting space & the equipment owned by the group.

As members of this group we can expect to:

- Be safe and happy in our chosen activity.
- Be respected and treated fairly.
- Take part as an equal to other children and young people in the group.
- Be protected from any harm or abuse by other members or outside sources.
- Find a listening ear when we ask for help.
- Have any concerns taken seriously and acted upon.

Any minor misdemeanors and general misbehavior will be addressed by the Group Leader. In consultation with the Prior/PP it may be that more serious or persistent misbehavior will result in short term or permanent exclusion from the group. Parents will be informed and consulted at all stages as reflected in the Parental Consent Form.

I have read and understood the Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it.

Signature of Child/Young Person:	
Print name Child/Young Person:	
Date:	
Signature of Parent / Guardian:	
Print name Parent / Guardian:	
Date:	