

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN ATTENDING EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE ELY RSCM COMMITTEE

In line with UK government regulations and current best practice, there has been considerable debate over the past year or so within church organisations at all levels on the important topic of child protection. As a result, clear statements of policy are emerging and are being implemented. Although there are some aspects of the policy that are not completely finalised and need more thought, the main threads are quite clear and the Ely RSCM Committee consider that the readers of this publication would welcome a summary of the current arrangements for the protection of children attending events that it sponsors. In this context, children are defined as young people under the age of 18.

Responsibilities of the Ely RSCM Committee

The most significant development is that all tutors and leaders working with children now need an Enhanced Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau in addition to the RSCM Clearance Certificate, which is still also required. Both of these certificates must be renewed every three years. To oversee the implementation of the revised child protection policy, the Committee, along with all other Area committees in the country, is required to appoint a Young Persons' Officer (YPO) before the end of 2004. Terms of Reference are currently being finalised, but provisionally Mrs Anthea Kenna has accepted an invitation to become the YPO for the Ely Area in addition to her duties on the Committee as the Schools Representative. (*Editor: Mrs Kenna's appointment subsequently confirmed*). Although not strictly a child protection issue, the RSCM recommends that there is someone with first aid qualifications present at each festival or other large-scale event.

Supervision

On courses and workshops attended only by children, the responsibility for supervision rests with the Course Director, tutors and adult supervisors. If adults also attend, they are responsible for the supervision of the children from their own churches, with the directing staff being responsible for any unaccompanied children.

At choir festivals, where the number of children participating is far greater, they are deemed to be under the direct supervision of their choirleaders or designated adults from their own churches for the entire day.

At Area Award examinations, all examiners and supervisors must have the Enhanced Disclosure and RSCM Clearance Certificate. Recent examinations in the Ely area have been conducted in the presence of another adult or monitored through the use of CCTV. However, the Committee has now decided not to continue with this arrangement in 2005, and, as recommended by the RSCM guidelines, parents/carers will be required to sign the application form to confirm their awareness that the examination takes place on a one-to-one basis.

Responsibilities of Choir Leaders

When registering any children for an event away from their own church/parish, choirleaders are required to:

- Give parents/carers full information about the event, including the aims (if not self-evident), venue, time and place of departure and return, transport arrangements, and details of the supervision planned.
- Obtain from the parents/carers signed consent forms in which they confirm that they understand and accept the arrangements made for the event. The form should also include details of any child's medical details that may be relevant (eg, nut allergy, asthma) and of the action required if a medical incident occurs during the event. Blank consent forms are invariably provided to those wishing to register children for events.
- Confirm in writing before the event that parents/carers have been informed of the arrangements as listed above and that consent forms have been received for each child wishing to take part.

On the day, the choirleader should take the consent forms to the event and, if taking part, retain them in case they are needed. If not taking part, the choirleader should hand the forms to a responsible adult from his/her church who is taking part, or, in the case of events arranged only for children, give them to one of the directing staff.

Events Not Sponsored by the Ely RSCM Committee

Although the procedures may vary, the principles summarised in this article apply equally to non-RSCM events organised by churches in the area, whether on their own premises or elsewhere. In these cases the local guidelines should be followed.

Editor: for further information or guidance on these important matters, please do not hesitate to contact the YPO, Mrs Kenna (Tel: 01638 508173 or e-mail: anthea@alphacottage.freeserve.co.uk).