

Policy for Youth at Cornerstone

Youth at Cornerstone

1. Introduction

These policies for the running of youth ministries at Cornerstone come under the Child Wellbeing Policy and Procedures.

Taken together, they outline our approach to safe ministry at Cornerstone. The goal is to protect young people and volunteers whilst running great ministries.

Everyone involved in this ministry on a regular basis will be required to have signed that they have read the following information before commencing work.

2. Description of Ministry and Leaders

2.1 Ministry Description

Youth @ Cornerstone is the youth ministry at Cornerstone Church for children in school years 8-13 (roughly 12-18 years old).

In other policies, children are defined as those under 18 years old. Here we will talk about youth as a subset of that.

2.2 Leader Role Descriptions

- **Ministry Coordinator** – overall responsible for the youth ministry as a whole – including child protection.
- **Ministry Supervisors** – responsible for individual sessions (usually one Friday Night). They have responsibility to ensure that policies are followed for that occasion.
- **Leaders** – Responsible for the oversight and safety of the youth placed in their care. Reports to and assists the Ministry Supervisor. They should be indicated as such by a lanyard at ministry events. All Leaders must be approved by Safe Ministry Supervisors before commencing work
 - **Provisional Leaders (see policy for details)** – count towards adult:youth ratios but must be supervised at all times.
- **Helpers** – temporary assistance at the request of the Ministry Coordinator. They count towards adult:youth ratios but as they are not full leaders they must be supervised at all times.

Other adults may visit the sessions at the discretion of the Ministry Coordinator to observe but must not be left alone with any young person without an approved Leader being present.

2.3 Ratios

One Leader is needed for every 10 youths, with a minimum of 2 needed at all times.

In the case of using more than one room for the activities there will always be a minimum of two Leaders in each room or be within sight of another Leader at all times.

2.4 Use of Helpers

It is understood that for practical purposes it will be necessary from time to time to have help from other people, for example, to fill in for absentees at late notice, or provide extra assistance on a busy day. They count in adult:youth ratios, but operate under the supervision of Leaders at all times. They must never be left unsupervised.

In the context of Cornerstone Youth, Helpers:

- Are 18 years or older and demonstrably stable in mood and behaviour. May not be left alone with a child. They must work alongside other team members and always remain under supervision.
- They may take instructions from any team member but are accountable to the Ministry Supervisor / Ministry Coordinator.
- They do not make decisions about activities or processes.
- As casuals, they are not required to undergo formal training, although they may be invited to attend.
- If a helper is present within the ministry 5 or more times within a year, then they will undergo safe ministry requirements.

3. General Guidelines

Apart from unforeseen emergencies, Leaders should not be alone with a youth. There should always be at least two Leaders present at all times. Careful planning needs to ensure this.

If needed, Leaders are to text other Leaders for more help. This can make things difficult at times, but it is necessary for the safety of both youth and Leaders. If two leaders are unable to be present due to an emergency or unforeseen circumstances, it is important to make a note in the Ministry Supervisor notes for that occasion.

Leaders must keep their physical contact with the children to an appropriate level.

Any meetings involving both Leaders and youth outside the regular programmed events must first be discussed with the Ministry Coordinator and the parents of the children involved.

4. Safe Environment

Incidents of abuse are unlikely to take place in front of another person and the presence of a witness can assist in clarifying questionable allegations. For these reasons, two Leaders will always be present when working with or supervising youth.

Leaders must not visit youths in their homes unless a parent/guardian is present or another Leader accompanies them.

5. Travel

Where transport is necessary for a youth group activity, driving arrangements must be at the direction of the Ministry Supervisor.

Vehicles must have a current Warrant of Fitness and seatbelts used by all passengers.

Leaders must take youth directly to and from arranged venues and must not spontaneously detour or make additional arrangements.

Driving young people with only one leader significantly increases our child protection risks. Where possible having a second leader in the car is ideal.

If this is not possible, Leaders should:

1. check with the Ministry Coordinator on the best approach.
2. not be alone with a single child in the car (take 2-3 children together)
3. have written permission from the parent guardian for this arrangement to occur (texting is ok for this purpose)

6. Signouts

At the end of functions, youth are under the responsibility of their parents/guardians, however leaders should be mindful of where the youth are intending to go.

Youth should not leave the function area without a parent/guardian or pre-arranged adult unless prior permission is given to Leaders. A record of attendance and any one-off or long term permissions from parents/guardians should be kept.

The Ministry Supervisor is responsible for storing attendance records in a secure online storage drive accessible by the Safe Ministry Supervisors.

7. Privacy and Transparency

All personal counselling is to be carried out within sight of another Leader or in a location where parental consent has been given for one-on-one discipleship.

Leaders will respect a member's feelings and privacy when engaging in physical contact of any kind.

Leaders are to be watchful of youth spending time together one-to-one. If two youth of opposite gender are together, they must be visible to others.

Where there is only one toilet on the premise, Leaders are to ensure that only one person is in the toilet area at any one time.

Adults and youth are expected to respect each other's privacy during activities that require undressing, dressing or changing clothes. Leaders will set an example by protecting their own privacy in similar situations. No Leader will be alone in a room with a youth while either is changing.

All aspects of every youth-related program will be open to observation by parents/guardians.

Leaders have a right to ask people who do not have a valid reason to be present at youth-related activities to leave. Police may be contacted if such persons refuse to comply with any reasonable request.

8. Alcohol and Drugs

The consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs on church grounds or during a youth group activity is not to be allowed or condoned by any Leader. Any youth found to be under the influence of alcohol or

illegal drugs is to be counselled and the parents/guardians contacted so that the youth can be returned home immediately.

Any youth required to take prescription medication may be required to provide a letter from their parents/guardians to the Ministry Coordinator.

9. Communication

As part of this ministry, the parent/guardian will provide a contact cell phone number. Any communication needing to be made with the parent/guardian will either be by phone, text or email depending on necessary urgency/nature of message.

Information regarding events and/or logistics should generally be given directly to the parent/guardian, especially if it involves a phone call, text or email.

Leaders should generally not be involved in back-and-forth conversation with youth via social media (e.g. text messaging, Facebook). If a young person initiates a conversation with a Leader electronically, the Leader is to redirect the conversation to a more transparent forum (e.g. face-to-face) or include other people in the conversation.

The best practice when sending emails or text messages is to include multiple youth or another Leader in the message. If you're using social media for ministry purposes, use closed groups where possible (e.g. Facebook) and direct young people to the group rather than your individual account.

Rather than attempting to create a comprehensive policy for use in church, there are 10 key principles to guide leaders in their communication habits.

1. ABOVE REPROACH

Communications should always be above reproach, both in terms of the content and the way it is communicated. Leaders should ask themselves: if this communication were to be made known to all of the church, would they consider it to be appropriate? Leaders ought to be sensitive to the impact of the words and images used, to avoid offence or miscommunication. They must never use flirtatious, sexually suggestive, explicit, or offensive language or images. Leaders ought also to be conscious of how things might look. They should be careful that the circumstances of their communication do not suggest that their relationship with a young person is inappropriate by, for example, communicating regularly or late at night. Even if a leader's motives are pure, misunderstandings can arise.

2. IN PERSON IS BEST

Face-to-face interactions are the best way to build relationships with youth. Leaders should not use electronic communications for matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged, or that require a back-and-forth conversation. In those cases, it's much better to have a conversation in person. If a young person initiates a pastoral conversation with a leader using electronic communications, the leader should ask if they can talk about it with the young person the next time they see them.

3. BE TRANSPARENT

Be aware that those who wish to abuse young people may try to cultivate secretive or exclusive relationships through electronic communications. That is why it is so important for leaders to be transparent in all communications. Leaders should aim to keep communications public and brief. Long or intense conversations by electronic means should be avoided. If a young person initiates a conversation like that, leaders should consider how to redirect it to a

more transparent forum or include other people in the conversation. That might mean talking face to face or including another leader in the communication with the young person's permission. At the very least, the leader should let their ministry leader know so that nothing is going on in secret. Leaders should also keep any emails, text messages or conversation threads with youth, in case an accusation is ever made or a misunderstanding arises.

4. DON'T INITIATE SOCIAL MEDIA FRIENDSHIPS

There is a power imbalance that exists between leaders and the youth they are ministering to. That power imbalance might make it difficult for a young person to say 'no' when a leader initiates a friendship on social media by, for example, sending a Facebook friend request or following them on Instagram. For that reason, it is best for a leader not to initiate, though a leader might choose to accept if the young person initiates a friendship.

5. SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Wherever possible, leaders should communicate electronically with groups rather than individuals. The best practice when sending emails or text messages is to include multiple youth or another leader in the message. When using social media for ministry purposes, closed groups should be used where possible (for example, Facebook) and youth should be directed to the group rather than to a leader's individual account if possible.

6. BUILD UP THE CHURCH

When posting on social media, leaders should think carefully about the impact of what is being communicated on the entire church community (including children, youth and the vulnerable). It is important to remember that leaders are often seen as representing the church. Leaders ought to consider how they can build up the church community, and avoid being divisive, showing favouritism, or making others feel excluded or inferior.

7. RESPECT OTHERS

Leaders should be careful to observe confidentiality and privacy in electronic communications, for example, not publishing the names, contact details or other personal information of people online.

8. BE TRUTHFUL

A leader should never hide their identity or pretend to be someone else. Electronic communications that seek to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else should not be used in ministry in any circumstances.

9. KNOW THE DIGITAL TERRAIN

When using social media, leaders should be aware of and comply with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to using it in ministry.

10. REPORTING ONLINE ABUSE

Laws regarding reporting of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children and youth apply equally to the digital world.

AND FINALLY, USE COMMON SENSE!

There may be exceptional circumstances that arise from time to time, and common sense might dictate that a leader deviates from their usual practice when it comes to electronic communications. In those situations, leaders must be transparent and above reproach and, where possible, should seek advice from their ministry leader.

Recommendations about the sort of contact that is likely to be appropriate at different ages:

Type of contact	Year 7-9 Students	Year 10-13 Students
Phone Calls	To be avoided. Preferable to speak with the parent first and ask permission to speak with the young person.	Reasonable phone contact for ministry purposes permissible. Long conversations to be avoided.
Text Messages	For logistical purposes only	For logistical purposes and encouragement - not for counselling or personal followup
Email	For logistical purposes and encouragement only	For logistical purposes and encouragement only
Social Networking	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.	Use discretion and keep in mind the 10 key principles above.
Video calls / streaming and chat rooms	Never	Never

(this section adapted with thanks to the Safe Ministry Blueprint For Churches - Safe Ministry with Children - Church Of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa New Zealand)

10. Photography

It is not acceptable to take photos, movies or recordings of youth group members outside the guidance of the Ministry Coordinator,

If photography is permitted by the Ministry Coordinator for a legitimate purpose - leaders are not permitted to keep or share these photos with anyone (other than the Ministry Coordinator).

11. Managing of Complaints

Any complaints received in relation to the programme or its Leaders are to be submitted through the Cornerstone complaints process, via the website as soon as possible. If the complaint pertains to abuse, refer to the [Child Wellbeing Policy](#) (Section 4)

12. Responding to Incidents

All incidents must be recorded on the Incident Register and the Ministry Coordinator will be informed. At the direction of the Ministry Coordinator, parents/guardians will be informed of any incidents in a timely fashion appropriate to the severity of the incident.

The Ministry Supervisor will ensure there is a First Aid Kit onsite. First aid will be administered by a Leader with a current first aid certificate or another adult appointed by the Ministry Coordinator or Ministry Supervisor. If this is not possible, the parent/guardian will be contacted.

13. Recognising and Reporting Health Concerns

If a Leader has any significant concerns about the health of a young person, this must be referred to the Ministry Coordinator as soon as possible.

If the concern pertains to abuse, refer to the [Child Wellbeing & Safety Policy](#) (Section 4)

14. Confidentiality

At all times, appropriate levels of privacy and confidentiality must be maintained in line with the Privacy Act 2020 and the Cornerstone Privacy Policy  [Privacy Policy Sep 2023.pdf](#)

Revisions

Date	Status	Comment
21 July 2025	Approved	Significant Rewrite
17 May 2021	Approved	Minor changes and clarifications
21 August 2017	Approved	Minor changes and clarifications
1 August 2016	Approved	Changes approved as proposed below
27 June 2016	Proposed	Minor language-based changes proposed
23 May 2016	Approved	No changes made from latest draft stage.
24 March 2016	Accepted as Draft	Significant changes made in light of new junior youth group starting.
23 March 2015	Approved	Minor changes made
23 February 2015	Approved	New document

I, _____ agree to work within the policy framework outlined above. If I have any questions about this policy I will make contact with the Ministry Coordinator.

Signed _____ Date _____/_____/_____