

Listening to our children and youth

Practical ways to enable their voices to be heard in our Church

The following information is intended to assist PCV churches and organisations in implementing the Victorian Child Safe Standards. The term 'children' in this document is defined as any person who is under 18 years of age.

Starting and finishing the ministry year listening to and engaging with our children

- At the **beginning of the year** take the time to ask the children for their input to the programme by running a section of your ministry time where the children are asked what sort of events and activities they might particularly like to have considered for inclusion for the coming year.
- Encourage the children to feel free to speak to a leader if they have any additional ideas or suggestions for the programme as the year progresses.
- It could be as simple as children identifying their favourite games to play or as complex as children identifying spiritual or biblical questions and issues they would like to learn more about.
- Document these ideas and suggestions and bring them to the leadership group for discussion and development/inclusion in the programme as appropriate.
- At the **end of the year**, prior to the last session of the ministry, run a feedback session and ask the children: - what did you learn from/enjoy most this year? – what would you like to see more of next year? – what would you like to see less of next year? – what new ideas do you have for this ministry?
- Where children are able and wish to, encourage one of the children to be the scribe for these ideas (on a whiteboard is ideal if you have one).
- Again, bring these ideas to the leadership group for discussion and development/inclusion in the programme in the following year, as appropriate.
- Remember to thank the children for their feedback and ideas and encourage them to continue to contribute and participate in the ministry.
- Finish each feedback session by praying with children and asking God to bless each child in the ministry and lead and guide the leaders as they serve God, the children and the church.

Helping children to speak up with any concerns they have about their wellbeing and safety

- At the **beginning of the year** take the time to tell the children their wellbeing and safety are important to the church and to the leaders. You could encourage them using the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19:14: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Explain to the children that the

leaders want to make sure that nothing hinders the children in their growing to know and love God and that they can at any time talk to a leader and ask for their help or tell them about something that is worrying, hurting or upsetting them. Tell them that the leaders are here to help.

- Identify which leaders the children can talk to – this can be done by introducing the leaders to the children at the beginning of the year and displaying photos of the leaders on a child-friendly poster or noticeboard on church premises so even the littlest children know who to talk to. The photos should be displayed at child height in spaces where ministries to younger children occur.
- Consider using coloured, ministry-specific t-shirts for those leaders on duty in children's ministry. Introduce these t-shirts to the children at the beginning of the year. If possible take photos of the leaders in them to display on a poster or notice board for the children to easily identify. Make sure that leaders who cease working with children in the church always return their t-shirt when they have completed their last ministry session or activity. Keep a list of who has a t-shirt and who has returned a t-shirt and follow up with any former leader who has not returned their t-shirt.
- If any new children join the ministry during the year make sure to tell them the above information and encourage them to speak up if they need help or have a wellbeing or safety concern.
- In camping ministries always commence the camp with an introduction of all the leaders, and let the children know they can speak them at any time if they have any concerns or ideas or questions. Again, wearing a coloured t-shirt or top is a great way of making it easy for children to identify the leaders so they know who to talk to if they need to.

Online surveys

- The use of online surveys (for example, using Survey Monkey – a free online survey tool) is a great way to empower teens to give their ideas and feedback to the leaders.
- It is highly recommended that parents of the teens in the ministry be notified about the survey via email **prior to the survey** commencing so that parents are fully informed and are given the choice to have their child opt out of the survey. For those teens whose parents do not wish their child to receive the email survey make sure you do not include that child's email on the survey distribution list. As some children may not have an email address this notification also allows parents to provide their own email address for the survey should they wish to do so.
- Remember that privacy applies to the collection and use of email addresses – for advice on this visit <http://www.safechurchpcv.org.au/privacy>
- Once the survey is concluded the leaders can then refer to this information in their planning and ministry in an ongoing way.
- Conduct the survey on a regular (but not too regular!) basis – for example, once a year or maybe every two years.

This information is available at www.safechurchpcv.org.au/resources