

Guidance on unaccompanied and uncollected children

Children arriving at a church activity unaccompanied

Generally children under the age of 11 years should always be taken to and collected from an activity for which they have been registered by their parents/carers. If a child is over 11 years of age, it is the responsibility of their parent/carer to make arrangements with their child for arriving at and leaving an activity. The adult leaders should always be aware of any children making their own way home and have written consent for this to happen (this is included on the “Registration Form” – see ‘Safeguarding toolkit’. Any concerns about these arrangements should be discussed with the child’s parents/carers.

It is possible that a child may begin to attend church without their parents/carers knowledge and/or consent. If this is happening regularly it could be a sign that something is amiss at home. Children in this situation should always be listened to in case this is a sign of something more serious. Please see “**Safeguarding in the Diocese of Blackburn**” our policy document for some of the signs and symptoms to look out for.

If an unaccompanied child attends a service in your parish we would recommend the following steps be taken:

- Make the person welcome and ensure that they are looked after by a ‘safer recruited’ adult leader (see Guidance on Volunteering and Working in the Diocese of London).
- Try to discover if their parents/carers know where they are and what time they are expected to return home. If this is before the session is due to end, encourage them to return home at this time unless their parents/carers can be contacted.
- Try to establish their name, age, address and telephone number and complete a registration form with as much detail as the young person can provide.
- If they know a contact telephone number, call their parents /carers to let them know that they are safe and ask for their verbal permission for the child to remain. Ensure they know what time church finishes; try to encourage the parent/carer to come and collect their child at this time.
- If the child is to return home unaccompanied, make sure they take with them details of the activity they have attended along with contact details, inviting the parent/carer to

- make contact. These could be contact details for the Sunday school / Youth group leader, Children's Champion or a member of the clergy.

All adult leaders should be alert before and after services when children don't always stay with their parents in order to ensure that they remain safe.

Uncollected children

It is rare in church life for children to be left uncollected at the end of a session except in exceptional circumstances. Occasionally this does happen, when this is the case, the following steps should be taken:

- Telephone the parents/carers and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible.
- If contact cannot be made, two leaders must wait with the child until this is possible.
- A child should not be escorted home, except in exceptional circumstances.
- If no contact can be made and the child appears to have been abandoned, the out of hour's duty social worker should be contacted at your local authority. This number can be found on your local authority's web site and it is advisable to have this number recorded and easily accessible.

Another adult should not be allowed to take responsibility for a child without receiving parental consent, written whenever possible.

Any safeguarding concerns should be reported immediately to the Church Safeguarding Officer.