

# External Contact with Children Policy

<b>Policy Number</b>	M07
<b>Policy Area</b>	Ministry
<b>Board Approved Date</b>	February 2021
<b>Scheduled Review Date</b>	February 2023
<b>Related Documents</b>	Safe Places Policy, Child Safety Policy, Code of Conduct, Child Safety Reporting Procedure, Discovery Kids Team Manual, i60 Youth Team Manual.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline Discovery Church's expectations in relation to contact between Discovery Church representatives and children when it extends outside of organised ministry events and the designated times for such events. This policy aims to provide a clear set of expectations that encourage healthy, appropriate and safe relationships with the children we interact with.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all Discovery Church representatives, defined as:

- **Staff** including employees, consultants and contractors.
- **Volunteers** including leaders, interns, ministry team members, lifegroup hosts and event-based volunteers.
- **Staff & Volunteers of Related Entities** including those of Treasure Corner Op Shop and Discovery Community Care.
- **Elders** (governing body).

## DEFINITIONS

**Child:** any person under 18 years of age. This includes those also referred to as a young person.

- Children that turn 18 while involved in Discovery Church's youth ministry activities will be treated in the same way that children are within this policy until they exit the youth ministry. While this recognises they are still participants within the youth ministry, it does not exempt them from any legal obligations they hold as adults.

**Relationship Formed Outside Ministry:** when a representative has a relationship with a child and/or their family formed through a connection other than their ministry role, such as in the case of a child being a family member or family friend.

**Electronic Contact:** any communication by electronic or digital means, including but not limited to phone, email, social media, gaming, online platforms or applications.

**Ministry Event:** any formal event or structured activity that is approved or otherwise endorsed by church staff. This includes but is not limited to in-person services, online services, lifegroup activities, team meetings and community-based activities run by our related entities.

**Ministry Purposes:** any activity conducted for the purpose of ministry or within the scope of ministry. It extends beyond ministry events to include ministry related communications (event details, planning, logistics, etc.), pastoral care, mentoring, faith-related conversations and general encouragement as it relates to a person's involvement with the church.

## CONTACT WITHIN MINISTRY EVENTS

Contact with children is expected within the course of Discovery Church ministry events, including on-site, off-site and online events. The **Child Safety Policy** and **Code of Conduct** outline the measures in place to protect children within all our activities. Contact is naturally significantly higher within our children's and youth ministries and the **Discovery Kids Team Manual** and the **i60 Youth Team Manual** outline the additional measures in place within these ministries.

Discovery Church also has four 'golden rules' that guide interactions with children across all ministry areas:

- **Two-adults:** there must be at least two adults present when engaging with children.
- **Ask for permission:** ensure permissions are gained from relevant pastors and parents/guardians.
- **Keep appropriate boundaries:** in accordance with policies, procedures and the Code of Conduct.
- **Always report concerns:** concerns must be reported to a Child Safety Officer.

The same expectations of the above-mentioned policies and ‘golden rules’ apply when representatives are engaging with children immediately before and/or after ministry events, such as in the foyer, playground or carpark. In these situations, parents/guardians are responsible for the care and supervision of their children and representatives should not assume responsibility for caring for children in these times. Children and especially younger children, should not be unsupervised in church buildings or on church properties, particularly in areas where other adults are not present.

The same expectations also apply during any off-site events, such as lifegroups meeting in homes, and online events. Children may be present within these environments and the same approach we take to keeping children safe must apply.

## A NOTE ON RELATIONSHIPS FORMED OUTSIDE OF MINISTRY

Discovery Church recognises that certain representatives may have relationships with children and/or their families that extend outside of the representative-to-child relationship formed in a ministry context. These relationships include:

- Family members (immediate and extended).
- Pre-existing relationships (formed prior to the representative-to-child relationship).
- Relationships formed via other connections (such as family friendships).

Where relationships outside of ministry exist or are formed, it is recognised that representatives will have contact with children outside of ministry events and different expectations will apply. To ensure that such relationships remain transparent and accountable, representatives must:

- **Inform their relevant pastor/department head** at the time of their role application (in their application form or during interviews/induction) or as they arise of such relationships and these will be noted by the pastor/department head.
- **Ensure there is parent/guardian permission** when spending time with a child outside of ministry events, as would be expected in any relationship involving an adult and child.
- **Maintain the expectations of policies**, including the Child Safety Policy, Code of Conduct and any departmental guidelines to the best of their ability during any contact with children.

It is important to note that in the context of relationships formed outside of ministry, the representative will always hold positional power over the child and it is the responsibility of the representative to maintain appropriate boundaries at all times. The representative-to-child dynamic exists outside of ministry contexts and can never be entirely removed; it is therefore critical that representatives always seek to be as transparent and accountable as possible.

If unsure about anything, representatives should seek guidance from the relevant pastor, department head or a Child Safety Officer.

## CONTACT OUTSIDE OF MINISTRY EVENTS

The majority of contact with children should occur within ministry events, however, it is sometimes necessary for contact to take place outside of ministry events and this can include in-person contact and electronic contact (calling, texting or online communications). Where this contact is necessary, there are several key guidelines outlined below.

<b>Purpose</b>	Contact with children outside of ministry events should be for ministry purposes – ministry related communications, pastoral care, mentoring, faith-related conversations or general encouragement.
<b>Permission</b>	Pastors/department heads and parents/guardians must give permission for contact with children outside of ministry events and should be aware of when and how this contact is taking place.
<b>Policy</b>	All of the expectations of the Child Safe Policy, Code of Conduct and departmental guidelines apply to contact with children outside of ministry events.

## **NEWBORN TO PRIMARY SCHOOL AGES / ~0-12 YEARS**

### **DISCOVERY KIDS**

#### **In-Person Contact**

In-person contact with children outside of ministry events is not permitted, unless it is in the context of contact with the child's family.

#### **Electronic Contact**

Electronic contact with children outside of ministry events is not permitted and all such communication must be through parents/guardians.

## **HIGH SCHOOL AGES / ~13-18 YEARS**

### **i60 YOUTH<sup>1</sup>**

Only certain representatives are permitted to contact children outside of ministry events, which are:

- Kids and Youth Pastors.
- Key Team Members.
- i60 Lifegroup Leaders (permitted to contact their Lifegroup members only).

Kids and Youth Pastors may give permission for additional pastors or leaders to contact children from time to time where this is necessary for specified ministry purposes. Where such permission is necessary, it must be given before contact takes place and only for the specified purpose. All other representatives must not contact children outside of ministry events.

If a child initiates contact outside of ministry events with a non-approved representative, the representative should contact the relevant pastor or lifegroup leader (if the child is part of a lifegroup) to refer the situation to them, or include those leaders in the conversation.

#### **In-Person Contact**

In-person contact outside of ministry events is permitted for approved representatives, subject to the following:

- Permission has been gained from the relevant pastor/department head for each in-person contact.
- Permission has been gained from the parents/guardians for each in-person contact.
- Leaders should generally only meet with children of the same gender.
- For children in years 7-9, two adult leaders are present at all times.
- For children in years 10-12, one leader may meet with one child if they remain in a public place, either the child's home in view of a parent/guardian (no bedrooms or behind closed doors) or in a public café or restaurant (e.g. McDonalds). The leader cannot drive a child there unaccompanied; they must meet there.
- A record of the meeting is made in Fluro including the date, time, location, who was present and a brief summary of the interaction. If this cannot be completed for some reason, the details must be sent to the relevant pastor/department head within 24 hours of the contact.

#### **Electronic Contact**

Electronic contact outside of ministry activities is permitted for approved representatives, subject to the following:

- Permission has been gained from the relevant pastor/department head (usually at the start of their role).
- Permission has been gained from the parents/guardians (using a Permission for External Contact Form<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> This section applies to any leaders under the age of 18, such as apprentice leaders, whom would fall within this age bracket irrespective of their involvement with i60 Youth.

<sup>2</sup> Permission for external contact is gained during enrolment into i60 Youth. Parents/guardians can permit this initially or at an age when they are comfortable for such contact to take place with their child. Pastors or leaders can check that this is in place in Fluro or by checking with the Kids or Youth Pastor if unsure. It is not necessary to gain this for every time electronic contact takes place.

- Group communications are used wherever possible and always considered before any one-on-one conversations. This is achieved by using group text messages, group chats or through a closed group page, and including the i60 accountability profile<sup>3</sup>.
- One-on-one conversations are avoided, either by including another leader, a pastor or the i60 accountability profile or moving the conversation to another format (such as a meeting with the lifegroup leaders). If a one-on-one pastoral care conversation is necessary, then a phone call is preferable. When a one-on-one conversation arises beyond simple logistical communications (e.g. “running 10 minutes late”), leaders must inform the relevant pastor (see last dot point).
- Contact with opposite genders is avoided, unless it relates to a mixed gender activity and the communication occurs through a group forum with leaders of both genders included.
- Video calls are not permitted, unless in a group context.
- Contact is before 9pm, or within an hour of an organised youth event finishing, unless it is an emergency situation and if so, the relevant pastor should be notified as soon as possible.
- Records of electronic contact are kept as far as possible, which means not using platforms that have no record (e.g. Snapchat) and not intentionally deleting communications.
- Communications never seek to hide an identity or represent the sender as someone else.
- A record must be made in Fluro of any conversations that are in-depth or of a pastoral care nature including the date, time, platform/technology used, who was present and a brief summary of the interaction. If this cannot be completed for some reason, the details must be sent to the relevant pastor within 24 hours of the contact.

A high level of caution must be used whenever communicating with children online. Leaders must always maintain appropriate boundaries, be transparent and be accountable for what they communicate, through both the words and images they use as they may be perceived differently by those who view it. All leaders must be willing to engage in a conversation with a pastor if any concerns are raised.

Permission to contact children can be revoked by pastors, department head or parents/guardians at any stage. Where this occurs, all contact from representatives to children must immediately cease. Parents/guardians can revoke their consent by contacting the relevant department pastor or a Child Safety Officer.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships are subject to the same expectations outlined above regarding in-person and electronic contact. If the mentor is not a person approved to have contact with children outside of ministry activities, they must obtain specific approval from the relevant pastor. All other expectations apply.

### **YEAR 12 AGE / ~17-18 YEARS**

#### **YOUNG ADULTS TRANSITION**

During the transition period from i60 to Young Adults, it may be necessary for contact to occur with Year 12 students outside of ministry events.

Young Adult leaders are permitted to contact Year 12 students in relation to Young Adult ministry events, so long as there is approval from the Youth Pastor and Young Adults Pastor and communication is directed through the relevant leaders (e.g. Year 12 Lifegroup Leaders or the dedicated transition leaders).

While contact with children outside of ministry events and purposes is generally not permitted (see *Social Contact* section), there are some exceptions to this in the case of Year 12 students in recognition of the transition to the Young Adults community that occurs during this year. Representatives must exercise a high level of wisdom around inviting Year 12 students to any non-ministry activities, taking into consideration the age and appropriateness of such activities. There is a level of nuance in this; for example, inviting several Year 12 students to a young adult’s house after a church service might be appropriate, whereas inviting Year 12 students to spend time with an adult without other young adults present is inappropriate. If a representative is ever unsure, they must seek guidance from a pastor first.

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<sup>3</sup> The i60 accountability profile is a dedicated social media profile used to promote accountability in online communications where a private or one-on-one conversation may be necessary. The profile is managed by the Youth Pastor and is only accessed in the event of a concern being raised; it is otherwise not used to monitor conversations.

Year 12 students are not permitted to join the Young Adults Facebook page until they exit the youth ministry (end of Year 12).

## **SOCIAL MEDIA<sup>4</sup>**

Only certain representatives are permitted to friend/follow children on social media<sup>5</sup> and only for ministry purposes, which are:

- Kids or Youth Pastors.
- i60 Lifegroup Leaders (permitted to connect with their Lifegroup members only).

All other Discovery Church representatives must not initiate or accept friend/follow requests with children. In the case of public pages/accounts, a child can follow an adult but the adult cannot follow them back or utilise any direct chat functions with the child. All representatives must never friend/follow a child that is under the required age limit for a social media platform (e.g. Facebook and Instagram are 13).

Any closed groups or pages set up for ministry purposes (e.g. Lifegroups or Service Teams), must involve at least two leaders and a pastor or the i60 social media accountability profile. All communication within these groups should be public.

All representatives, and especially those permitted to engage with children via social media, should consider the appropriateness of the content they produce and engage with on their social media accounts, being aware of the influence this has on children and/or other members of the church community.

## **SOCIAL CONTACT**

There is an inherent power dynamic that exists between representatives and children that extends outside of ministry contexts. For this reason, social contact – contact that extends beyond ministry events and purposes – is generally not permitted between representatives and children.

In the case of public events or celebrations (parties, weddings, graduations, school events, etc.), it is reasonable to expect that representatives and children will be present together. In such contexts, representatives should always be mindful of the positional power they hold and uphold appropriate boundaries.

In the case of inviting children to events or celebrations, it may be considered appropriate for representatives to invite Year 12 students, children they lead or their own children's friends to such events. Representatives should exercise a high level of caution around this, thinking through the appropriateness of the event for the age group, and for any children below Year 12 age, ensuring parent/guardian permission is in place and informing the relevant pastor of such scenarios. If an event may involve alcohol consumption, the consumption of this must be responsible and parents/guardians must be informed of this prior to giving permission regardless of children's ages.

## **TRANSPORT**

In certain circumstances, the transportation of children to or from ministry events may be necessary and suitable Discovery Church representatives may be asked to assist, subject to the following:

- Permission has been granted from the relevant pastor/department head.

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<sup>4</sup> As outlined in the *Relationships Formed Outside of Ministry* section, there are different expectations in the case of relationships formed outside of ministry that would apply to this and the following three sections.

<sup>5</sup> Any representatives that cease to be representatives, due to concluding in their role or being asked to step down from their role, must unfriend/unfollow children on social media platforms at the conclusion of their role.

- Written permission has been granted from the child's parent/guardian (using a Transport Permission Form).
- Two adult leaders are present in the vehicle at all times.
- Transport takes place in a registered, roadworthy and insured vehicle driven by a fully licensed or green probation driver.

If transport is required in a crisis situation and all of the above is not readily in place, representatives must contact the relevant pastor to find an appropriate solution before transporting children.

Transport related to social activities are subject to the same expectations outlined in the above *Social Contact* section.

## **BABYSITTING**

Representatives should not provide babysitting to the children they lead, unless in the case of relationships formed outside of ministry and if so, the relevant pastor/department head must be informed of the arrangements.

Discovery Church congregants are free to arrange babysitting independently, however, they are responsible for assessing the safety and suitability of a person they wish to engage in such a role. If they seek recommendations from staff, such recommendations must only be made on a personal basis and do not represent the views of Discovery Church and this must be communicated to them.