

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Any questions relating to the contents of this document can be relayed to below compiler and/or email cberg@commonground.co.za

DOCUMENT HISTORY	DATE	COMPILED BY
First edition	May 2017	Brad Anderson
Second edition	September 2017	Brad Anderson
Third edition	March 2019	Brad Anderson
Fourth edition	April 2021	Michael Hampton
Fifth Edition	March 2023	Marc McKinley

Introduction

We believe that children and high schoolers belong primarily to God and therefore need to be nurtured, protected, and valued at all times, irrespective of their race, culture, physical or mental ability, or socio-economic status. Therefore, we take the safety and wellbeing of every young person very seriously. This document has been formulated with the purpose of protecting both the children in our programs and the people who work with them. This document has taken into account similar documents and practises from other churches in South Africa and abroad. It is furthermore compliant with The Children's Act and seeks what is in the child's best interest.

Common Ground Church (CGC), in the interest of the safety of our children and high schoolers, as well as our good, Christian name in the community, will always err on the side of caution. We seek your cooperation in this. We would have that all our actions are beyond reproach in all matters, particularly in matters relating to the safety of our children.

We aim to create a safe environment in every way for our children by combining good leadership with a safe environment and safe practices. We believe in the need to equip our leaders to ensure a ministry that is safe for all children. Our greatest priority in this regard is to protect the rights of the child.

Our Constitution defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years. Therefore, in this policy, the description "child/ren" will refer to all minors under the age of 18.

Context

We ask that every person wishing to join the Next Gen Team (Kids Rock, Ignite or Frequency) or wishing to work with children under the leadership, governance, or name of CGC, reads through and agrees to, this policy. This policy, therefore, applies to anyone with access to children and includes, but is not limited to:

- Volunteers (regular/once-off/holiday/congregational social justice initiatives)
- All staff (including potential new staff)
- CGC Eldership Teams
- CGC Babysitters
- Note for Common Good volunteers – Common Good has their own Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct that volunteers of their initiatives will be required to adhere to

The requirements within this policy apply to all CGC initiatives and events under the CGC umbrella, including but not limited to our weekly ministries, camps, special events, social justice initiatives, holiday clubs and holiday programs on a Sunday. It applies also at sites where these CGC initiatives are held and are not limited to CGC sites and venues only.

In the event of initiatives held together with **Partner Organisations**, this policy remains relevant and applicable. In addition, the Partner Organisation's policies and procedures might apply too, and it is the responsibility of CGC leadership in charge of the initiative, to make themselves aware of the requirements of the Partner Organisation and to adhere to both organisations' policies as applicable.

This CGC Child Protection Policy (together with the relevant Next Gen ministries expectations document-where applicable) serve as the framework through which every volunteer, staff member and elder should serve in this ministry. This policy must be updated and re-signed on an annual basis.

CGC requirements

For the purpose of this policy, the person applying to work with children will be referred to as the "leader".

CGC requires that anyone desiring to work with children must:

- Connect with the ministry/initiative leader and go through this policy, relevant application forms and ministry expectations.
- Agree to, sign, and adhere to this Child Protection Policy and the requirements expressed herein.
- Fill in and sign the applicable application forms and provide documents required as per the specific application (e.g., copy of ID and character references)

- Obtain 3 clearance certificates: a clearance certificate against Part B of the National Child Protection Register, a criminal check clearance and a sexual offenders clearance. Any applicant under the age of 18 must have a form signed by their parents/guardians declaring they have never been involved in any activity that was harmful or potentially harmful to children.
- The leader must have their involvement approved by the congregational elders. This will be reviewed on a bi-annual basis.
- For Next Gen Ministries, the individual must have completed the DNA process of church membership, including a one-on-one coffee with eldership and must have been welcomed into membership (unless under the age of 18). If anyone has not been welcomed into membership for any reason, then specific written approval of their suitability to work with children must be obtained from the congregational eldership team.

No one who has been convicted of a crime involving the abuse or neglect of children will be allowed to work with children at our church. Any other criminal record will be considered on a case-to-case basis in discussion with the congregational eldership team and ministry leaders. If an offender or suspected offender moves to a different church, it is then incumbent on the leaders of the church they are leaving to inform the new congregation of the risk.

Defining Child Abuse

Child abuse may take the form of the following conduct in relation to a child:

- Allowing children to be sexually abused
- Sexual abuse
- Exposing a child to any pornographic material
- Bullying
- Emotional abuse (causing harm by name-calling, threats, intimidation, isolations, ridicule etc. This can also happen on social media)
- Harassment (unwelcome conduct and contact through physical contact, following or stalking, unwelcome comments)
- Neglect (being deprived of essentials – food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, education, supervision, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care etc.)
- Exploiting a child for labour
- Exposing or subjecting a child to psychological abuse
- Physical abuse (intentional or reckless act causing physical harm to a child)
- Spiritual abuse (using the position of influence and power to dominate and manipulate, using Christian terminology to justify unacceptable behaviour)

Leaders and volunteers have authority and power over children because of their position, age, maturity, physical size, strength, and life experience. Abuse arises from the misuse of authority or power, and any form of child abuse is always wrong. Due to the inherent imbalance of power, children are incapable of giving valid consent to abuse.

Guidelines for the protection of children

A. General Guidelines

1. A child should never be alone within a venue with a leader. If a leader finds him/herself alone with a child, another leader/adult should be asked to accompany them immediately.
2. In the case of sensitive conversations, leaders must find a quiet spot that respects the nature of the conversation but is easily accessible. It must never happen behind closed doors.
3. If there is ever an occasion where a child needs a lift, or is going somewhere with a leader, the leader must get direct, personal permission from the parents/guardians via a phone call or message. In this case, once permission has been given, the leader must send a confirmation message to the parents/guardians stating the nature and timeframe of the lift/outing. Transportation of a child alone in a vehicle must never be with a leader of the opposite sex.

4. One on one meetings between a leader and a child must only occur with direct, personal written permission (including electronic messages e.g., WhatsApp) from a parent/legal guardian, and must occur in a public space, or at the home of the child with the parents present and must only occur between the hours of 7am-7pm. The parent/guardian must be made aware of all the details of such a meeting (time, place, purpose).
5. Children who need to be accompanied to the toilets must be accompanied by female leaders. Leaders must check that the bathrooms are safe, and then stand in the doorway while children go to the toilet. If the child is so young that he/she needs assistance, the leader may assist as discreetly and quickly as possible, and never behind a closed door. We may ask that parents/guardians change nappies; leaders may ask them to come and take care of their own children if the need arises.
6. All leaders need to be vigilant in ensuring that the activities the children partake in, and the space in which we host the children, are safe.
7. As far as possible register of all children must be kept at all CGC initiatives. The arrival and departure of children that are part of the initiative, must be carefully monitored. Each congregation and ministry must establish systems to protect the children at this critical time.
8. Leaders must avoid any physical contact with a child in private. Any physical contact should be carefully considered, ensuring that it could not be construed to be inappropriate in any way. Inappropriate physical contact would include, but not be limited to, long hugs, sitting on laps, 'bum taps', back rubs, and holding hands (unless with younger kids to keep them safe). Appropriate physical contact would include, but not be limited to, high-fives, brief sideways hugs, handshakes, hand on the shoulder, pat on the shoulder. Any physical contact with a child should:
 - 8.1. be in public.
 - 8.2. be appropriate to the age of the individual and related to their need.
 - 8.3. generally, be initiated by the child.
9. Leaders must never resort to physical punishment of any kind. Leaders must learn and be equipped with how to discipline and control children in a positive manner. Our heart behind discipline should be restorative and aim to move the minor holistically forward.
10. Leaders must never insult, belittle, or manipulate children.
11. Leaders must avoid engaging in rough, physical, or sexually provocative games, especially with children of the opposite sex. In the same way, do not allow children or young people to engage in games or horseplay which could be misconstrued by other children or young people.
12. Leaders must never make sexually suggestive or provocative comments about or to a child/ren, even if it is only in jest. Do not joke inappropriately with other leaders in front of a child/ren. In the same vein, never allow children or young people to use inappropriate language while they are under your care.
13. Leaders must not allow bullying to happen in any event. Bullying in any way is to be dealt with strictly and speedily.
14. Leaders must never leave a child/ren alone at or in a venue, or on the pavement waiting to be fetched by parents. If their transportation is late, phone the parent/guardian to arrange transportation.
15. Should there be children without transport who need to walk home- the ministry/initiative leader should use their discretion. Permission must be sought from the parents where possible. A proper handover process must be followed when returning children to a partner organisation.
16. Leaders must be aware of how they dress. Please dress appropriately for the context. Do not wear revealing clothing.
17. Leaders must immediately report any suspicion of abuse to their ministry leader, whether this is within the context of Common Ground ministry or outside of it. *Please see the outlined protocol below for such circumstances.*
18. Leaders must be accountable to other leaders within the team and must inform their ministry leader should any incident occur, which could be held against them, could lead to them being falsely accused, or if they feel uncomfortable with any situation.
19. On camps or similar outings never allow boys and girls to share the same dormitories or tents, or adults to share the same sleeping accommodation with other people's children of the opposite sex. If there is only one set of ablutions, control access strictly.
20. On formal church-organised outings away from the church property/venue, make sure you have the necessary emergency information for each child and that each child has a completed indemnity form.

B. Photographs and Video recordings

1. Do not take close-up/small group (less than 15) photos of children without the written permission of the parents.
 - 1.1. Only photos/videos of big groups of children (more than 15) can be taken without parental permission. The guideline is whether an individual child can be easily identified (face, name stickers or any 'tagging' etc) and tracked down.
 - 1.2. Ministry/initiative leaders must designate one person from their team to be responsible for taking photos, ensuring compliance with the CPP. No other leaders or parents are permitted to take photos of any kind.
2. Do not identify in writing the child/children in any photograph or video recording.
3. Any photos/videos that are taken can only be used for feedback purposes (not including Social Media) within the broader umbrella of CGC.
4. Photos or videos of children on personal devices will count against a leader if any accusation is brought against them – so it is wise to not have any on your personal devices.

C. Social media

For the purpose of this document, social media is defined as any website and/or software application which allows people to communicate and share information using the internet on any computer and/or mobile device. We recognise that social media is a big part of ministry to the next generation, and with the following guidelines in place, can be utilised in many helpful ways in creating connections with young people.

1. Any official social media accounts must be held by the ministry leader. All such social media accounts must be set to 'private' and have reasonable vetting processes (both for access granted and the nature of the photo/video). Photos/videos posted on social media accounts must not contain any identity 'tags' of any sort.
2. Before posting any media on social media accounts, ensure that it complies with ALL the following requirements:
 - 2.1. The ministry-held account is set to 'Private'
 - 2.2. The children are not easily identifiable, and their faces are not visible.
 - 2.3. The media does not portray the children in a negative light.
 - 2.4. No one has been tagged in the media
3. In all social media interaction (including, but not limited to, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook etc.), use the following question as a guiding principle: "Would I be happy for the child's parent/guardian and my eldership to read this?". Ministry/Initiative leaders must be included as an Admin on all groups (WhatsApp, Facebook etc) involving children connected to the ministry.
4. A saved record of all social media interaction with children must be kept, so your conversation can be revisited if necessary. Deleted messages and posts immediately cast suspicion over the interaction and will be counted against you if any accusation arises.
5. Do not engage with children on any social media platforms after 9pm or before 6am, except in the case of an emergency, in which case parents must be contacted immediately.
6. Leaders should not have profile pictures of themselves with a child/ren.

D. Online Church and Ministry

1. A child should never be alone on a video call with a leader. If a leader finds him/herself alone with a child, the video chat should be politely ended and resumed once another leader/adult is available and connected. The best way to avoid this is to ensure that you do not let a minor onto a video call before another leader has logged on with you. Consider signing in as leaders early to assist with this.
2. A written saved record of all interaction with children must be kept, so your conversation can be revisited if necessary. This should include the length of calls, time, attendees, and the topic discussed.
3. With regards to video communication, under no circumstances may video footage during a conversation be recorded, screenshoted, or saved.
4. Although time limits have been suggested above to cater for online "evening ministry" (movie nights, online preaches, watch parties etc.) it is advised to try and limit all communications to daylight hours.

5. Leaders need to communicate to minors their responsibilities when using these platforms, creating safe boundaries to work within, avoiding any possible inappropriate behaviour from minors' side.
6. Leaders must be sure that the parents of the minors they are inviting to a video call have been permitted for video communication to take place. This must always be given through the online service permission slip.
7. In the case of sensitive conversations, Frequency leaders must rather make a phone call with another leader present. Kids Rock and Ignite leaders must rather make a phone call with parents' present, (consider asking your ministry leader to join this conversation). It must never happen without the parent/legal guardian's permission. You should notify your ministry leader of the conversation.
8. One on one online meetings between a leader and a child are discouraged and may only occur with direct, personal written permission from a parent/legal guardian, and should only occur over a voice call (i.e., no video chats) and must only occur between the hours of 7am - 7pm. The parent/legal guardian must be made aware of all the details of such a meeting (i.e., time, platform, purpose).

Protocols for the protection of children

In the case of an emergency or where any form of abuse of children is suspected or reported, please immediately follow the relevant protocols outlined below.

A. Concerned parents/guardians

If a parent/guardian has a concern around possible abuse/neglect of a child/ren or a concern around inappropriate conduct of a volunteer or staff member, they must immediately contact the ministry leader as well as inform the church via email to childprotection@commonground.co.za. This will ensure it will be dealt with discreetly and swiftly as we take the safety of our children very seriously.

B. Fire

In the event of a fire, raise the alarm as quickly as possible. Do this by calmly getting everyone's attention and moving the children out of the building at the nearest exit and gather in the designated safe area. Small group leaders are responsible for checking that everyone from their small group/class is in the safe area.

Your primary responsibility is to get the children to safety. Please only attempt to fight the fire if you know all children and other people are safe and with a supervisor. Please familiarise yourself (in each venue) where the fire extinguishers are and familiarise yourself with the exits that would be most convenient for your group.

For any other emergencies (crime, wild animals, natural disasters, etc), please apply a similar protocol to above.

C. Medical

Congregational Eldership must ensure that all CGC venues are adequately supplied with a sufficient First Aid kit and that there is at least one person present who has valid first aid training. Leaders need to make sure that they know where the first aid kit is in their venue, and if necessary, use it within their ability. No medication can be dispensed without parental permission. If a serious injury or accident occurs, a medical doctor, as well as the parents/guardians, need to be contacted immediately. Please be aware of any allergy's children may have.

Any serious injury that required the attention of a medical professional/trained First Aid leader must be reported to the Ministry/Initiative Leader, who will keep an 'Incident Report', wherein the name of the child together with the date, nature, treatment, and outcome of the injury must be recorded and, if relevant, shared with the partner organisation. Please record the incident/record of injury on the online Microsoft Form (which would have been shared with you by the Child Protection Administrator) as soon as the incident has happened. This will be sent to the Child Protection Administrator to be kept electronically should it need to be revisited later.

With HIV/AIDS as a huge factor in our society, please follow the principles of universal precaution, which is the assumption that in situations of potential exposure to HIV and Hepatitis, all persons are potentially infected and all blood and body fluids and excretions which could be stained or contaminated with blood (for example tears, saliva, mucus, phlegm, urine, vomit, faeces, and pus) are therefore to be treated as potentially infectious.

1. All persons attending to blood spills, open wounds, sores, breaks in the skin, grazes, open skin lesions, body fluids and excretions should wear protective latex gloves to minimize the risk of HIV transmission. However, emergency treatment should not be delayed because gloves are not available. Unbroken plastic packets can be used on hands where latex or rubber gloves are not available.
2. If there is a biting or scratching incident where the skin is broken, the wound should be washed thoroughly with running water and disinfectant. Cleansing and washing of wounds should always be done with running water and not in containers of water. Where running tap water is not available containers should be used to pour water over the area to be cleansed. Blood splashes on the face (mucous membranes of eyes, nose, or mouth) should be flushed with running water for at least three minutes.
3. If blood has contaminated a surface, that surface should be cleaned with fresh, clean bleach solution and the person responsible for this should wear latex gloves. Other body fluids and excretions that could be stained or contaminated with blood (for instance tears, saliva, mucus, phlegm, urine, vomit, faeces and pus) should be cleaned up in similar fashion.
4. Blood-contaminated materials should be sealed in a plastic bag and disposed of in an appropriate manner.

In the event of possible contact with HIV infected blood, the employee or church member should be referred to the local clinic, General Practitioner, or pharmacy to receive appropriate treatment which may include a one-month course of ART (Antiretroviral drugs). Details of the nearest local contact should be kept at the church. The HIV status of any child is confidential. If you are aware that a child is HIV positive, this information is not to be shared with anyone, including other leaders. All body fluid spills should be treated as outlined above, alleviating the need to disclose a child's HIV status.

Children should be instructed never to touch the blood, open wounds, sores, breaks in the skin, grazes, and open skin lesions of others, nor to handle emergencies such as nosebleeds, cuts, and scrapes of friends on their own. They should be taught to call for the assistance of an adult.

D. Suspected abuse outside of the church context

We are required, by law, to report any child/ren we suspect are suffering abuse in any way. In the case of any leaders becoming concerned of the potential abuse of a child happening outside of the church/ministry environment, the following process must be followed.

1. If a child shares information with you about a potentially abusive situation, do not react with obvious shock. Reassure the child that they have the right to be safe and that they have done the right thing by speaking to you. Do not ask detailed questions, only ask open-ended questions, such as "can you talk more about what happened?" Do not promise them that you can keep things a secret but promise them that you want them to be safe.
2. Do not speak to the parents about your concern if the concern could possibly be related to the parents or family in any way, as this may further endanger the child. Do not speak widely about your concern.
3. Write down exactly what the child said or what you have observed and what you are concerned may be happening. Sign and date the page and take it to your ministry leader.
4. The ministry leader must immediately contact the appropriate elders and evaluate the concern. They will then determine the next step, which may include:
 - 4.1. Trying to gather more information from the child.
 - 4.2. Involving a trained counsellor to formulate a plan of action.
5. If the eldership and ministry leader still feel there is legitimate cause for concern, they must document their concerns (and possibly, fill in form 22) and immediately contact an appropriate support structure and report it appropriately to a designated child-protection organisation. The case will then be referred to a social worker for investigation.

Childline South Africa **08 000 55 555** or Lifeline **021 762 8198** or Child Trauma **021 461 1114**.
If you feel the child is in immediate danger, please call the Police on **10111**.

E. Accusation of abuse within the church context

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at church or during our activities/initiatives or by one of our staff members or volunteers, the following procedure shall be led by the congregational elders:

1. The parent or guardian of the child, the ministry leader and the entire eldership team must be informed immediately. Elders then lead this process.
2. The leader or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave and/or stepped out of the ministry team pending an investigation and will be instructed to remain away from the premises and ministry events during the investigation. He or she will be instructed to have no contact with the alleged victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be immediately reported to the civil authorities for a thorough and independent investigation, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse and the judicial process. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or misconduct. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
5. A pastoral visit (through the eldership) will be arranged for those who desire it, both for the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator (if appropriate). This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
6. Any person who is found guilty by the law of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children.
7. Eldership (together with the civil authorities and professionals) will determine appropriate ongoing boundaries in response to the outcome of the investigation.