



# SAFE PRACTICE GUIDE

## Working Safely with Children & Adults at Risk

### Why is this important?

Safe and nurturing environments flourish when children and adults-at-risk feel respected and protected. Archdiocesan workers can encourage this by taking steps to enhance safety when working with children and adults-at-risk.

### What should we be doing?

#### Have Working with Children Blue Cards

Under the *Working with Children (Risk Management & Screening) Act 2000*, any person involved in child-related work/activities must hold a Working with Children Blue Card before commencing that work. This includes volunteers and students undertaking a practical placement as part of a tertiary course. Generally, all religious representatives (e.g. priests, religious, deacons, chaplains, religious instructors) require a blue card. A person cannot commence or continue to work with children until they are issued or reissued with a valid blue card.

#### Important

It is illegal to employ or allow a person who is restricted or disqualified from holding a blue card or who is the subject of a negative notice under the Act to work with children (paid or voluntarily).

#### Maintain Personal Boundaries

Workers should be very clear about their role and its limits when working with children and adults-at-risk, and maintain proper personal boundaries at all times. They should avoid any unnecessary or unauthorised physical contact, and not be overly familiar or give excessive attention to any individual such that it gives the appearance of a 'special' interest or relationship.

#### Provide Adequate Supervision

Workers should be accompanied by, and be within direct line of sight of other adults when working with children and adults-at-risk (without impinging on the right to privacy). As a guide, when working with children below 13 years of age, a ratio of 1 adult to every 5 children is recommended. When working with children 13 to 17 years of age, a ratio of 1 adult to every 10 children is recommended. At a minimum, 2 adults should be present when working with children. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, wherever practical, supervising adults should not be related to each other. Parents should be encouraged to assist in supervising and monitoring activities in which their children are involved. Young people (under 18 years) should not be made responsible for the supervision of other children.

When working with children and adults-at-risk with greater needs or during higher-risk activities (e.g. excursions, overnight camps, pilgrimages) the ratio of supervising adults should be increased. Ratios set by legislation or relevant standards must be met (where applicable). The gender balance of adults should also reflect the gender of the participants.

#### Use Safe Locations

When working with children and adults-at-risk use locations that provide natural surveillance (without impinging on the right to privacy). Avoid using secluded, closed-off or out-of-view locations.

Where a level of privacy is necessary (e.g. for personal counselling), the location should allow a clear line of sight to the child or adult-at-risk (e.g. unobstructed windows, open door).

IMPORTANT - Activities involving children and adults-at-risk should not be conducted in private quarters, homes or residences including a presbytery/parish house.

### **Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation**

The sacrament of penance and reconciliation involving children and adults-at-risk should be conducted within the clear line of sight of another adult (without impinging on the right to privacy). Consider using an open space outside of the traditional confessional. Where a confessional is used, there should be a physical barrier between the penitent and priest.

### **Vesting Altar Servers**

Children and adults-at-risk performing the Altar Server role should wear the vestments over their clothing. They should not be expected or instructed to undress or remove any clothing.

Wherever possible, use a location, other than the sacristy, for children and adults-at-risk to change into the vestments. The location should be open and allow a clear line of sight.

Parents and guardians should accompany children and adults-at-risk to the vesting area and assist in putting on the vestments if necessary.