



YMT NATIONAL MANUAL/E. Child Protection/CP – Code of Conduct
Current as at 04/01/2024

YMT Child Protection

Code of Conduct

Duty of Care

YMT members have a 'duty of care' for the young people they are working with. Stated simply, 'duty of care' means that we must take reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all young people in our care.

Across the range of YMT ministry such as school retreats, camps, youth group and even social activities involving young people, YMT members must be committed to assessing any potential risks associated with the circumstances or activities that they may be inviting young people to participate in.

Duty of care also extends to the need to model safe and responsible behavior. This means we should avoid activities while in the presence of young people that would be potentially hazardous for a younger person.

Issues of sensitivity

Part of our duty of care to young people also relates to the raising of issues of a sensitive nature. Responsible ministry involves encouraging young



people to explore only past experiences which would be appropriate for the context of that ministry.

For example, in no ministry context is it ever appropriate for a team member to explicitly initiate discussion or sharing, such as via a testimony or in leading a small group, about the issues of **sexual abuse** or **attempts at self-harm**.

The reason for this is that if a young person present has been sexually abused or has actively engaged in self-harm, broaching this subject can open up a potentially overwhelming area of their past or present life, which is likely to require professional help. Most YMT members and teachers are not equipped with the time or professional resources to assist a young person process these experiences effectively.

Issues that may be referred to but which require prior consultation with your Team Manager are the issues of: **thoughts of self-harm, self-destructive behaviours such as eating disorders, and the loss of loved ones or friends**. Similar to the issues above, raising these issues for some students may be overwhelmingly relevant. The Team Manager can assist you with knowing how to acknowledge these parts of your journey but in a way that is sensitive and respectful of you and the young people listening. In a school context, your Team Manager would always try to speak with the REC to let them know that these issues will be touched on just to check that this is appropriate given the experiences of their particular group of students.



Summary of Sensitive Issues

Issues that should **never** be explicitly initiated by YMT:

- *Sexual Abuse*
- *Self-harm actions: cutting and/or attempted suicide*

Issues **potentially** initiated by YMT after consulting your Team Manager:

- *Self-harm thoughts*
- *Self-destructive behaviours such as eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia, etc)*
- *Loss of loved ones or friends*

Substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol can be referred to but if you're sharing your own past experience, be conscious not to glorify the activities.

NB. In relation to all of these very personal issues, only share those areas of your journey that you are fully reconciled with yourself.

Mandatory Reporting

In most states of Australia, YMT members are bound by the legislation of 'Mandatory Reporting' in relation to issues of child protection.

This means that if we have **reasonable grounds to suspect** that a child has been previously or is currently at risk of sexual, physical or emotional abuse we are required, by law, to report this to the official child protection agency.



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As a result, if a student discloses to you information that leads you to believe that they are at risk, then you must inform your Team Manager or Ministry Coordinator immediately who will inform YMT national leadership

The same applies if a young person discloses to you that they have recently considered, or are currently considering, some form of **self-harm** (this includes cutting and thoughts of suicide) – you must inform your Team Manager or Ministry Coordinator immediately, who in turn, will inform YMT national leadership

Because we are asking this of you, never promise “not to tell anyone”. If a student confides that there is something they want to share with you but wants you to promise not to tell anyone, reassure them of your concern and your commitment to help them in whatever way you can but do not promise not to tell anyone.

Reportable Conduct

YMT’s work comes under two state based reportable conduct schemes in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC). In NSW the scheme is overseen by the Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG) and in VIC it comes under the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP). The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires organisations working with Children to notify the relevant state body of any allegations of Child



abuse against any workers or volunteers engaged in working with Children.

This means that if an allegation of Child abuse is made against any YMT employees or volunteers, we will be required to report it to the OCG or CCYP, and they may instruct us to conduct an investigation into those allegations.

Professional boundaries

NSW legislation defines 'reportable sexual misconduct' as including the "crossing of professional boundaries". This is defined as behavior by an adult (that's us) toward a minor (*anyone* under the age of 18 years) that is "inappropriate and overly personal or intimate". In other words, if you express or demonstrate romantic or intimate feelings for a school student or anyone under the age of 18 years, this not only constitutes a breach of YMT single vision, but more importantly, may be deemed as sexual misconduct and therefore would be reportable to the relevant authority.

This type of behavior would be considered a breach of your professional boundaries, regardless of whether or not your feelings are expressed electronically (eg. Via text, email, or social media), verbally by phone or, verbally or physically in person.



In light of this legislation, it is essential that you share immediately with your Team Manager if you find yourself having romantic feelings for anyone under the age of 18 years.

In a similar way, if a YD or other young person communicates a romantic interest in you, it is essential that you share this immediately with your Team Manager, whether or not the feelings are mutual. In practical terms, if a young person flirts with you on more than one occasion, you need to let your Team Manager know.

It also applies that if a YD or young person discloses to you that they have romantic feelings for another adult member of your team, you must report this to your Team Manager immediately.

Practical tips for handling a Disclosure Situation

How to respond:

- maintain eye contact with the student
- show you are concerned and ready to listen
- avoid labeling the student's feelings
- relate your impressions and give the child ample time to respond
- be comfortable with silence and avoid badgering the student with questions
- avoid a display of shock or disgust or personal distress
- address the student's feeling of guilt and assure the child that you believe him/her
- let the student know in a sensitive manner what you plan to do and that you'll try to protect him/her



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- ascertain the child's immediate need for safety
- if you have reasonable grounds to suspect the young person has been or is at risk, do not ask too many questions as this can contaminate the evidence should an official investigation be required
- notify the Team Manager or Ministry Coordinator

Things you can say:

- I believe you
- It wasn't your fault
- I'm glad you felt you could tell me
- I'm sorry it happened to you
- You have the right to be safe

Additional rules for YMT members interacting with minors (young people under the age of 18 years)

Person to person interactions with minors:

1. YMT members cannot request nor accept personal contact details from minors such as mobile numbers, email addresses, etc.
2. YMT household bedrooms are strictly off limits to minors.
3. Minors are not permitted to stay overnight in YMT households. In the event of exceptional circumstances or an emergency, permission must be obtained from the parent(s) and your Team Manager.
4. When praying with a minor, always arrange to have another team member present to pray with you. If the young person is of the opposite gender, always invite a team member of the same gender as the young person to join you.



5. Avoid long, in-depth individual conversations with minors of the opposite gender. This can be difficult, but respectfully look for opportunities to suggest inviting another team member, of the same gender as the student, to join you if the conversation heads in a deep & meaningful direction.
6. If a minor asks to speak with you privately, do so where other people can see you or would at least have the opportunity to see you (ie never behind a closed door or in an out-of-the-way-place).
7. Occasionally you will be required to transport young people to or from youth events, usually in the YMT vehicle but possibly in a private vehicle. It is essential that you:
 - (i) only do this with permission from the parents and your Team Manager or Ministry Coordinator and,
 - (ii) always have another YMT member present in the car with you

Digital interactions with minors:

1. Parental consent must be received for all minors prior to participating in an online YMT video event. The YMT facilitator must therefore mark the roll of participants to confirm parental consent has been provided.
2. An online YMT video event can only occur if a minimum number of 2 YMT members and 2 minors is maintained.
3. Under no circumstances can a YMT member or a minor participate in an online YMT video event from their bedroom.
4. YMT members must wear their official YMT polo and all participants in the online YMT video event must be suitably dressed eg. No pyjamas, swimmers, etc.



5. Immediately following an online YMT Video Event, the YMT facilitator must complete a Report to be supplied to YMT national leadership for review and filing.

Reporting responsibilities for YMT Leaders

1. If, during the course of a school retreat, the Team Manager is informed by a team member that a student is considering, or has recently considered, doing themselves harm or they have grounds to suspect the child is at risk of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, the Team Manager must:
 - Immediately inform the REC or key teacher
 - Immediately or as soon as practicable, inform YMT national leadership
 - Complete a YMT Child Protection Incident Report form and forward to YMT national leadership
2. If information such as referred to in point 1 above is shared with the Team Manager or Ministry Coordinator during or through association with any non-school YMT ministry event such as an iSTAND Weekend camp or youth group event, the Team Manager must:
 - Immediately consult with YMT national leadership to determine the most appropriate course of action.
3. Having received a report from a Team Manager, the National Director &/or National Manager will assist the Team Manager to determine the most appropriate form of action. Determining the most appropriate action may require wider consultation with YMT leadership and official child protection agencies.