

# Code of Conduct

## Children's and Youth Ministry

### ICF Utrecht

#### I. Introduction

The church should be a safe place. A shelter that offers love, safety and security for everyone, both young and old. However, this safety is not always guaranteed. Sexual abuse occurs within church relationships; sometimes it is obvious, sometimes much more subtle.

In sexual abuse, power and trust are misused to satisfy one's own needs, usually under the pressure of confidentiality. Sexual abuse is a difficult subject. Yet within ICF Utrecht we want to open up this subject for discussion. Therefore we have chosen to draw up a policy on how to be a safe church and to express ourselves clearly: in Christ's congregation there is no place for abuse in any form whatsoever. This Code of Conduct is part of ICF's Safe Church policy and a guide for working with children and young people.

For ICF's children's ministry, certain rules of conduct have always been used. Although these were not written down, most people naturally adhered to it. There is a risk that the recording of lawful and unlawful behavior in a code of conduct can lead to a straitjacket, rendering spontaneous behavior impossible. That is not the intention of this code of conduct. However, it is necessary for us to be constantly aware of the correctness of our actions, to be able to and dare to talk about this with each other and to be accountable to parents and/or guardians of the children in our care during the children's meetings.

As part of the procedures regarding the appointment of new supervisors, this code of conduct will be discussed with him/her, on behalf of the church council, by the safeguarding advisor.

#### II. Code of conduct for supervisors in the children's and youth ministry

##### General rules of conduct

As a supervisor (or volunteer) you are responsible for the safety of the relationships. You provide an environment and atmosphere in which the child or young person feels safe and respected. You have a duty to protect the child or young person against any form of unequal treatment and / or sexual abuse. Everyone involved in the children's and youth ministry is constantly in contact with others and is expected to act correctly. A difficult task, especially considering that well-intentioned behavior can have an unintended effect. A number of guidelines to promote responsible behavior:

- *Respect the personal (physical and mental) integrity of the other person.* Be aware of the power inequality that comes with your position. Do not abuse the dependency or vulnerability of those entrusted to your supervision or care. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that children over 3 years of age are only taken on your lap if they ask for it themselves.
- *Avoid situations that can lead to accusations of sexual harassment, discrimination and/or racism.* This concerns verbal, non-verbal and digital expressions, also in the form of jokes. Supervisors must ensure that such behaviors do not occur between children/young people themselves. All sexual acts, looks, contacts, relationships between a supervisor or volunteer and a (minor) young person are not permitted under any circumstances and are considered to be sexual abuse.
- *Avoid ambiguous, offensive, abusive and intimidating language.*
- *Never promise secrecy.* Always tell that what you discuss with the young person will in principle remain "indoors" unless the safety of others or the child itself is at risk. Respect the privacy of the young person, but engage third parties when this is

necessary for the well-being of the young person. Agree with the young person that before you tell anything to third parties, you will let him or her know.

- *Avoid being alone with a child or young person in an enclosed space: stay visible and do not make yourself vulnerable.* Leaving a door open or a space with one or more windows can prevent many problems. If some conversations are to be conducted in private, at least inform a co-supervisor about the how and why of the conversations. Be cautious in sanitary rooms during meetings of the kids club and treat the child with respect. When a child needs help, leave the toilet door open.
- *Do not invite young people at home without the parents' knowledge and avoid overly close ties with young people in private life.* It stems from the nature of leadership that a supervisor must exercise a certain restraint with regard to taking young people home. Obviously, if this happens, there will be several family members or roommates present, or it will involve several young people at a time.
- Do not give children/young people gifts (this does not include a suitable token of appreciation). Ensure that the content of any letters/emails you send to children/young people do not give rise to wrong thoughts. In principle, the content of pastoral or more formal letters must be okay to be read by everyone.
- *Be aware of the effect of non-verbal behavior: facial expression, intonation, attitude and clothing have a lot of influence.* Verbal expressions are more tangible than non-verbal expressions. If young people find certain situations unpleasant, it often has to do with non-verbal behavior: looks or gestures with 'double meanings'. These may be done with good intentions, but may create wrong impressions.
- *Be honest and treat each other with respect.* Children and young people appreciate honesty and a respectful attitude more than is sometimes thought.
- *Be fair with regard to punitive measures and avoid physical contact.* In anger, things can sometimes go wrong. Again, it is good to deal with the young person in an honest way and to admit your own wrongdoing where necessary.
- *Do not just criticize; everyone is happy with positive appreciation.* This point applies to all situations.

This code of conduct also applies to other adults who are (incidentally) involved in children's and youth ministry.

### **III. In case of...**

In all cases where the code of conduct does not provide (directly), or if you are in doubt about the acceptability of certain behaviors, it is within your responsibility as a volunteer and the team of volunteers to act in the spirit of the code of conduct and, if necessary, to contact the safeguarding advisor within the own church, or advisors of the hotline Abuse in Church Relationships ([www.meldpuntmisbruik.nl](http://www.meldpuntmisbruik.nl)).<sup>1</sup>

If you identify behavior that is not in accordance with this code of conduct and you have suspicions of inappropriate (sexually oriented) behavior, you are obliged to report this to a safeguarding advisor or contact point.

Violation of this code of conduct will lead to a formal complaint and the procedure may result in disciplinary action. When a volunteer is suspected of a criminal offense, a report will be made to the police/judicial authorities as well as to the advisors of the hotline.

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<sup>1</sup> The hotline Sexual Abuse in Church Relationships (Seksueel Misbruik in Kerkelijke Relaties) is an initiative of the Christian Reformed Churches, the Netherlands Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Restored Reformed Church.