

Code of Conduct: Children's and Youth Ministry ICF Rotterdam-Noord

Date of policy: August 2024

I. Introduction

The church should be a safe place, a shelter that provides love, safety and security to everyone. Unfortunately this safety cannot be taken for granted, sexual and other kinds of abuse takes place within churches worldwide; sometimes this is obvious, sometimes it is more subtle. At ICF-Noord we take this issue seriously and believe in Christ's Church there is no place for abuse in any form.

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 them. 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 talk about this with each other and to be accountable to members and visitors in our care during pastoral visits.

As part of the procedures regarding the appointment of new supervisors/volunteers leaders this code of conduct will be discussed with them by the safeguarding advisor and signed. A VOG (Certificate of Conduct) will also be requested, and references will be required as per the *ICF pre-appointment check requirements*.

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

As a supervisor (or volunteer) you are responsible for the safety of the relationship. 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 expected to act correctly when carrying out their ministry. A difficult task, especially considering that well-intentioned behavior can have an unintended effect.

Below are guidelines which must be followed to ensure responsible behavior:

1. *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 5 years of age are only taken on your lap if they ask for it themselves.
2. *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.
3. *Avoid ambiguous, offensive, abusive and intimidating language.*
4. *Never promise secrecy.* Always tell children or young people that what you discuss with them will in principle remain "indoors" unless the safety of others or the child itself is at risk. Respect the

privacy of the young person or child but engage third parties when this is necessary for their well-being. Agree with the young person or child that before you tell anything to third parties, you will let him or her know.

5. *Avoid being alone with a child 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 children's ministry and treat the child with respect. When a child needs help, leave the toilet door open. We use the 4-eyes principle which means that each group always has 2 supervisors, this can be one adult and a teenage helper but ideally two adults. Teenagers who help out are the responsibility of the supervisor and can act as a second set of eyes but must never be left alone with a child.
6. *Do not invite young people 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.
7. *Do not give children/young people personalised gifts* (this does not include a suitable token of appreciation), aim to give the same gift to all children if one is needed. 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.
8. *Be aware of the effect of non-verbal behavior: facial expression, speaking from an intimidating height to a child, 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.
9. *Be honest and treat each other with respect.* Children and young people appreciate honesty and a respectful attitude more than is sometimes thought.
10. *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 or child in an honest way and to admit your own your wrongdoing where necessary.
11. *Make sure if criticism is needed, it is done constructively. Ensure that positive appreciation is also given to encourage children/young people.* 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 Safe Church

Advisor within church, or advisors of the hotline [Sexual Abuse in Church Relationships](#).¹

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.

¹ 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.