

# Help!



I want to work safely  
with children and  
young people

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## I want to work safely with young people and children

So you've been approved as a children's or youth worker.

### Congratulations!

You've already done the ground work:

- Submitted your job application
- Completed a voluntary disclosure form for your criminal records check
- Had an interview – scary!

Your references are fine and then, horrors, the dreaded DBS form is given to you. It's not that you don't want the check to be done, it's remembering all those dates (when exactly was it I moved to Barmouth from Bradford?) and ticking the right boxes. Mission accomplished. You can now sit back and wait for the result to come back... 'It's OK – I'm cleared for take-off!' you think.

Just then you're told you need to see the child protection policy (fair enough), agree to work according to its principles (no problem). Lastly a rule book (massive tome the size of six telephone directories is plonked in your lap).

When you ask about starting work with the children you are told you have to memorise this lot first!

Safeguarding children is important but you need some 'good sense' guidelines that won't aim to keep you from relating to children and young people in a normal, natural way. The questions that follow are based on issues often raised with CCPAS and covered by us in our training. We hope they will encourage you to feel confident in your work, not make you afraid to get close to young people and children.

“

How many workers should take a child to the toilet? I don't want to get accused of abuse if I go alone but I've been told it would be safer if two of us escort the child and we leave the door open.

”

It's important workers are properly appointed and checked out before they begin their job but once they are cleared, we should trust them to get on with it. You could say to another worker, 'Gemma needs the loo, I'll take her there.' Your co-worker doesn't need to watch your back to check you are not doing something you shouldn't or be your witness in case of false allegations! Also, children need to feel that their privacy is respected so why shouldn't the door be closed or nearly closed?

## Ratios

If your group is going to be involved in outdoor sports, e.g. mountaineering, rock climbing, swimming or canoeing – then you would need to have a higher ratio of workers to young people. You should ensure that properly trained workers are part of your plans, too.

I'm trying to arrange for our youth club to attend an event. It means hiring a minibus or taking cars but it's a nightmare sorting out

enough workers to supervise the young people.'

## Travel

Of course you need to ensure good supervision but unless your young people present serious behavioural problems, CCPAS would suggest the following:

- In a car – one driver who is an approved/checked worker – but don't forget to ensure that the vehicle is insured and roadworthy and that the driver has a valid license! In some circumstances, e.g. if a young person has a 'crush' on a worker, it would be better for that worker not to transport him or her.
- In a minibus – one driver who is an approved/checked worker plus another worker in the back.

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I've had a phone call from an angry parent who said: "I allowed my 9 year old daughter to go on a trip to the beach and because she's very fair-skinned, I gave her sun cream and said she should ask a worker to put it on for her. When she returned home, her back was blistered. Apparently my daughter asked a worker to rub the cream in but she refused on the grounds of child protection."

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- This is not good sense child protection. Often workers are afraid to touch children but we have some good sense advice:
- Whenever possible children should apply their own sun cream or ask a friend to help.
- Young children and disabled children may need help from an adult.
- If helping to apply sun cream do so in a public place. If not and the weather is hot, ensure children cover up or keep in the shade.
- Make sure parents and carers are aware of your practice. If they are not happy, agree what would be appropriate for their child and ensure workers are aware.

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One of the children at Sunday Club was really upset today because his cat got run over. I really wanted to give him a hug but I was afraid in case it was against the rules.

”

Touch is important. Without it, children die inside. If we end up with a 'no touch technique' like a nurse with disposable gloves and forceps we've lost the plot. What we have to ensure is that touch is never abusive or intrusive. This is what CCPAS says:

## Taking care of touching

- Keep everything public. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be related to the child's needs, not the worker's. You could say, 'I'm so sorry, James. Would you like a hug.' If he replies, 'Oh yes, please', then it's related to his needs, not yours, and you can respond accordingly. You should bear in mind though that for some children, touch is painful (associated with abuse) or confusing because home is a hug-free zone. Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the worker.
- Avoid any physical activity that is, or may be thought to be, sexually stimulating to the adult or the child.
- Children are entitled to privacy to ensure personal dignity.
- Children have the right to decide how much physical contact they have with others, except in exceptional circumstances such as if they need medical attention.
- When giving first aid (or applying sun cream etc), encourage the child to do what they

can manage themselves, but consider the child's best interests and give appropriate help where necessary.

- Team members should monitor one another in the area of physical contact. They should be free to help each other by constructively challenging anything which could be misunderstood or misconstrued.
- Concerns about abuse should always be reported.

“

A 15 year old girl came into the youth club, made a beeline for Mark, the leader, flung her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. What was he supposed to do?

”

One person replied 'Turn the other cheek!' when we asked this question in a seminar. Seriously though, you could consider the following.

- Allow her to give you a brief sideways hug and a peck on the cheek, and that's all.
- Ensure you are always in a public place – never in private!
- If you feel uncomfortable about this girl's behaviour (it seems sexual/she has a crush on you) then don't be available. Make

sure someone else greets her on arrival.

- If your safeguarding policy doesn't allow this kind of contact, then discuss with leaders how you should respond.

'The other day I met one of our Kids Klub children in town. He was really upset because he couldn't remember how to get home to his new house. I would have given him a lift home but we're not allowed to have kids on their own in our cars. All I could do was give him his bus fare and point him in the right direction. I felt really bad.'

An understandable reaction when good sense child protection should have ruled the day. You could have rung your leader and explained that you were taking the boy to his home. If your leader was unavailable then you should take the child home or some other safe place, letting his parents know what had happened. Then you could notify your leader in writing explaining why you had acted in that way.

“ Last week at club, Emma was very upset about something. She said she wanted to talk to me. Rather than being with her on my own, I had to call another worker to come and listen and she then clammed up. What should I have done? ”

Poor Emma, hoping for a quiet chat and she's landed with two workers, one of whom she'd (perhaps) never open up to on a sensitive subject! It would have been better to have told the group leader, 'Emma wants to chat. I'll just be in the sitting room (or wherever) if you need me.' Afterwards write in your activity's log book a note of the conversation. If it was a child protection concern, make a brief note in the log book, 'Emma came to talk to me tonight. See separate report in her file.' That detailed report, spelling out what she said, how you responded, what led to the conversation and what action you took, should be shared with the Safeguarding Co-ordinator in your church without delay. If any action is needed, your Safeguarding Co-ordinator will initiate it.

“ Is it OK to have only one worker in activities with children? ”

No, we're not saying that. It's important to have enough workers, both male and female, for mixed sex activities. However, it doesn't mean to say that you can't have a single worker with a small group of children, providing there are other adults to call upon in an emergency – like taking a child to the hospital, or the toilet. Each organisation needs to decide on an appropriate ratio of adults to children – depending on the children's ages and needs, as well as the activity, for example dangerous sports, will need a higher level of supervision. This said, it is really sad when children's needs are neglected (or in some cases abuse compounded) because our child protection rules do not allow a worker to be with a child on their own. Workers may fear that a child may make a false allegation. Well, many people work with children on their own all the time! Children rarely make false allegations - some might, but adults can lie too. If a child was going to lie, it would make no difference that there were two workers present – because a child in those circumstances could always claim that both workers were involved or one went out of the room at some point. CCPAS

rarely get reports like this. So, what CCPAS recommend is that you have guidelines about what will normally happen, but where it is necessary in the interests of a child to depart from what the policy says (as in the above two examples) then the child's needs should come first, but your leader should be informed as soon as possible.

“

We're taking the young people away for the weekend staying in dormitories in a school in the country. How can we supervise them overnight?

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There are different ways to tackle this. Some organisations have workers sleeping in the same room to supervise the young people safely. Other organisations use waking night cover – there will always be workers doing the rounds of the tents or dormitories to ensure that everyone is protected. What is important is that before you go on holiday, parents are informed of the procedures to keep their children safe. If there are any queries raised, then it is better to explain what you're planning and why, so that parents are reassured. Alternatively, you may want to revise your plans if parents are unhappy about the arrangement.

# Ten top tips

- 1.** Read your child protection policy and abide by it and make sure you are following what your denomination or organisation says.

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- 2.** Have written guidelines on good practice and make sure you publish these so that your workers, parents and other people know what is expected (like the examples above)

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- 3.** Follow the guidelines regardless of your own views of what is best. You are more likely to spot if someone is not keeping to the guidelines

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- 4.** Understand that there is no 'one size fits all'. You may have to be particularly careful about one of the children/young people whose behaviour is sexualised. All workers should be aware if you have to handle some situations differently.

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- 5.** Don't have favourites. All children and young people are special!

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- 6.** Attend workers' meetings. They are an important way of keeping up to date, discussing issues, getting training, praying for the young people.

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- 7.** Don't be afraid to 'whistle-blow' if you become aware of bad practice or abusive behaviour by workers or children

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- 8.** Use the activity's log book to record concerns, discipline issues, complaints about workers or children. Some information regarding disclosures will need to be kept separately under keys in a secure place.

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- 9.** Inform your Safeguarding Co-ordinator if you are worried that a child is at risk of harm or being abused

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- 10.** Remember you can contact CCPAS on 08451204550 if you want to discuss a concern. We are available also out of office hours.

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## Useful contacts

### **Stop it now!**

0808 1000 900

[help@stopitnow.org.uk](mailto:help@stopitnow.org.uk)

[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

Stop it now! produce two helpful leaflets:

*Child's play? Preventing abuse among children and young people.*

*What we all need to know to protect our children.*

### **Kidscape**

Parent advice line: 020 7823 5430

020 7730 3300

2 Grosvenor Gdns, London,

SW1W 0DH

[www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

National charity publishing booklets and information on self-protection skills for children and how to keep children safe.

### **Anorexia & Bulimia Care**

03000 11 12 13 Option 1

Saville Court, 10-11 Saville Place,

Clifton, Bristol, BS8 4EJ

[www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk](http://www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk)

Information and resources on eating disorders and self-harm.

### **The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)**

0870 000 3344

33 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London

SW1V 2WG

[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

[enquiries@ceop.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ceop.gov.uk)

CCPAS works in partnership with

CEOP who have a 'report abuse'

button on their website in relation to

on-line activity. CEOP also provides

resources on internet safety for

children and young people.

This is one of a series of **Help!** leaflets published by CCPAS.  
For our full range of resources and for more information  
visit our website [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)



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