

# Establishing a Code of Conduct with children and young people in the parish context

## WHAT IS A CODE OF CONDUCT?

The Commission for Children and Young People (VIC) defines a Code of Conduct as a document that lists “behaviours that are acceptable and those that are not.” A Code of Conduct is founded on the belief and understanding that every individual has the right to feel safe and be safe and in doing so to have life *‘in all its fullness’ (John 10:10)*.

As adults in ministry, working or volunteering within a parish context, the Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct sets out the do’s and don’ts in relation to our interactions with children and young people. Equally, a Code of Conduct for children and/or young people helps to provide clarity for children and young people in relation to their own rights and responsibilities.

This ensures that acceptable and unacceptable behaviours are clearly defined and communicated within the parish to promote a shared understanding of the actions that promote safety for those engaged in programs, activities and events.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CREATE A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

*“And a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6)*

Within a parish the promotion of the Code of Conduct to children and young people serves many purposes. Just as it is important for adults within a parish to have a Code of Conduct, establishing a Code of Conduct for children and young people, and with them, communicates that they are valued members of their parish. It also signals that parish leadership and adults in this particular community place an importance on their safety and wellbeing.

In understanding that children’s rights are ‘human rights’ and that each individual is an independent rights-bearer, the concept of creating a Code of Conduct with children and young people is an acknowledgment of this belief. Parishes may choose to create a Code of Conduct for Children and Young People within the broader parish context or for specific parish programs.

Findings from the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Inquiry and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse established that child abuse is more likely to occur in organisations that do not value, respect or listen to children and young people. When children and young people are involved in the process of creating a Code of Conduct this supports them to have a voice that can influence policy and programs within their parish.

When a Code of Conduct is created collaboratively with children and young people, we are drawing attention to their needs. This process can provide children and young people with a platform to have their own voices and opinions heard, documented and validated. A Code of Conduct for children and young people that reflects their understanding of acceptable and unacceptable peer-peer relationships and adult-child relationships, is a strong example of how a parish can help build a

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child's confidence and develop their sense of agency to have influence and control over their world. It is an authentic way of being and acting with respect, justice and transparency.

To summarise, when children and young people are respected, listened to and valued within an organisational context, the benefits for children and young people include:

- A sense of 'ownership'
- Greater confidence
- An increased sense of belonging and connectedness as they have been able to express themselves and have their needs, concerns and opinions heard.
- The fostering of civic participation where children and young people are members of our community who can affect change.



(see **Appendix 1 – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Child Friendly Version**)

## CONSIDERATION WHEN CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Every parish engages with children and young people through different activities, groups, ministries and events. When considering 'how to' create a Code of Conduct with children and young people, there are some important considerations to keep in mind:

- **The child's context: family circumstances and diversity of experiences**  
When engaging with children and young people it is important to be mindful of each child or young person's individual circumstances and the factors that may influence their development and how they make sense of their world. These factors may include, but are not limited to, family structures, culture, financial hardship, health, and education.
- **Age and stage of development**  
Created in God's image, each child is unique and different. Developing at different rates, there is no, one, defined trajectory for each individual. In valuing and celebrating our differences, it is important to remember to be flexible and adapt our ways of communicating to suit each individual child's requirements. For example, an 8 year-old participating in a Sacramental program for Reconciliation will have a different level of comprehension and understanding to a 16-year old preparing to attend World Youth Day overseas.
- **Children's needs and abilities**  
Subject to their age and stage of development, children will have differing needs. In addition, there may be cognitive and physical factors e.g. hearing, intellectual development, physical

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disability, mental health etc. that may need consideration when engaging children and providing opportunities for participation. Research has also found that “Children and young people are often less verbal and more demonstrative than adults.” (ACU, *Kids Central Principle 5 – Keep me in the loop*, p.5), therefore it may be necessary to tune into the child’s non-verbal cues. Being creative and flexible with how you encourage each child to contribute and respond to an activity may facilitate children’s participation e.g. when offering an activity cater for children who prefer to express themselves creatively through drawing as well as children who prefer to verbally express or write their responses.

- **Cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds**  
Acknowledging and fostering children’s cultural and linguistic diversity within your parish is an essential part of belonging that in turn, fosters a child’s sense of identity. Cultural and linguistically diverse communities may have differing values, priorities and practices in relation to child rearing that will influence their child’s development and learning. Similarly, parishes may find that communication with cultural groups may be assisted by interpreters and translations of materials in community languages.
- **Cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**  
Respect of Aboriginal cultures, values and practices is at the heart of creating a culturally-safe environment for Aboriginal children. Cultural safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people requires connection to community, identity and culture. All parishes must consider what they can do to promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and young people.
- **Parish context**  
Across the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, each parish provides diverse groups, programs and ministries for children and young people. When planning for the creation of a Code of Conduct for Children and Young People, it is advisable to reflect upon the different groups, programs and ministries that are offered at the parish. Taking this holistic approach to reviewing and considering program contexts will assist the parish to create a Code of Conduct for Children and Young People that is reflective of its programs. For example, a parish may run an online program and/or face-to-face programs.
- **Physical environment and rapport**  
In conducting activities with children, it is important to set up the physical environment in a way that is comfortable and welcoming to facilitate participation e.g. warm and inviting venue, quiet setting, comfortable seating and/or tables, snacks and water. Equally, it is also important to build personal rapport with the children to create a sense of shared purpose, encouragement and respect.

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## STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO CREATING A CODE OF CONDUCT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

	Guidance	Helpful hints
<b>Step 1 – Introduction</b>	<p>Set the scene by introducing your intention to develop a Code of Conduct for Children and/or Young People within your parish (or specifically for your parish program).</p> <p>Mention that there is a Code of Conduct for adults within the parish, which is the “set of rules” that describes what adults can and cannot do and how they are expected to treat others within the parish including children and young people.</p> <p>Explain that children and young people within the parish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ have the right to feel safe and be safe</li> <li>▪ should feel welcome and able to grow in their faith</li> <li>▪ be encouraged to meet other children and young people and make friends</li> <li>▪ feel accepted, whatever their abilities and differences</li> <li>▪ feel respected and listened to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain that the Code of Conduct for Children and/or Young People is specific to how they relate to other children and young people and adults present at the parish.</li> <li>• Ask children and young people of other Codes of Conduct or “rules” that they may be aware of e.g. rules for playing sports, rules at home, board games have rules, code of conduct at school, code of conduct for using the internet safely at school.</li> <li>• We have selected John 13:34 as a foundation for this introduction, however there may be a range of scripture quotations that support the development of a Code of Conduct. Parishes should use their judgement to select appropriate quotations that reflect of the ethos of the parish e.g. Mark (9:37).</li> </ul>

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- have a responsibility to ensure they behave in way that helps others feel safe and be safe (including adults)

Explain that Jesus' message to his disciples allows us to bring our faith alive:

**I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. John 13: 34**

Explain that as members of the parish family – they have a “voice” and that we are here to “listen” to their views about feeling safe, being safe and helping others feel safe.

Explain that it is important to work together to “write down” the Code of Conduct, so that everyone can contribute their viewpoint and everyone knows what the rules are.

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<p><b>Step 2 – Consultation</b></p>	<p>Start by using the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne’s <i>Code of Conduct Explanation for Children</i> and <i>Code of Conduct Explanation for Young People</i>, to explore the Code of Conduct expectations for adults within a parish (see Appendix 2).</p> <p>For younger children - demonstrate the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne <i>Rights and Responsibilities Poster</i> (see Appendix 3).</p> <p>Use the following (or similar) open-ended questions to reflect on this statement as prompts for your consultation with children and young people:</p> <p><b>I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. John 13: 34</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does Jesus expect of us?</li> <li>- What does Jesus mean when he says “you also should love one another?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of the range of factors that may impact a child or young person’s ability to participate e.g. language considerations, rapport, age and stage of development (see <b>Considerations</b> section).</li> <li>• Use open-ended questions to engage children and young people in conversation and allow time for children and young people to reflect and respond.</li> <li>• Demonstrate your interest by engaging in active listening strategies e.g. relaxed and open body posture, making appropriate eye contact, acknowledging contributions, being patient etc. (see Appendix 4 – <i>Australian Catholic University, Kids Central Principle 5 – Keep me in the loop “Listening and Hearing”</i>).</li> <li>• It is important to remember to hear, listen and “see” children and young people. Observing non-verbal cues and behaviours helps us to tune into what the child or young person is saying and gain insight into what they might be thinking and feeling.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What “values” (i.e. beliefs or principles) or actions are important in how we treat others (children, young people or adults)?</li> <li>- How can we help others to feel welcome and accepted?</li> <li>- What does acceptance mean to you?</li> <li>- What helps you to feel safe and be safe in our group/parish?</li> <li>- How do you expect to be treated by other children and young people when you are here?</li> <li>- How do you expect to be treated by adults while you are here?</li> <li>- How will you treat other children/adults when you are here?</li> <li>- Is there anything else that would help other children and young people to feel safe?</li> <li>- What would make this a safe space to be in?</li> <li>- What can we (adults) do to help you feel safe?</li> </ul> <p>Discover what is important to children and young people by engaging them in conversation or by obtaining feedback using a range of methods such as surveys, written responses or drawings for younger children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the perspectives and ideas expressed – remembering that children and young people are keen observers of the world around them.</li> <li>• Using positive and engaging language and tone can affirm, support and encourage children and young people and build their self-confidence. Avoid using language that is threatening and frightening.</li> <li>• Develop activities or worksheets that assist children and young people to explore the questions and themes provided e.g. prayer meditation activity, drawing activity, work together to produce a welcome video for the parish.</li> <li>• Encourage children and/or young people to define rules that also address safety in an “online” environment e.g. not sharing another person’s image without permission, not circulating personal information including passwords.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Step 3 – Write the Code</b></p>	<p>Document the Code of Conduct compiling the words and representations of the children and/or young people – taking on board children and young people’s choice of words.</p> <p>The language and format that you choose when documenting the Code of Conduct for Children and Young People, needs to be reflective of the group themselves. As this is a Code of Conduct for Children and Young People, the language chosen needs to be tailored to the reader e.g. age appropriate, be mindful of literacy level. It may also be worth exploring different ways of presenting the Code of Conduct e.g. document, pictorial, video presentation, poster.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep the language simple and do not over complicate the wording with jargon and words that children do not know the meaning of. Take the time to define words or concepts.</li> <li>• Encourage participation and discussion perhaps using small groups to encourage all children and young people to have an opportunity to contribute.</li> <li>• Encourage the children to provide examples for some of the items listed for the Code of Conduct such as ‘We will not hurt one another such as no hitting, no kicking etc.’ ‘We all have the right to feel safe – physically and in our hearts.’</li> <li>• You may even consider having the children and young people themselves handwrite the document or design it on computer, emphasising a sense of ownership, control, contribution and empowerment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 4 – Establish procedures for breaches of the Code</b></p>	<p>Discuss with children and/or young people the need to establish a process and consequences for when there is a breach of the Code of Conduct i.e. “when happens when someone breaks the rules?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering children with awareness and knowledge of who to go to for help and what to do if they or another person are unsafe, is crucial for protecting children and young people.</li> </ul>

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It may be helpful to facilitate a discussion to explore the following questions (or similar) in relation to the Code of Conduct that has been established:

- Can you think of an example of “breaking the rules”? Let’s list some examples together e.g. “hitting someone”, “teasing and name calling”, “excluding someone” etc.
- What would you do if someone was not following these rules?
- Do you know who you can speak to if another person is “breaking the rules” or hurting someone?
- What if the adult you tell does not listen to you? Who else could you tell?
- What steps do you think an adult should take if child/young person breaks the rules?

Remind children and young people that there are times, when adults in the parish will need to let other people know, to make sure that everyone is safe e.g. this may involve letting your parents know, the Parish Priest and/or other people who can provide help.

- It is helpful to explore and list a range of trusted adults the child or young person could talk to about their concerns both within the parish e.g. ministry coordinator, Parish Priest and outside the parish e.g. parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, school counsellor, friend’s parent.

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<p><b>Step 5 – Approval</b></p>	<p>Work collaboratively with children and/or young people to review the Code of Conduct they have compiled.</p> <p>Once the document reflects and honours the voices of the children and/or young people in your group, finalise the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Provide children and/or young people with a copy or easy access to the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Demonstrate to children how their work will be made available to adults and the parish community so they may have confidence that it has not just been ‘an activity’, but a valued part of the life of the parish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an opportunity for the children and/or young people to present the Code of Conduct to the leadership of the parish e.g. Parish Priest, Parish Pastoral Council, Safeguarding Committee.</li> <li>• Provide an opportunity for the Safeguarding Committee to formally acknowledge the work of the children and/or young people e.g. thank you letter, participation certificates, Safeguarding Committee presentation.</li> <li>• Depending on the context, it may be helpful for children and/or young people to “sign” a copy of the Code of Conduct to demonstrate their acknowledgement and agreement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 6 – Promotion</b></p>	<p>Once the Code of Conduct for children and/or young people has been approved and consultation ended, it will be essential to promote the Code of Conduct to the Parish community.</p>	<p>Communicating the Code of Conduct to the wider congregation could take a variety of forms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updating the parish website</li> <li>• Putting copies of the Code of Conduct on the noticeboard and other parish venues where children gather for groups, programs, activities and ministries</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing hard copies of the Code of Conduct to the children, youth people and families in the parish</li> <li>• Promoting the Code of Conduct in parish bulletin and other social media platforms</li> <li>• Providing copies of the Code of Conduct for children and young people to children, youth and their families when they enrol and/or commence in groups, programs, activities and ministries etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 7 – Ongoing review and update</b></p>	<p>Reviewing the Code of Conduct for children and/or young people is the final and ongoing step in the process and ensures that the document will remain alive, current and relevant to the group of children and young people who are within your parish.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It may be worth considering how frequently you review the Code of Conduct e.g. the beginning of each year for the parish or at the start of each new program cohort. You may find that some of the wording is rephrased, or other examples may be added, or perhaps there are no changes at all. Either way, reviewing the Code of Conduct with children and young people creates an opportunity for engagement and for children and young people children to influence and shape their parish.</li> </ul>

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## APPENDIX 1: United Nations Child Friendly Convention on the Rights of the Child

**United Nations Convention on the rights of the child**

**CHILDREN'S WEEK**

Article 1: Everyone under 18 has these rights.

Article 2: All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 3: All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Article 4: The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help you learn to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.

Article 5: Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.

Article 6: You have the right to be alive.

Article 7: You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognised by the government. You have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country).

Article 8: You have the right to an identity - an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.

Article 9: You have the right to live with your parents, unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a family who care for you.

Article 10: If you live in a different country than your parents do, you have the right to be together in the same place.

Article 11: You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.

Article 12: You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

Article 13: You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends other people.

Article 14: You have the right to choose your own religion and

Article 15: You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others.

Article 16: You have the right to privacy.

Article 17: You have the right to get information that is important to you and being from radio, newspaper, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.

Article 18: You have the right to be raised by your parents, if possible.

Article 19: You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

Article 20: You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.

Article 21: You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.

Article 22: You have the right to special protection and help if you are an orphan, if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country, as well as all the rights in this Convention.

Article 23: You have the right to special education and care if you have a disability, as well as all the rights in this Convention, so that you can live a full life.

Article 24: You have the right to the best health care possible, safe water to drink, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help you stay well.

Article 25: If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have those caring arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate.

Article 26: You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.

Article 27: You have the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met. You should not be disadvantaged so that you can't do many of the things other kids can do.

Article 28: You have the right to a good quality education. You should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level you can.

Article 29: Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

Article 30: You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion - or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.

Article 31: You have the right to play and rest.

Article 32: You have the right to protection from work that harms you, and is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

Article 33: You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.

Article 34: You have the right to be free from sexual abuse.

Article 35: No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.

Article 36: You have the right to protection from anything of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

Article 37: No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel and harmful way.

Article 38: You have the right to protection and freedom from war. Children under 15 cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.

Article 39: You have the right to help if you've been hurt, neglected, or badly treated.

Article 40: You have the right to legal help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.

Article 41: If the laws of your country provide better protection of your rights than the articles in the Convention, those laws should apply.

Article 42: You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.

Article 43 to 54: These articles explain how governments and international organisations like UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected with their rights.

'Rights' are things that every child should have or be able to do. All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost every country has agreed to these rights. All the rights are connected to each other, and all are equally important. Sometimes, we have to think about the rights in terms of what is the best for children in a situation, and what is critical to life and protection from harm. As you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights.

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[United Nations Child Friendly Convention on the Rights of the Child - NAPCAN](#)

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## APPENDIX 2: Code of Conduct explanations for children and young people



**CODE OF CONDUCT EXPLANATION FOR CHILDREN**

In this Church we have a special set of rules which we call a 'Code of Conduct'.

These rules are for all the people who work or help out at Church, these include the priest, the children's liturgy leaders, those involved with the altar server program as well as many others.

We have made these rules to make sure everybody in the Church is safe, especially children and young people.

**Things that adults are not allowed to do:**

- No one is allowed to hurt you:
  - Physically - hitting, punching or hurting any part of your body
  - Emotionally - being rude to you, scaring you, yelling at you, swearing at you, saying nasty things to you or trying to embarrass you in front of others
  - Sexually - talk to you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, touching your private parts, asking you to touch their private parts or showing you pictures of private parts. Private parts are the parts of the body that are covered by your bathers.
- Treat you as their favourite person and give you gifts because you are their favourite
- Force you to do something that you do not want to or break the rules.
- Ask you to keep secrets

▪ Treat you differently because of what makes you special. This includes your gender, culture, sexuality or disability

▪ Be alone with you

▪ Meet you privately without your parent's permission

▪ Connect with you on your phone or on the internet privately


▪ Take a video or photos of you unless your parents have said this is ok

**Things that adults can do:**

- Look after you, help you feel welcome and keep you safe
- Speak to you in a kind and respectful way
- Include you and ask your opinion when making decisions that affect you
- Listen to your concerns and respond in a way that supports you and keeps you safe
- If they find out some information that means that you or someone else is unsafe, an adult must tell someone - this might include the Police

**Following these rules helps us to keep you safe. If you feel like an adult in the Church has broken these rules we want to know. You could tell a trusted adult like your parent, other family member, a teacher or someone in the Church.**

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## CODE OF CONDUCT EXPLANATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In this Church we have a "Code of Conduct" for all the people involved in ministry, that work and volunteer at the Church, including the priest, youth group leaders, those involved with the altar server program, as well as many others.

We make sure that the people who hold important roles in our Church, read and sign the Code of Conduct every year.

We have done this to make sure that these people understand their responsibility to keep everyone in the Church safe, especially children and young people.

### Things that adults are not allowed to do:

- No one is allowed to hurt you:
  - Physically - hitting, punching, grabbing you or causing you to be injured
  - Emotionally - being rude to you, threatening you, yelling or swearing at you, bullying you or embarrassing you in front of others
  - Sexually - talking to you or touching you in a sexual manner, trying to encourage you to touch them or have sex, showing you inappropriate images.
- Show favouritism and give you gifts
- Encourage you to break the rules
- Ask you to keep secrets

- Treat you differently or harshly because of what makes you special. This includes your gender, culture, sexuality or disability.
- Be alone with you
- Meet you privately without your parent's permission or knowledge
- Connect with you on your phone or on the internet privately
- Take video or photos of you without your parent's permission or knowledge

### Things that adults can do:

- Help you feel welcome and safe
- Speak to you in a kind and respectful way
- Include you and ask your opinion when making decisions that affect you
- Listen to you and support you
- If they find out some information that means that you or someone else is unsafe, an adult must tell someone - this might include the Police

**Following the Code of Conduct helps us to keep you safe. If you feel like any person in the Church has broken these guidelines, we want to know. You could tell a trusted adult like your parent, other family member, a teacher or someone in the Church.**

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## APPENDIX 3: Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Rights and Responsibilities Poster

**RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

I have the right to feel safe and be safe from harm.

I have a responsibility to follow safety rules within my parish and not engage in bullying or harmful behaviours toward others.

I have the right to be accepted and supported, whatever my ability and differences.

I have the responsibility to care, support and accept others.

I have the right to express my views openly and honestly in all matters affecting me.

I have the responsibility to respect other people's views.

I have the right to speak up and seek help and support if I have been hurt or abused.

I have the responsibility to seek help for myself and others if they need it.

I have the right to participate in my Church community, to grow and practise my faith.

I have the responsibility to use the teachings of my faith to respect others, live peacefully and to care for our world.

These rights and many more can be found in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

*The Archdiocese of Melbourne is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity of all children, young people and vulnerable adults.*

# Establishing a Code of Conduct with children and young people in the parish context

APPENDIX 4: ACU, Kids Central Principle 5 – Keep me in the loop pg. 10 “Listening and Hearing”

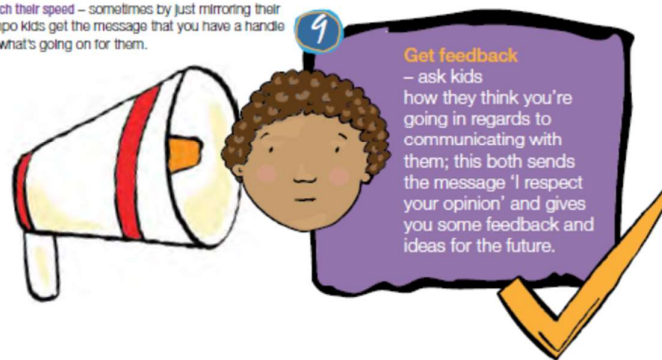
## KEEP ME IN THE LOOP



### LISTENING AND HEARING

#### TIPS FOR TALKING TO KIDS

- 1 Take time to hear a child out – even when they're asking for something that you know you're not able to provide. This might give you some hints as to what the child really needs or wants and can help you come up with an alternative.
- 2 Put yourself in the child's position – what types of responses would you like from an adult if you were in the same situation? Most of us wouldn't be keen for our ideas to be dismissed or understated ('surely it's not that bad' or 'well I'm sure that's not what they meant!') so be mindful of your responses.
- 3 Let kids vent negative feelings – children need to be able to express themselves without adults judging or minimising them. This can be hard when they are voicing their grievances. Rather than justifying yourself first, start with an acknowledgement: 'It must have been hard to tell me that. Thank you' or 'Yeah, I can see that you're angry'.
- 4 Match their speed – sometimes by just mirroring their tempo kids get the message that you have a handle on what's going on for them.
- 5 Reflect children's content and feelings – check in with the child to make sure that you've understood what they were saying. 'So you were angry when I didn't come when I said I would' or 'You're feeling a bit anxious because you don't know who's looking after your cat' followed by 'am I right?'
- 6 Check your tone – although adults spend some time thinking about what they're saying to children, often they don't consider how they're saying it. Ask yourself: is my tone warm and inviting or am I being patronising or dismissive?
- 7 Give them a chance – sometimes kids will ask adults questions. Rather than jumping in and giving an answer to them straight away why not ask them what they think the answer is 'what have you heard?', 'what do you think's going on?'
- 8 Less is sometimes more – don't over talk with kids: they can get bored and distracted easily. Make sure that both of you have had the opportunity to say what you need to say and that a resolution has been found. Then let it go – or better yet do something fun!



[Australian Catholic University Keep Me in the Loop resource](#)

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