

May 2020 PresSafe Update

Dear Ministry Coordinator,

So far in 2020, there have already been some significant changes to PresSafe Communication Protocols. This email contains some further changes. We appreciate the difficulty that can arise when these updates occur within quick succession. Please bear with us as we listen to feedback and provide policy and procedures that are workable on the ground, and most importantly, keep children safe.

With that said, please note the following:

Screen shots of one-to-one conversations with young people **NO LONGER** need to be sent to the PCQ Transparency Number or Email.

INSTEAD

Ministry Coordinators are to have a weekly 'check-in' with the leaders on their ministry team, as regularly as possible. The weekly check-in will cover how the Leaders are going generally, but also discuss the contact that they have had with any young people from the ministry program during the week.

Leaders, whilst recording attendance in Elvanto, will need to record on the same form a brief description of contact they've had with children, including method of communication, and any significant concerns.

- e.g. "Met with Bill and Fred at McDs to read bible. Texted Jim, Alfred, & Geoff and thanked them for serving at church. FB Messaged Alex a couple of times to check he's coping with his father's illness. Talked with him about his father's health and faith. Prayed."

Leaders are able to include these notes in the free text field labelled "Notes Specific To The Entire Group" at the end of the Group Report form.

These changes are in line with a discipleship approach to ministry to young people which we actively adopt within PCQ. As part of this approach, we encourage Ministry Coordinators to be in contact with the leaders in their teams on a regular basis.

They should discuss how the leaders are personally walking with Jesus and the general tenor of the leader's life and ministry. There should be an opportunity to grow in understanding of their discipleship of the young people they are responsible for. Interaction and contact with young people will differ depending upon the age range of the ministry and should be in line with existing PresSafe Communication guidelines. **More guidance on a discipleship approach to ministry and how it benefits child safety will be available soon.**

In any communication with young people, there must be:

- Parental permission
- The communication must be age appropriate (see Communication Table)
- Transparency (in ministry teams in the method of communication, e.g. do not use means of communication that cannot be audited - e.g. SnapChat and WhatsApp) If you have any questions about this, please discuss with Chris Knapp or Stu Hoadley. Please also note, we will be seeking further advice on using a variety of platforms safely with children.

Email Contact: Organisational emails (or emails sent through Elvanto) are still encouraged for emails sent to parents and young people. If for any reason you need to use a personal email, please continue to copy in 'transparency@pcq.org.au'.

Video Calls: All information provided (at the end of March) about video calls is still current. For clarity, children under 13 can be part of group video calls as part of a ministry program. However, they should not participate in direct one-to-one video calls.

In general, please ensure parents are aware of the frequency and kinds of contact their child should be receiving from leaders .

Finally, please be reminded that any person involved with ministry to children within PCQ needs to have first successfully completed the PresSafe Selection and Training Process. Then to remain compliant, they will need to undertake annual training and continue to hold a current positive Blue Card notice or exemption (called "Working With Children Check" in other states.)

If you are employed by the PCQ your Blue Card status will be overseen by PCQ Church Offices (Elizabeth McClenahan bluecard@pcq.org.au) who will send you correspondence about Blue Card renewal. If you ignore this correspondence and your Blue Card expires, you can not participate in Children's Ministry until you have been issued a positive notice or exemption card.

Please take a moment now and **check** the expiry on your **Blue Card**, and act now if you will need a renewal anytime in the next 3 months.

Let's keep working together to keep children safe.

Previous PresSafe Update on Video Calls

The purpose of this update is to allow a leader to hold a group video call/conference with members of their discipleship group, provided transparency and accountability guidelines are met. Please ensure your leaders are advised of this content.

Discussions have taken place with the new **PCQ Safety Administrator, Christine Knapp**, and she has resolved that group video calls with children are permitted and encouraged as a way to keep connection and provide pastoral support for the young people under your care. This allows for one Leader to communicate via video conference call with multiple young people.

Please note that in any calls where there will only be one child there is the requirement for two leaders or parents to be in the call/chat. Also, leaders in group calls should make provision to ensure they are not alone with a young person in the call.

Here are the basic guidelines:

Video calling/conferencing may be used, and is even encouraged, provided the following criteria are met:

- Parental permission is given to participate in such video calls.
- Session has approved that communication platform.
- Where a video call is planned with a group of youth then the call/conference can be undertaken with only one leader. The leader should attempt to ensure that there are multiple youth in the call with them at all times. If technical difficulties/dropouts mean that the leader is alone with one child for a short period in the call, they are to simply notify their ministry coordinator later (when they are able) that this has happened and outline any conversation that has taken place. If there is extended difficulty reconnecting others to the call, the call should be concluded and restarted when these issues have resolved, or measures taken to ensure that transparency has occurred, such as requesting a family member to be with the child in the call.
- Where a video call is to be with only one child there must be at least two leaders or parents in the call/conference. The two leaders must ensure they are the first on the call/conference so there's no one to one conversations with the child. If a leader has technical difficulty and drops out and has problem reconnecting to the call, the call should be ended and restarted when these issues have resolved, or take measures to ensure that transparency can occur.

For planning a video call with one child where you can't get two leaders in the video call/conference, provided the child's parents are aware of this and approve of this arrangement, it may be suitable to arrange for another family member or parent to be present in the room and able to hear and see the video call.

Disclosures of Suspicion and Harm

The procedure for any disclosures of abuse or suspicion of harm remains the same. Notify the Ministry Coordinator or Minister when you are able, who will contact the PresSafe Safety Administrator. This is ensure a clear chain of reporting to help protect the identity of children at risk. However, at any point, you can directly contact Police or Child Services.

Public Access to Online Youth Meetings

Youth over 13 are encouraged to invite their friends to participate in invitation-only group video calls (say, for a scheduled youth group meeting occurring via video call) but it must be stressed to them that parental permission is required, and that it is not appropriate to simply send a link to a friend. Remember to check the public accessibility on platforms such as Facebook Live, so you don't inadvertently allow open access to online youth group meetings. Please ensure parents know that the online meetings are happening. And remember to cater in other ways for children under 13 (e.g. if using Facebook Live where they legally can't be involved) or those in families that have chosen not to participate in these platforms.

Communication Breaches

Please be clear with your leaders that whilst we are actively encouraging good online communication, PCQ does not tolerate any secretive communication. That is, the kind of communication that intentionally isolates or targets a child to take advantage of them. The Church has a zero tolerance for any communication that is intentionally circumventing parents and/or accountability structures.

Accountability

Ministry Coordinators and Ministers should be checking in with leaders about online contact they are having with any children in the absence of face to face meetings. It should not come as a surprise to parents or those coordinating a ministry, what contact any child is receiving or the frequency of the communication.

If you have any questions, please first discuss with your church and work together on communication transparency. Any further questions can be directed to Christine Knapp (safetyadministrator@pcq.org.au) or Stuart Hoadley (stuart@pcq.org.au).

Transparent Communication

Children's ministry will continue to utilise available technology for communication. This kind of interaction can enhance ministry and ensure that information relating to your children's ministry is received in a timely and relevant manner.

In leading our ministries we must seek to create safe environments for children, and this includes our electronic communication. Our ministries need to promote **transparency** and avoid secretive behaviour. Please pay attention to the behaviour of your leaders. If

they are not taking steps to be transparent, or are concentrating their attention in communication towards vulnerable families, then discuss your concerns with the PresSafe Risk Management Officer as soon as possible. (safetyadministrator@pcq.org.au)

A key part of transparency is having parental permission for any communication with children. This can be sought when parents provide permission to be part of a children's ministry program, event or activity. This permission can last up to an entire calendar year, though parents have discretion to change these preferences at any time. Permission does not need to be sought every time a conversation takes place, however it is good to encourage transparency between leaders and parents. The frequency and form of communication should not come as a surprise to parents.

To emphasise, if there are people involved in ministries who are avoiding transparency, this is problematic. If you become aware of secretive communication or behaviours, please discuss this with the PresSafe Risk Management Officer immediately.

(safetyadministrator@pcq.org.au)