

Respectful Socialising in Children's and Youth Ministry

- and how to prevent sexual abuse and
other violations

Colophon

Published by:

FrikirkeNet, January 2019, 1st edition

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This document can be downloaded in its entirety at frikirkenet.dk

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This document was reviewed by Kuno Sørensen, psychologist at Save the Children Denmark, who states that:

"If the members of FrikirkeNet comply with these guidelines, they will be able to provide help, support and protection for children primarily in relation to sexual violation and abuse."

This document was reviewed by Frederik Fredslund-Andersen, head of association development at DUF, the Danish Youth Council, stating that:

"When the members of FrikirkeNet follow these guidelines, they base their work with children and youth on respectful and voluntary relationships as well as the legislation concerning socialising with children and young people. When everyone complies with these guidelines during all social activities, it provides parents, leaders and especially children and young people with a sense of safety. They are a must-read for both old and new leaders of Christian child and youth organisations and can be revisited regularly to assess interactions with children and young people."

FOREWORD

Children and young people have an important place in the church. They are entrusted to us through the churches' ministry with children and youth, and it is important to have the best possible framework for a good, safe and healthy community for all. A community based on trust and mutual respect. A community in which well-being and happiness have the highest priority, and people join because they want to be involved, not because they have been forced or manipulated into it.

Unfortunately, in recent years there have been cases where the unthinkable happened – that pastors and employees of both the National Church and free churches have sexually abused children and young people.

Against this backdrop, we have had a productive dialogue with child and youth organisations of free churches about what respectful socialising is and the need to actively prevent any kind of abuse in the churches' ministry with children and youth.

This dialogue has now been put into writing in these 'guidelines for respectful socialising'.

But guidelines and good intentions are not enough. They must be put into practice, in everyday life, in the places where we meet children and young people.

We have to talk - about the good as well as the difficult things. Talk about them at the start of term, which you can read more about in this document. We must talk to the children and the young people and to one another about common values and rules. The more we talk about these, the easier it becomes for everyone to abide by them. And the harder it becomes for those who intended to violate others.

The responsibility for ensuring respectful socialising and the responsibility for safeguarding children and young people against any form of violation lie with the church leadership and employees, salaried as well as volunteers. It is their responsibility to intervene and stop any case of grooming or other inappropriate behaviour. And the leadership is responsible for legislative compliance, including that sexual abuse and other violations are reported to the relevant authorities as prescribed by law. It is our expectation that all leaders and employees, salaried as well as volunteers, are familiar with the content of these guidelines and support one another in putting them into practice.

We welcome feedback to continue to improve this document.



Thank you – together we can continue to facilitate respectful socialising in our churches and child and youth associations.

*Mikael Wandt Laursen,
Secretary General of FrikirkeNet*

Respectful Socialising in Children's and Youth Ministry

- and how to prevent sexual abuse and other violations

This document is intended for

- leaders and employees of Christian child and youth associations
- pastors
- those who are part of the church leadership, church councils or similar.

This document is about

- the meeting between children and young people (0-18 years) and adults within the context of the church's ministry with children and youth.
- respectful socialising based on autonomy and respect for the individual.
- good, healthy, trusting interaction and relationships that give well-being and happiness the highest priority.

At the same time, we recognize that any relationship can potentially be taken advantage of, power relations abused, and personal boundaries transgressed.

It is therefore important that we make boundaries clear and have explicit agreements about what respectful socialising is.

That is why this document is also about

- grooming, that is, what happens when an adult befriends a child or young person with the intention of committing sexual abuse.
- how to act when we suspect or realise that a child or young person has been violated.
- legislation.
What does the law say? And who does what and when, when sexual abuse has taken place?

It is also important that we have clear guidelines for how to handle a suspicion or awareness of cases where rules and boundaries have been violated. Irrespective of whether it concerns a leader or employee towards a child or young person or actions between children and young people. And irrespective of how it happened. That is also covered by the guidelines in this document.

What this document is not about

There are many themes, issues and challenges that require clear boundaries, and to which we must pay special attention; both in relation to the well-being and life situation of children and young people in general and in relation to how the belief in God is expressed in our communities.

We cannot cover everything related to respectful socialising in this document. Some of the topics that are not covered explicitly must still be given due attention.

This applies to general well-being, pastoral counselling and confidential conversations, the risk of spiritual abuse, social control, bullying and similar topics.

FACTS

Duty of Notification

Extra vigilance

is required when children disclose information about difficult experiences they have had at home or in other places they visit. This applies to e.g.:

- suspicion or awareness of cases where a child or young person is or has been exposed to violence, sexual abuse or any other type of neglect at home or in other places.
- bullying, social control and other challenges that children and young people are exposed to or participate in, online and offline.
- alcohol and drug abuse and other types of self-harming behaviour among children and young people.

In these cases the 'standard duty of notification' applies, which is found in section 154 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services (Serviceloven).

In other words, this means that you are obliged by law to contact the social authorities and ask them to (help you) assess the concern or information.

The social authorities can be contacted by phone during daytime hours, and the 24-hour social work services at the municipality or police can be contacted out-of-hours during evenings or weekends.

If there are grounds for filing a notification, the relevant information can be found on the municipality website.

Openness and dialogue

We should be vocal about what respectful socialising is. We also have to talk about rules and norms and setting clear boundaries so that everyone - children, young people (and their parents) and adults in the association or church - share the same information and can help one another comply with the agreements and respect one another.

That is why we talk to one another. We do it often and always at the start of term: after the summer holidays, following New Year, at the start of a camp and whenever it is relevant to remind everyone of the contents of these guidelines. It does not have to take long. As long as it is clear-cut and explicit - and of course adapted to the child or youth group in question.

What we have in common

In the church we are united by our faith in God and we believe that the Bible is God's Word to us. That places a special responsibility on our shoulders for what takes place when people go to church. Faith in God is an individual matter. It is voluntary. No one can or should be forced to believe or to do so in a particular way. Here too, we must uphold respectful socialising and mutual respect for one another's boundaries.

Respectful socialising

Respectful socialising is characterised by mutual respect, decency and equality. Respectful socialising is evident in good, healthy, trusting relationships, in which well-being and happiness have the highest priority.

In practice, this means that we have a set of guidelines that we always do our utmost to follow. At the same time, we recognize that sometimes a pragmatic solution is needed to make things work in everyday life. In those cases, the relevant leader or employee will always inform another leader or employee of the group.

Guidelines

for working with children and youth, ensuring that

- We respect one another's boundaries, physically, psychologically and in relation to one's belief in God.
- We try to involve children and young people (and possibly their parents) in the planning and implementation of activities.
- Hugging is allowed if both parties are comfortable with it. Kissing is never allowed, nor if requested by a child.
- There are always at least two adults present with the children. If two adults are not available, e.g. due to illness or other circumstances, it might be necessary to cancel any planned activities.
- For activities at an adult's home, there are always at least two adults present. This cannot be waived.
- When children are picked up or brought by car, arrange that all meet at the same place to ensure that an adult is never alone in the car with a child, if possible.
- When (young) children need help to use the bathroom, the door is kept open or ajar to leave no doubt about what is going on.
- Everyone always has clothes on and no one can be forced to take theirs off. This also applies in summertime and during pillow fights and other activities, when it gets warm and it is tempting to undress.
- Confidential conversations are of course allowed, but never in a closed off and separate room. Confidential conversations take place e.g. in the corner of a common room or in places where others can see who is present and what is going on.

... add more examples that are relevant to your context and activities.

During camps and overnight weekend trips, also ensure that

- There are always at least two adults on a trip, adults of both genders if there are children of both genders.
- When (young) children are tucked in and read a bedtime story, the lights must be on and their personal boundaries respected. For example, the adult will not sit on the child's bed but on a chair or the floor next to it.

You cannot have a romantic relationship with a child / young person from the association

- As a leader or employee, you have a special responsibility in relation to children and young people. Perhaps you are also young and have the role of a youth leader. It is easy to fall in love! But you have to be aware that it is prohibited by law to have a sexual relationship with a person under the age of 18 that you have a teacher or leader relation to. It is not strictly illegal to have a romantic relationship according to the law. But it is prohibited to have a sexual relationship with a child or young person that you are the leader of. The easiest approach is to have a general rule: "it is not allowed to have a romantic relationship with a child or young person from the association" without permission from the leader and/or the parents.

If you have any questions about specific situations relating to facilitating respectful socialising or situations that are not covered by this document or that are new to you, please talk to your leader.

FACTS

Statement of Previous Convictions in Respect of Children

A statement of previous convictions in respect of children (Børneattest) must be obtained for all leaders, employees and volunteers who are in contact with children under the age of 15. This is laid down by law in the Act on the Retrieval of a Statement of Previous Convictions in Respect of Children (Børneattestloven), executive order no. 1416 of 03/12/2018.

In practice, this means that

- It is the responsibility of the leadership to obtain the statement.
- The leader, employee or volunteer must give their consent to the statement being issued.
- Without consent, he or she cannot work as a leader, employee or volunteer in a child and youth association.
- The leadership will request the statement from the police for a specific person identified by social security number.
- If the statement reveals that the person has previously been convicted of sexual abuse of children, it means that he or she cannot work as a leader, employee or volunteer in the association.

What does a statement of previous convictions in respect of children say?

- The statement contains information about convictions, fines, etc. for certain violations of anti-terrorism legislation and violation of the Criminal Code's (Straffeloven) rules on sexual abuse of children under the age of 15 and child pornography.
- Information will appear on the statement for at least 10 years after the conviction, some crimes appear on the statement for 20 years, others are never removed.

Please be aware that

- The statement only reveals whether a person has already been convicted of sexual offenses, including possession or distribution of child pornography.
- A statement without convictions does not guarantee that the person in question has never committed abuse or that they do not intend to do so in the future.
- The statement only covers convictions related to children under the age of 15.

You can find more information about the statement here:

www.politi.dk/bestil/bestil-strafeattest/boerneattest

FACTS

The Teacher Clause

In Denmark the age of consent is 15. But special rules apply to relationships between adults and children at e.g. schools, after school clubs, churches and other associations:

Section 223 of the Criminal Code – “The Teacher Clause”

Anyone who has intercourse with a person under the age of 18 that is the guilty person's stepchild or foster child or is entrusted to the person in question for education or upbringing is punished with up to 4 years of imprisonment. (2) The same punishment applies to a person who grossly abuses their age and experience-based superiority to convince a person under 18 to have sexual intercourse.

Sexual Abuse and Other Violations

It is our overarching goal to prevent and thereby avoid any kind of violation of personal boundaries, including sexual boundaries.

To be able to prevent we must be aware of

- What sexual violations are,
- How sexual abuse can occur, including
- Grooming and
- How to act, when we have a suspicion or awareness of cases where abuse has happened or is about to happen.

Sexual violations

A sexual violation takes place when a person transgresses another person's boundaries in a sexual way. It can be touching the body in an inappropriate way, touching the genitals, displaying nude pictures or pornographic images, and intercourse. It can also be inappropriate and sexualised language.

The Criminal Code is very clear on this topic. Chapter 24, sections 216-236 of the Criminal Code deal with sexual crimes. You can find the full text at retsinfo.dk, search for "Straffeloven" (gældende).

How can it happen?

Perhaps you wonder how it can happen that an adult can commit sexual abuse of a child. Even at church? "How come no one finds out? And why do children and young people not object? Can it happen to anyone? Does it not only happen to the weak and the most vulnerable, those who already have other problems to deal with?"

These are good and relevant questions.

The short answer is that there is no simple answer.

- All children and young people can be subject to sexual abuse. Boys and girls.
- It is usually men who commit sexual violations, but women also do.
- Few offenders are paedophiles. Paedophilia is a diagnosis. The diagnosis requires that several conditions be fulfilled before it can be given. Not all paedophiles commit sexual abuse.
- Most sexual abusers have ordinary, heterosexual adult sexual relationships while they also commit child sexual abuse.
- Sexual abuse is usually committed at home or within the immediate family. But it can also take place at churches, after school clubs and other places where children and adults meet physically. Sexual violations can also occur online, sometimes followed by a physical encounter but not always.

A key characteristic of sexual abuse committed by adults outside the family is what is called grooming.

Grooming - in Short

Grooming is an English word that means "to nurture, care and tend to yourself or others" and "to train and prepare someone for something to happen".

Grooming is also the word used to describe the process when an adult befriends a child or young person with the intention of committing sexual abuse.

Grooming takes place over time. It can be short time, weeks or months, or as long as several years. Below you will find the definition and an outline of grooming.

FACTS

Grooming

"Grooming is defined by the process in which the (somewhat) older and more experienced offender uses manipulation, lies, flattery and praise, and also implants a sense of responsibility and guilt into the victim in order to bring the victim to participate (seemingly voluntarily) in sexual activities aimed at gratifying the offender."

Contact and friendship

The contact phase is when the abuser selects potential victims. It can be the most weak, vulnerable and extroverted. It can be the most quiet and introverted. Or it can be any other type with whom the abuser successfully establishes a good relationship and builds a friendship with. The abuser never selects randomly.

Risk assessment

The abuser is always aware of the risk of his or her intentions being revealed. Does anyone become suspicious of the way the adult acts around the child or young person? Is there a need to make up a story to avert the suspicion? Should the adult hold back for some time, then resume the relationship later on?

The one and only

The abuser favours the child or young person and strengthens their relationship through special attention, gifts or access to e.g. concerts or football matches, if that is what the child or young person fancies.

The singling out can also be evident in the verbal interaction - the way the adult speaks to and about the child. It can make the child or young person feel indebted to the adult, their new friend, who seems so wonderful and helpful and encouraging. This is also the way the abuser makes the child or young person feel guilty if demands and expectations are not met. *"I have done so much for you, surely you can... do something for me."*

The sexual theme is introduced

The abuser shows interest in the child or young person and is curious about how they are doing and whether they have or have had a girlfriend or boyfriend. The conversation can be very direct and deal with genital development, pubic hair, or experience in kissing or having sex.

Sometimes the theme is introduced at the beginning, especially with teenagers and young people, who

are preoccupied with discovering their sexual identity and may find it helpful to talk to an adult about it. Other times it is done more slowly and probing.

The sexual assault

For the abuser, the ultimate goal is to meet alone with the child or young person in a place where sexual abuse can take place. It can be at the adult's home or in a car on the way to or from home or an after-school club. It can be at camps or other places where the abuser can arrange for the abuse to take place without being discovered.

Secrets and threats

During the grooming process and especially in relation to the sexual aspects and the abuse, the abuser puts a lot of effort into emphasising that the two (or more) of them have something special together. It is private and should not be shared with others. Alternatively, the abuser can blame the child: *"You wanted to. You volunteered for it. You didn't say no. You didn't walk away."*

The abuser can also threaten the child or young person to stay silent. For example by claiming that the child or young person has done something illegal. Or by taking photos of the abuse and threatening to share them with others.

It can be difficult to talk about!

It applies to all of the above that it is terribly difficult for the child or young person to tell others what has happened.

- It is a serious breach of trust by an adult - who can the child or young person trust now?
- If the abuse has taken place in the context of the church and Christianity, the abuser might have claimed it is the will of God or that "God sees everything". Who would want to defy God?
- Young children might not have the vocabulary to describe what has happened.
- Older children discover only too late or not at all that they have been fooled and manipulated into doing something they would never have agreed to if they had known beforehand what was going to happen.
- Children and young people feel ashamed that they "have had sex with" an adult. Although that is not at all what has happened. They have been subject to sexual abuse.
- Children and young people can be afraid to reveal things they have been threatened to keep quiet about. Who would dare to hope that nude pictures would not be sent to one's parents or someone else? And if it turns out that they have done something illegal, they certainly would not want to... risk anything.

Can we contact the parents?

When you have a suspicion or awareness of abuse taking place in (the church's) child and youth associations, it is as a general rule appropriate to contact the parents immediately so they can care for the child or young person.

They can be contacted at the same time as the social authorities and/or the police. You can also ask the social authorities or police to help you contact the parents.

However, there are situations in which you **cannot** contact the parents. This applies if (the suspected) abuser is a parent or primary caretaker of the child.

In that case, you must contact the social authorities and/or the police directly. They will assess and decide who does what and when.

Always ask a senior leader

Regardless of your suspicion or information, always talk to your leader about issues relating to the well-being of children and young people and problematic relationships between an adult or abuser and a child or young person. Unless the leader is the one you suspect!

- If you are an employee: talk to the leader of your group or section.
- If you are the head of a child and youth association: contact your senior leader. That could be the national head of the association or the pastor or perhaps the chair of the church council.

- If you are the most senior leader of a child and youth association, you might already have guidelines on what to do in these situations. If you do, then this is a good time to review those guidelines.
- If you are a pastor or a senior leader of the church - then your responsibility is to act on the suspicion or awareness that your employee shares with you. Perhaps you already have a set of guidelines to help and guide you.

FACTS

Suspicion or Awareness ...

of (sexual) abuse is never just an internal matter.

The law must be followed - and it states that the authorities must always be informed about a suspicion or awareness of child sexual abuse. See section 154 of the Consolidation Act on Social Services (Serviceloven) about the duty of notification.

What if a suspicion or awareness of sexual abuse involves a leader or a pastor?

In that case, you must contact the leader superior to the leader or pastor. If you do not know who that is, contact the national head of the child and youth association or the chair of the church council. You can also contact the leadership of your denomination or FrikirkeNet and ask for help on how to act on the information you have.

What about the press?

Journalists are curious and they know what is going on in their local area. They have a nose for news, and before you know it, they have found your address and phone number. So what do you do?

You answer that you cannot comment on a specific case.

And then you refer to FrikirkeNet if your church is affiliated, or to the person in your association, church or denomination, who is responsible for dealing with the press.

On the line below you can note down the relevant name and telephone number of FrikirkeNet and/or the person in your association, church or religious community who make statements to the press. That is the person to refer others to - no matter who is asking you about what has happened.

FrikirkeNet

Name and telephone number of press officer:

Local leader or leader of denomination

Name and telephone number of press officer:

What to do if you are a

Employee, leader or pastor:

Refer others to the press officer.

Press officer:

Consult your manual and follow the guidelines.

Call a more experienced colleague who can help and guide you, if needed.

Good Advice for Those Responsible for Talking to the Press

Remember:

- You do not have to reply right away. It is quite all right to tell a journalist that you need to check up on the case before making a statement.
- Agree a time, e.g. half an hour or an hour later, when the journalist can call back. Ask about the purpose of the interview – which type of media is it for (e.g. printed newspaper, online news, TV or radio), and when will it be published?
- It might also be a good idea to look up the journalist. What has he or she previously written? This way you can get an impression of whom you will be interviewed by later.
- Sometimes, a journalist will try to make you answer immediately. This reflects their need, not yours! Do not let yourself be pressured into risking saying something you wouldn't otherwise have said. Insist that you need some more time and then get back to them as agreed.
- Use this time to get relevant support, e.g. from FrikirkeNet, which has experience in handling the press and can provide guidance on the specific case.
- Decide what you want to say - what is the most important message? - and stick to that no matter what the journalist tries to get you to say.
- If there is not a need for a quick reply, you can always ask the journalist to send the questions by email to ensure you have adequate time to prepare a reply.
- Remember to ask if what you say is for background or direct quotation.
- If your statement is for direct quotation, clarify that in exchange for an official statement it is a requirement that you will approve the quotations. This can be done by email, and even if the journalist challenges this condition, stand firm. This is normal procedure for sensitive topics. And it allows you to check if there are factual details that need to be corrected and whether you have been quoted correctly.

What Next?

Printed guidelines and good intentions are not enough. They must be put into practice in everyday life, everywhere we meet children and young people. We therefore recommend that a local action plan is made based on these guidelines.

- Copy the list on page 6 'Guidelines for working with children and youth' and adjust to your after-school club or target group. E.g. "Respectful socialising at junior club xx" and then add all the relevant bullet points from the list. If you have a youth club, the bullet point about helping young children use the bathroom is probably not relevant. On the other hand, it is probably relevant to include the point about not having a romantic relationship. The opposite applies if it is a children's church.
- Place the modified guidelines in a place where everyone can see them, ensuring that everyone remembers and helps enforce the agreement about respectful socialising.
- Make a local action plan containing a short and clear description of who should do what and when if someone has a suspicion or awareness of cases of grooming or other violating behaviour.
- Fill in the form in Annex 1, ensuring that it is always known who should be contacted in which situations and how to get hold of those contacts.
- The local action plan and the contact list should be kept in a place that is accessible to all employees. Be aware of the current rules (GDPR) regarding consent for retention of personal information.
- Start of term. Talk about what respectful socialising is when you meet after the holidays and when you prepare for e.g. a camp and weekend trips. Or at any other time when it is relevant to remind everyone of the things that are important to keep in mind. Put it in the calendar so you do not forget.

Consultancy Advice

If consultancy or technical advice is needed, e.g. in relation to a specific concern, duty of notification or to develop your local guidelines, we recommend contacting Gitte Jakobsen, who is a social worker, MS and expert in the prevention and handling of cases of grooming and sexual abuse.

Gitte Jakobsen can be contacted by phone 50 58 94 59 and by email: mail@gittejakobsen.dk

This list can be adapted to your local church and/or child and youth association. Fill in the names, addresses and telephone numbers so you know whom to contact in each situation.

A pdf-version of this document can be found at frikirkenet.dk

Contacts at Church or Religious Community

Local Church and Denominational leader

Name – national level

Name of national head

Email – national level

Telephone – national level

Name - local

Name of priest – local

Telephone

Email

The chair of the church council or the designated child and youth contact person

Name

Telephone

Email

Child and youth association

Name

Name of head or chair

Telephone

Email

FrikirkeNet (if affiliated)

Secretary General Mikael Wandt Laursen

Telephone +45 42 42 22 15

Email mwl@frikirkenet.dk

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Kuno Sørensen, psychologist, Save the Children

“ *When the members of FrikirkeNet follow these guidelines, they base their work with children and youth on respectful and voluntary relationships as well as the legislation concerning socialising with children and young people. When everyone complies with these guidelines during all social activities, it provides parents, leaders and especially children and young people with a sense of safety. They are a must-read for both old and new leaders of Christian child and youth organisations and can be revisited regularly to assess interactions with children and young people.”*

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