



Safe Ministry Practice – Toileting of Children

As leaders we have the responsibility to provide safety and welfare to the children in our care. We seek to implement the **Child Safe Standards** to maintain child safe practices and culture in our Churches.

*With particular attention to **Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur &***

Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.

Why should we as a church be so concerned about toilet protocols for children?

There are two main reasons:

- When children need to use the toilet during church activities they leave the main group and so are away from the safety and visibility/ accountability of the larger group, and
- In terms of a space in which offenders may have opportunity to act, toilets provide a location that is often unoccupied, doors can be secured and can also provide a cover story for the offender should they be found there with a child.

For these reasons, we need to have clear protocols for toileting children and make sure these procedures are communicated clearly to leaders and volunteers who work with children, to parents and to children themselves.

Each church needs to evaluate their specific location and the layout of their buildings to determine the risks. For some, the toilets may be in the church hall while for others the toilets may be in a separate building from the church hall or far from where others are congregating. **No church building is the same and each context needs its own risk assessment.**

Consideration of where toilets are located and where ministry to children is conducted will determine what precautions need to be adopted. For example, if the ministry activity to children takes place in a church hall with toilet entrances that are visible to leaders and a child does not have to leave the building, children may go to the toilet unaccompanied. Where the toilets are located outside or some distance from where the ministry activity is occurring and are out of site, it may be necessary for two leaders to accompany the child. Other solutions may work for your particular situation, such as texting parents to come and assist their child. The underlying principle is that children should not be somewhere they are unobserved and they should not be alone with an adult or peer.

Other factors to consider requiring adjustments or extra safety intervention include toilet access points, the maturity level of the children, if the building is readily open to people walking in from the street e.g. in a public high traffic area, whether children have disabilities or special needs, or the level of lighting.

The following are some general guidelines.



FOR BABIES, INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN CRÈCHE:

Parents are encouraged to have their child toileted or have nappies changed before being signed in. Any child who needs assistance with toileting or a nappy change will require a parent or carer who can be called upon e.g., via text message to come to crèche to assist their child. Leaders or volunteers should not change nappies. Leaders should not physically assist children of any age with aspects of toileting such as undressing or unbuttoning clothes.

FOR PRE-SCHOOL AND YOUNGER PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN:

If a toilet trip is necessary, a leader, preferably female leader, should accompany pre-school and younger primary school aged children to the toilet and take them in groups (two or more, up to 5). The leaders should check the inside of the cubicles first to ensure it is safe. The leader is to stand outside the toilet entrance and monitor adults entering while children are inside.

OLDER PRIMARY AGED CHILDREN:

Depending on the location of the toilet, consider if children can go unaccompanied. If it is safer to go accompanied, consider sending the children in small groups of the same gender. There needs to be monitoring of how long the children have been gone for. A leader may need to check their whereabouts if they are gone for an unreasonable length of time. Ensure there is a leader supervising the remaining group if you need to leave to do a check-in.

If toilets are located very remotely from the main building or lines of sight are poor, it may be wise to consider leaders accompanying groups to the toilet.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ It is very helpful to communicate clearly via a notice to parents and carers at the beginning of each year and also to new families throughout the year about how your church and ministry will manage toileting children. Include a consent form for parents to sign saying they consent to the toileting arrangements e.g. sending an SMS to the parent if their child needs to go to the toilet.
- ✓ All children's ministries are strongly encouraged to use a **Sign-in-Sign-out sheet** which allows parents or carers to leave their mobile phone number so that leaders can contact them via SMS if assistance is needed with toileting. This can also be helpful with contacting parents for other issues such as being very unsettled. See breakingthesilence.org.au/resources for sign in/out sheet template.
- ✓ When planning any new building or renovation it is helpful to think about toileting facilities and whether an accessible toilet is available or can be built that allows for adequate supervision to the toilet entrance.

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