Faithful Community

A Duty of Care Approach for Programs

The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada

Faithful Community

Copyright © 2024

The United Church of Canada

Table of Contents

Part I: Duty of Care—Our Obligation

Introduction:

Jesus came into the world to bring life in all its fullness. As followers of Jesus, we are called to show love to one another, and to the world (John 13:34–35), to share our gifts and resources, and to build a community of mutuality and respect (Acts 3: 44–47). As a church, we have a primary duty to care for those who are marginalized, less powerful or more vulnerable in our community (Deuteronomy 10:17–19, Isaiah 61:1, 2).

The United Church of Canada has a legal, moral, and spiritual duty to care for and protect participants in our church programs. This is a legal principle called "Duty of Care", and all groups, including church groups, have been, and will be, held legally responsible for ensuring reasonable measures are taken to ensure safety.

This handbook is provided by The United Church of Canada to help our communities of faith and other related ministries to understand the principles of "Duty of Care" and to put policies and procedures into practice to insure they meet this obligation.

These principles apply to staff and volunteers. Adopting policies and practices which are followed consistently tells the community that you take seriously your responsibility to offer a safe and nurturing environment for study, service, worship, and personal growth.

Statement of Commitment

The United Church of Canada is committed to providing a safe environment for worship, work, and study in all communities of faith and related bodies which operate under its name. The United Church of Canada seeks to ensure that all staff and volunteers who work with vulnerable individuals in United Church settings share this commitment. This commitment will be demonstrated by staff and volunteers showing respect for personal boundaries, protecting others from harm and abuse, and enabling those in their care to learn and grow without fear of exploitation. The environment created will be accessible to all regardless of physical or cognitive limitations, race, age, gender, or socio-economic status.

This handbook will be useful in many contexts, including:

➢ Community of Faith Committees working with Sunday School teachers, mid-week children's program leaders, etc.;
➢ Community of Faith Boards responsible for the oversight of pastoral care visitation, support teams;
➢ Community Ministry and Outdoor Ministry Boards;
➢ Youth leaders and Youth event planners (local, regional, and national);
➢ Ministry and Personnel Committees and Sexual Abuse and Prevention Committees;
➢ Teams/groups working with vulnerable populations; and
➢ Pastoral Care/Visitation with seniors and in homes.

While this handbook provides much useful detail, it is not exhaustive. As legislation varies in regard to Provincial, Federal, and Territorial law, **communities of faith need to be prepared to do additional research** to ensure that they are meeting the requirements in their local jurisdiction. Legislation that may impact decision-making may include but not be limited to:

➢ Human Rights Codes—federal and provincial/territorial;
➢ Accessibility Acts—federal and provincial/territorial; and
➢ Child Protection Legislation and Regulations—federal and provincial/territorial.

Theological Statement:

Throughout time, God called people to live in covenant relationship with each other and as God's people (Genesis 9:9–11, Genesis 17:4–8, Exodus 34: 27–28, Mark 12: 28–32, Mark 14:22–25, among others) and continues that covenant with us today. Therefore, we are called to live in community that cares for one another and the most vulnerable among us, in the knowledge that we can be vulnerable at any time in our lives for a variety of reasons.

Where We Are Today

Faithful Footsteps, the precursor to this guidebook, was published in 2000. At that time, the terms "duty of care" had very little understanding, if any, to many across our church borders. It grew out of the vicarious liability rulings of the late 1990s. Employers were responsible for the actions of not only their staff but also their volunteers, especially with regard to vulnerable populations.

In the past 20 years, our society has changed. Technology has extended the walls of how we may do ministry. Learnings from our past are shaping our decisions for the future. Legislation is impacting how we may deliver services. Our duty of care extends beyond the original perceptions of "screening".

While screening continues to be an integral part of any duty of care program, it is not, nor should it be, the only component. Our duty of care extends to any person who is considered "vulnerable." Generally, a person is considered "vulnerable" where there is a position of authority or trust that is inherent to the relationship. Historically, our duty of care has primarily and particularly focused on care for children and youth. But, in reality, people of all backgrounds—who are from diverse racial identities, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, ages, and cultural backgrounds—can be vulnerable based on their life experiences, their identities, their past traumas, experiences of exclusion, and many additional factors. As caregivers, the ways in which people experience vulnerability may not necessarily be immediately apparent. Offering care while being aware of such diverse vulnerabilities is an important component of any program.

When we look beyond the traditional means of how individuals interact with others, we must also consider how technology impacts our duty of care. What are the implications for social media accounts? How does meeting in a virtual environment impact the generally accepted practices for youth gatherings? Services delivered by live stream brings with it a new degree of responsibility. Communities of faith need to be aware of the possible outcomes when considering new mechanisms of delivering their services.

Part II: Understanding Risk

What is Risk and Why Should We Be Concerned

Risk is a natural part of everyone's life. What varies is the degree of exposure that we are exposed to and how we manage it. It has been said that getting out of bed in the morning is taking a risk. But short of never leaving our homes, we cannot avoid risk in life. What we can do is consider how we approach and manage the risks to which we may be exposed.

Organizations that deliver services need to be concerned about the risks they face so that they can develop a risk management plan. In the same way that we, as individuals cannot eliminate all risk, organizations cannot eliminate all risk. However, what organizations can do is identify the risks and then take steps to eliminate, minimize, or defer the risk.

Risk Assessment Rationale

The term "risk management" may seem very intimidating, but it need not be. **Risk management means accepting the fact that harm is possible, either by a deliberate act, or through carelessness or accident.** It means taking care to consider the possibility that something could go wrong and taking steps to minimize, prevent or eliminate the circumstances which may lead to injury, abuse, or harm. A solid risk assessment in relation to a particular type of ministry or program will help to determine the measures that need to be put in place.

Factors to Consider in Determining Risk

The programs and activities of communities of faith and related ministries have many different levels of risk attached to them, depending on several factors.

- ➤ Participants: How vulnerable are the participants? How old are they? How dependent are they? Are they ever alone with the leader/staff/volunteer?
- ➤ Environment: Is the room safe? Is there a window in the door? Is it an off-site public space or in a private home?
- ➤ Activity: Is this a group activity or one-on-one? Is it a physically active event? Is it an activity that demands privacy (i.e., hospital visiting or counselling)?
- ➤ Supervision: Is there documentation kept on the events? Are spot checks conducted on programs on a regular basis?
- ➤ Nature of relationship between participant(s) and leader: Is there a significant power differential between participants and leaders? Are leaders in a position of trust? Does the activity itself depend on the fostering of a close and personal relationship (i.e., friendly visiting, mentoring)?

Understanding the nature of the risk will help church groups to determine the kind of screening, training, and supervision needed to make activities as safe as possible for those who are involved.

Components to Include in Completing a Risk Assessment

To complete a thorough risk assessment, it is important to consider all the factors that contribute to the risk. In order to do this, you need to consider the following.

- ➤ Position: The job description should accurately reflect the position. This should include all positions within the organization, paid, volunteer, student, contract, etc.
- ➤ Environment: Where might activities and interactions occur? This includes physical environments, off-site locations, means of transportation, etc.
- ➤ Relationship of participants: It is important to recognize that relationships exist between all those present—leadership, participants, and volunteers/support persons. It is also important to recognize that the relationship may change through the time spent together.
- ➤ Program Delivery: Technology has changed the way we deliver programs. It has also changed the level of risk associated with the program.

The objective in completing a Risk Assessment is to determine the level of screening required. The table on the following page is intended to assist in determining the level of screening required.

Risk Assessment to Determine Level of Screening

Risk Category	Risk Factor	Yes/ True	No/Not True
Degree of Isolation	1. Staff/Volunteers may have an opportunity to be alone with Children/Youth or Vulnerable Persons.		
Degree of Supervision/ Leadership	2. Staff/Volunteers have limited or no supervision or are considered a person in a leadership role with authority. Children/Youth and Vulnerable Persons who have contact with this person would consider them to be an authority figure.		
	3. The activities of Staff/Volunteers are in a place where activities are not observed or monitored regularly.		
Access of Property	4. Staff/Volunteers may have access to personal property or money of persons served.		
	5. Staff/Volunteers have access to confidential information related to Children/Youth and Vulnerable Persons.		
Degree of Physical Contact	6. This role requires Staff/Volunteers to have physical contact with Children/Youth or Vulnerable Persons.		
Vulnerability of Persons Served	7. Persons served have language or literacy barriers.		
	8. Persons served are immobile.		
	9. Persons served have challenges that contribute to their vulnerability (e.g., physical, psychological, and situational).		
Degree of Physical Demand	10. The activity involves potential danger to persons served (e.g., rock climbing, using a stove).		
	11. The activity involves potential stress (e.g., Children/Youth upset by visit to elderly in palliative care).		
Degree of Trust	12. Staff/Volunteers develop close, personal relationship with the Children/Youth or Vulnerable Persons they serve.		
	13. Parents and caregivers entrust Children/Youth or Vulnerable Persons into this individual's care (e.g., teaching, visiting, mentoring, tutoring, nursery care).		
	14. The position involves transportation of Children/Youth or Vulnerable Persons.		
	15. Staff/Volunteers contribute to making career decisions or other important decisions of persons served.		
Degree of Inherent Risk	16. The activity heightens potential for Ministry Personnel to be in contact with bodily fluids or disease of persons served.		
	17. The activity exposes persons served to operation or handling of potentially dangerous equipment (e.g., playground equipment, lawnmower).		
	18. The activity exposes the persons served to handling toxic substances or results in exposure to poor air quality, noise, etc. (e.g., demolition in an inner-city mission).		

Options for Reducing Risk

Once a risk assessment is completed, there are various options to consider for reducing the risks.

➢ Eliminate the activity: You may decide the risks are too high for the activity to continue (e.g., no more cooking classes with the nursery kids; late night swim at youth retreat is discontinued).

➢ Modify the activity: You may make changes to how the activity is carried out (e.g., home visiting is done with teams of two visitors).

➢ Transfer the liability: You may choose to have the service or program offered by someone else with professional expertise (e.g., hire a bus service to transport elderly parishioners to worship rather than organize volunteer drivers).

➢ Assume the risk: You may decide that despite potential risks the program is essential to the nature of your ministry and so continue to offer it (e.g., crisis counselling for youth is deemed a valuable and important ministry and you continue it; needle exchange program continues at a Community Ministry).

➢ Minimize the risk you assume: If you choose to continue to offer programs with significant risk, you should adopt other measures to reduce and avoid the risks and potential losses. Purchasing insurance is one way to do this, and implementing a screening program at the appropriate levels is another.

A Word About Insurance

Insurance is an important resource to cushion an organization's liability if things do go wrong. Check with your local insurance advisor about the kinds of insurance available to your group for its work. Be sure to identify off-site activities. Don't be afraid to ask about coverage for special activities.

Do not rely on insurance as the only measure to minimize risk. More and more often, insurance companies themselves are requiring clients to practice diligent screening as a part of their approach to risk reduction.

In Summary

Having undertaken a thorough risk assessment, and made choices about reducing risk, the chance of something going wrong has been lessened. You will be certainly in a better position—ethically, morally, spiritually, and legally—if something untoward should happen.

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it." (Proverbs 3:27)

Part III: Steps in Screening

Where Does Screening Fit?

The policies for screening are set before there is ever a candidate in mind. It begins with a clear position description and ends when the position is no longer needed. Screening is not about individuals; it is about creating and maintaining a safe environment through careful matching of tasks and skills.

10 Steps in Screening

1. Define the nature of the position and write a job description.

2. Determine the nature of the risk.

    - Participants
    - Setting
    - Activity
    - Supervision
    - Relationship

3. Recruit based on the job description and skills needed.

4. Use an application form to keep track of important information about the applicants.

5. Interview prospective candidates (can be very formal process or fairly conversational, depending on the task). Request 2 to 3 references for all positions.

6. Check references provided.

7. For positions with highest risk and involving significant trust and vulnerable individuals, consider a police record check (PRC) with vulnerable sector screening. Some positions may warrant a Child Intervention Record Check as well.

8. Provide orientation and training to persons newly placed in church positions.

9. Provide supervision and evaluation feedback regularly and formally.

10. Have a schedule to check with program participants on how the leader/ministry volunteer is doing. This may vary with the program but should be regularized.

The next sections will detail the screening process step by step. It is important to recognize that these steps should be followed for all positions, not just those involving those identified as vulnerable and/or requiring a PRC.

A. Pre-selection: Steps 1–3

The important groundwork for a screening process occurs long before the recruitment of individuals begins.

1. Job Descriptions

    Job descriptions are very powerful tools. They define the boundaries and guidelines for the task and help to define the risk inherent in the position. Clear job descriptions protect the workers by formalizing roles and also send a clear message to any potential abuser that safety of participants is a primary value. Ensure that a written job description contains the following pieces of information:

    - Job title
    - Participant group

- Length of appointment
- Goals of the job
- Outline of responsibilities
- Boundaries and limits of the position
- Skill, experience, and qualifications required
- Personal traits and qualities needed
- Orientation and training available including ongoing training
- Support, supervision, and evaluation provided
- Mandatory activities
- Screening measures implemented in selection process

If there are clear standards and limits in relation to a position (i.e., not to visit children in a one-on-one setting), these should be clearly stated in the job description.

2. Risk Assessment

The previous section (Part II: Understanding Risk) provides significant detail on this process.

3. Recruitment

The worst kind of recruitment in terms of the safety of vulnerable persons goes something like this: "Help! We are desperate for assistance. If we don't get the workers, the program will be cancelled!" This sense of urgency does not always attract the type of worker your group needs or wants.

Think carefully about how to recruit for positions of trust in your community. Where will you advertise? Who will you invite to apply and how? Do not create the impression that all applicants will be accepted. Be clear that you employ careful screening measures and include that information in responses to any inquiries. This will allow persons to screen themselves out early if they would not feel comfortable participating in a screening process.

B. Selection Process: Steps 4–7

Once you have begun to recruit, the following steps are necessary to make sure good documentation is kept on the selection process.

4. Application Forms

These are useful tools for even relatively basic positions. It provides program coordinators with contact information for applicants. It gathers the basic information on the person's relevant experience and gives the organization permission for reference checks (and Police Records or Abuse Registry Checks if necessary). It will be essential that you check with the Human Rights Commission or Council in your province or territory for lists of the type of questions you can and cannot ask in an application form. There are several prohibited grounds for discrimination which must not be breached.

5. Interviews

Interviews are an essential part of the screening process. The interview allows an opportunity to talk to potential candidates directly and assess the "right fit" of person to position. Interviews do not have to be highly formal in structure, but they do have to be consistent for all candidates if they are to be fair. Ask similar questions of all candidates. Be aware again of relevant human rights laws as discussed in the section on application forms. Some things to consider in designing an interview format are:

- Conduct the interview using a panel of at least two interviewers;
- Choose an appropriate setting for the interview;
- Describe the job to the applicant using the established job description;
- Describe the screening processes as they apply to the specific position;
- Use the same questions for all interviews—these may be adjusted to reflect the responses of the candidate but need to result in collecting the information required;
- Document the applicant's responses to the interview questions and retain them in their personnel or volunteer file if they are selected; and
- Look for attitudes toward children, vulnerable adults and others which do not fit with those of your organization or church

The interview questions should elicit the kind of responses which help you to judge the candidates' relevant experiences and education, ability to work within the values and principles of your organization, and personal integrity. It is important that members of the interview team understand and have a commitment to confidentiality.

Any information received about unsuccessful candidates in the interview process should be treated as confidential, and notes shredded or otherwise securely disposed of.

6. Reference Checks

A reference check may be the most effective screening tool you can use during the selection process. The people providing references will offer you an outside perspective on a candidate's suitability for a particular position or type of work. If written references are provided, follow up with a telephone call to the reference person. Ask for further details specific to the position for which the person is applying.

It is a good practice to use a consistent list of questions to ask references, and to check with at least two of the references on a candidate's list. In the interest of consistency, one person on the screening or selection team may do all the follow-up reference checks. Make sure you inform the reference person of the nature of the position and solicit their opinion about the candidate's suitability in this situation (e.g., "Terry would be working in close contact with elderly people, in a home-visiting situation. Would you be comfortable with Terry having this kind of contact with an elderly relative of yours?"). Listen to tone, attitude and hesitancy of the reference person as well as to the words they use. For youth, finding appropriate references may be difficult. If this is their first volunteer or work position, options for references become difficult. Some options may be a teacher, coach, mid-week group leader, neighbour, or an extended family member. Only one reference should be a family member.

7. Police Records Checks

Police Records Checks have historically been seen as "the screening tool". This should not be the case. The Police Records Check (PRC) should never be the only screening measure used. It should be used once you are close to making a selection. In some cases, you may indicate that a position is being offered contingent on a clean PRC. Only the individual for whom the PRC is being issued can request a PRC. The same is true for a Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC). A VSC is for occupations that involve contact with vulnerable individuals such as children, elderly, and persons with disabilities.

A person may have a criminal record but that does not mean they would not qualify for a position. For example, if a person has a civil disobedience conviction for protesting at a nuclear power station, would that preclude them from being a pastoral visiting volunteer? Would an impaired driving charge prohibit someone from being a Sunday School teacher? The answer to either question might

be Yes given the nature of the ministry in which it is being asked. Part of the risk assessment process includes identifying the classes of conviction that would preclude someone from being engaged in a position—paid or unpaid. Some classes of conviction would automatically preclude someone from some positions of trust and authority (e.g., fraud, assault, sex-related offenses). A thorough discussion of these issues is an important piece when defining screening policies. The requirement for any form of PRC should be indicated on the application form, in the job posting and during the interview. The applicant must be the one who requests the PRC.

There are significant limitations to Police Records Checks/Vulnerable Sector Checks which need to be acknowledged:

➢ They are only good as of the date received—have a schedule and process for renewals;

➢ The individual may be using a false name, or false birth date, so that there are no matches found in their record;

➢ If the conviction occurred when the person was a youth, the information is protected under the Young Offenders Act, and you will not have access to this information;

➢ Some sex offenders and abusers have never been convicted of a crime, so there will be no record to uncover;

➢ Most police forces will not issue a PRC for minors even if there are no convictions; and

➢ Not all police forces check the same data sources for records; you will need to know what information your local force has access to, and you may wish to widen the search of records to other jurisdictions. (Be aware of the expense incurred for each police records check. If it is essential to the screening for the position, you will need to plan your annual budget for police record checks to do the job thoroughly.)

Frequency and Retention of Police Records Checks

"Do I have to request a PRC every year?" The answer is, it depends. If the relationship with the employee/volunteer is continuous, you may want to put in a schedule for renewal and request an offence disclosure submission (self-disclosure) on the years between. Where the relationship is interrupted by spans of time such as summer employment, you may want to request a PRC every year. Whatever mechanism is used, it needs be consistent across all positions—paid and unpaid.

Police Record Checks are the property of the individual—not the organization. The organization needs to implement a process which includes:

➢ Review of the PRC by at least 2 people;
➢ Recording results, including the date received and who reviewed; and
➢ Maintaining information in a secure location to ensure confidentiality is maintained

Clearly, this tool may be of great importance in screening for some positions, but it may not be either appropriate nor necessary for others. Your risk assessment will be your guide.

Child Abuse Registries

A few provinces and/or Child Welfare jurisdictions keep registries of persons with convictions or charges of child abuse and child sexual abuse. If the position for which you are screening requires close contact with children or youth, your group may want to see if Child Abuse Registry Checks are possible in your area. Contact the government agency responsible for Child Welfare in your area for more information on this. Be prepared to present your rationale for needing this information. Again, the applicant needs to apply for this information to be released.

C. Volunteer/Personnel Management: Steps 8–10

You have done your risk assessment, have a solid job description in place, have recruited, interviewed, and checked references, and have asked for and received a PRC as may be required. You feel you have made as good a choice as possible. However, the process does not end here. This section deals with ongoing screening, which involves providing orientation and training to your personnel. Screening continues with the processes of active supervision and evaluation while the person works.

8. Orientation and Training

It is worthwhile to have a designated period of time as a probationary period, to allow both your organization and the newly placed worker to decide if the match is good. This is a time for teaching the fine points of policy and training in the standards of care related to work with participants who are vulnerable. Orientation is a responsible way to integrate new workers into your group and to provide support as a person learns the ropes.

Orientation to the specific job task can be done by partnering with a more experienced worker, or through formal sessions. At the end of the probation period, you will have observed enough of the person's work style and skills to confirm the appointment, to reassign the person to other work, or to terminate their services. With volunteers, it is important to help them realize that there are many opportunities for their talents to be shared. If they are not appropriately skilled for work with vulnerable individuals, you may be able to support them in seeking other ways of serving in the church community. Orientation and training events should be mandatory. Refusal to attend these events may be a signal to selection committees that something is not quite right.

9. Supervision and Evaluation

Supervision is a way of supporting individuals in their work settings and monitoring the safety of programs. Evaluation can be done periodically to assess the individual's work performance and address any areas of needed skill development or goals for learning. If people are not used to supervision or evaluation, it is helpful to clarify the purpose of this kind of monitoring:

- It ensures a standard level of practice;
- It creates an opportunity for an individual to reflect on their learnings in their position and improve their work;
- It protects participants; and
- It can protect workers against false allegations of wrongdoing.

The supervision and evaluation expectations should be clearly outlined in the job description and should use the job description as a reference point. The amount and frequency of supervision will be determined by the level of risk in the position: the higher the risk level, the more frequent and intense the supervision. For example: A Sunday School Superintendent plans to drop in and do a spot check on classes at least once a month. Teachers know to expect a random visit during their lesson time. Another example: A Pastoral Counsellor meets bi-weekly for one hour with a professional supervisor to review all current cases and the documentation of all sessions. Notes are kept on the supervision sessions and all documents are signed and filed. A formal evaluation is conducted semi-annually.

Design a supervision schedule and evaluation tool that makes sense for each position in your organization.

10. Follow-up

An excellent source of information on how a particular worker interacts with program participants is the participants themselves, their family members, or other care-givers. It is important to let workers know that you will be approaching participants for feedback on job performance. This can be simply framed as part of your regular risk-management activities; there is nothing personal about this checking procedure. Supervisors need to foster good relationships with program participants and/or family members so that they know their concerns will be heard and respected. You must also understand that if information from participant feedback is to be shared with the worker, confidentiality of the participants must be protected. Value and support those who offer their time, talent, and ministry to those who participate in your programs. Through supervision, evaluation, and follow-up, you will demonstrate your commitment to the growth and learning of your workers and participants, and the protection of all.

The Principle of Confidentiality

You can see that doing a detailed screening process will give the screening group access to a great deal of personal information about applicants. Your group will need clear policies to maintain the confidential nature of the information acquired. Think carefully about who needs to have access to this information and how long any documents (i.e., Police Records Check material) will be kept on file. Out of respect for those who serve in your organization it is absolutely necessary that this information be kept in a secure location and access strictly controlled. It would be advisable to have members of your screening committee sign a pledge of confidentiality to indicate that they understand the importance of this principle.

Part IV: Creating an Inclusive Environment

Events

One-off events or recurring annual events require their own level of planning to address duty of care concerns. Whether it is a one-day event, an over-night event or a week-long retreat, there are various elements that need to be addressed. The following is provided primarily in the context of events for youth.

➢ Supervision: Supervision of any group will include at least two (2) individuals, at least one of whom is an adult person as defined by the legislation. At minimum, any person who is providing leadership needs to be at least five (5) years older than the oldest participant when working with minors. Ratio of leaders to participants needs to be reflective of the age of the participants. Legislation related to child-care facilities and recreational programs is a good source for determining ratios. The gender of the participants should be reflected in the gender of the supervisors.

➢ Overnight Considerations: When an event involves an overnight stay, a church auditorium or similar facility is often used, especially when the participants are youth. Things to take into consideration from a duty of care perspective may include sleeping arrangements, change room facilities, and washroom facilities. When looking at this, gender distinction may be the first thing that comes to mind. However, the following also need to be considered:

- Access: Who has access to these areas, beyond your specific group? This is important if using a church auditorium or similar facility. Access in this context refers to who may actually be able to enter the space at any time.

- Supervision: Who is actually going to be using or staying in the same space? If leadership is going to be sleeping in the same space as participants, it is important that there be more than one leader and that they are located in such a way as to be separate from the participants.
  - Communication and Participation: Prior to the event, it is important that the plan for sleeping arrangements is communicated to everyone—participants and parents/guardians/sponsors. Parental permission may be required if the plan is for a "communal" sleeping room with mixed genders.

    Where hotel or dormitory accommodation is being used, consensus needs to be reached before departure on acceptable behaviours under these conditions. Supervision becomes a different challenge and hall monitoring may be required. Ideally, limit the number of floors to be occupied. A participant should not be in a room on their own, or share a bed. As well, participants and leaders should not share a room.

  - Transportation: Minimizing the risk when transporting participants is always important. When transporting youth, whether in ministry owned vehicles or in personal vehicles, there may be additional levels of risk to consider. One of the easiest ways to defer the risk is to engage a third-party transporter. However, this can become expensive and prevent full-participation of individuals due to cost.

    If in-house transportation is to be used, the following needs to be considered:

- Any driver needs to have been screened including a police records check—additional screening would include confirming the driver has a valid driver's licence and a clean driver's abstract;
- Insurance coverage needs to be confirmed for the driver's vehicle; and
- Drivers should never be alone with one participant in the vehicle; this is true of youth or legal adults. Ideally, there should be two adults in the vehicle when transporting youth.

Part V: Communication, Technology and a Safe Environment

How we communicate has changed—and will continue to change. Information letters and permission slips may be via electronic forms as opposed to paper copies. Registration for events may very well be through an online portal. Sharing pictures no longer requires printed copies.

While all of this is good for engaging youth and those who may be isolated because of health or location, it also opens another area of exposure that ministries need to recognize and manage. This is an area that is in a constant state of flux. What was the trend yesterday will be gone tomorrow and we need to adapt quickly in order to manage it. This document is not intended to answer all the questions but to provide a starting point of things to consider. How much a specific ministry requires will be dependent on the programs and the groups that are being served.

Communication Policy

The underlying principle to recognize in this section is communication. The way we communicate has changed and will continue to evolve as technology evolves. Therefore, a ministry's communication policy(s) are the foundation on which other practices emerge. Some things to consider in developing these policies should include:

1. Communication policy needs to be consistent across the ministry;
2. Identify the target audience including age and vulnerability;

3. Include parents/guardians in communications when youth are involved;
4. What is being communicated—is it group directed or personal;
5. What format is the communication—print, email, social media, website, or video;
6. Who controls electronic account(s)? This may include email, social media, web and web postings. Best practice is to not use a personal account, especially when working with children and youth. Use one that at least one other person has access to; and
7. Use clear language in all communication.

Social Media

Social media is more than a communications tool: it is an amazing, accessible, and exciting platform for building and maintaining communities, getting information out, reaching out to new audiences, and connecting with people. The same "rules of engagement" that apply in other venues involving social engagement—relationships, boundaries, and ministry practices—apply in the virtual world, ensuring a safe and spiritually nourishing environment. When venturing into the world of social media, it is important to recognize you are accountable for everything you say and do. The lines between a person's personal and work identities don't exist online and you are responsible for what you write or say on social media. Don't accept or send "Friend" invitations or connections through your personal account with youth or adults you work in ministry with.

The following are some best practices about interactions in social media and face to face:
1. Remember that you are responsible for what you say, whether online or offline;
2. Persons in a position of authority/power have that status whether in-person or online;
3. Youth ministers and volunteers have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship;
4. What happens online in virtual spaces are just as real as events that happen in "real life." For many young people, what happens in their social spaces online is just as important, or even more important, than what transpires during in-person events;
5. Keeping your social media posts and messages viewable in the "public" sphere and avoiding private messages to individuals, if possible, can build in a level of accountability into your social media interactions; and
6. As a leader, approach your social media engagement with the groups of young people you work with in a professional manner, and consider very carefully what you say, and what photos, memes, links, etc., you share before posting

Live Streaming

Communicating through virtual portals has become common place. Even the smallest communities of faith may be able to live stream a Sunday service or other event with the use of standard software and an Internet connection. And while this is a means of allowing people to engage in that worship service, it also opens the door to risks that are less evident in face-to-face situations.

Members of a community of faith are often invited to participate in services and events. When the exposure is only to those within the walls of the venue, it is easy to know who is present. However, when the service is broadcast live, this becomes more difficult. There are individuals—adults, youth, children—who are uncomfortable with their image being shared in a more public venue such as the Internet. The challenge is in respecting the individual's wishes while at the same time allowing full participation by all those who wish to do so.

What precautions can be taken to safeguard the privacy of individuals but still allow full participation by anyone who desires this? What is implemented will be determined if the event is in-person only, live-steam with an "invitation" (password) or simple live-stream.

1. Decide as soon as planning for the event starts if the event is going to be streamed and how that will be done. All communication needs to clearly indicate who will have access to view the content. This includes live streaming and any possible recordings of the event.
2. Permission slips, signed by the parent/guardian, are required for all minors to participate in the program.
3. Waiver forms are required for all participants giving consent for the use of photos and videos. The form should clearly indicate how images will be used. This should be included as part of the permission slip for minors eliminating the need for two (2) separate forms.
4. Determine if there are options for participation in which the individual is not "on camera". For example, an individual may be a narrator in the background or part of the band which is not seen on camera.
5. Full participation is not just the act of being involved but also feeling safe while doing so.

Electronic Meetings and Events

Holding meetings in a virtual space has become commonplace and much easier with the introduction of standard software. The rules of engagement used for in-person meetings and events also apply to virtual meetings. And, it is important that it does not apply only to verbal interactions but also to the chat and comment areas. There are also some unique aspects of virtual meetings that need to be taken into consideration.

1. Attendance
   - Is attendance by invitation only or is there a public link?
   - If by invitation, how do you prevent the link from being shared to others?
   - Identification: is a true image and actual name required to be used?
2. Online discussion: are the following online functions enabled, and if so, how are they monitored?
   - Chat
   - Comments
   - Discussion
3. Recording of meetings: has the reason for recording the meeting been clearly communicated and have individuals given consent?

Part VI: Healthy Boundaries

General Principles

Healthy boundaries—what are we really talking about. Boundaries may be many things but, in this context, we are not referring to walls or fences; it is not a physical means by which things are separated. In this context, boundaries provide understanding and respect within a relationship. A person's boundaries may not be readily apparent and we may not learn a person's limits until we cross them. Ideally, in healthy community relationships, we identify and learn what is acceptable behavior around communication, connection, space, professionalism, interpersonal dynamics, and more. This doesn't happen overnight. It takes patience, compromise, time, and trust.

Healthy boundaries can be as simple as the rules by which we agree to function under during a meeting. Or it can be complex, as may occur when the nature of the interaction becomes more personal. It can imply physical boundaries such as how close you are to a person or it can be more of an emotional boundary. What is important is to recognize that everyone's personal boundaries are unique and need to be respected regardless of the person's age, gender, cultural background, or social status.

United Church Boundaries Courses

The United Church of Canada offers Boundaries Courses through United in Learning. They are part of the mandatory training for Ministry Personnel, Licensed Lay Worship leaders, and candidates.

The website description is as follows:

We'll explore some of the common boundary issues that can emerge in the practice of ministry, and discuss how to expand our repertoire of strategies for dealing with situations that can require careful judgment. The courses will be an opportunity to discuss best practices with others in church leadership across the country; find out how others cope with complicated boundary issues; and reflect on how to ensure that the church continues to be a safe and hospitable place for everyone.

While intended for ministry personnel—ordained and lay—those in ongoing leadership roles should be encouraged to take the courses.

Part VII: Conclusion

All church-related communities, whether they be congregations, ministries such as camps and community outreach, retreat/education centres, or regional/national events, need to be places where people from all walks of life feel welcome and safe. It is essential that the church is vigilant in its efforts to create and maintain safe environments and safe services for all participants. At the same time, we need to recognize that God works changes in the lives of individuals, and that the church celebrates personal growth and transformation. This will mean that some types of high-risk positions will not be open to all applicants. Faithful stewardship of human resources will allow other kinds of opportunities to be open to those who are not suitable for work with vulnerable people.

Know your own context. It will be up to your church or organization to make these guidelines work in your particular context. Each community/church/organization is different due to many factors: the type of ministry; the type of community (urban, rural, large, small, isolated, cosmopolitan); types of programs offered; the numbers of volunteers and staff involved; the province/territory. These things will affect the policies you need to adopt. The level of risk and related screening will affect the policies required including supervision and reporting requirements. In all cases, the safety of the participants and the leadership needs to be the focus of the work.

Hope and Faith, but No Guarantees!

There is no way to absolutely guarantee that no harm will ever come to any participants, staff or volunteer in a program or service. But your organization exists and serves because there is a human need, and in faith you step in to offer support and service.

Adequate insurance is needed to safeguard the future of your programs. The kind of insurance and the level of coverage will be dependent on the type of programming being offered. An open and frank discussion with your insurance provider will assist you in determining this.

Spread the Word

Be sure that the members of your church, your organization, and your program participants are aware of policies related to programming and why you have adopted these policies. You will be communicating your commitment to safety and will give witness to your ethical, moral, and spiritual responsibility to promote trustworthy care and service.