

Developing a Group Contract or Code of Conduct (12 – 18 yrs.)



Introduction

Every group of people has a set of rules to guide their behaviour. This 'code' may be stated explicitly or else it's something you pick-up and begin to understand after being in the group for a while. When working with children or young people in a church context it is important to make the rules or code clear to everyone from the outset. In fact, it is even better when the group members help to create the code themselves. This can lead to greater individual ownership of how all the members should be treated. It makes clear what is expected of each member and importantly, what each member can expect. Personal safety and group safety go hand in hand. When something out of the ordinary happens, everyone should know how and where to find help.

Here is one way of drawing-up a Group Contract or Code. Please adapt to suit the group's developmental needs.

Purpose: To promote awareness of personal responsibility, safety and wellbeing among group members as they participate in church ministry.

Time Requirement: 1½ Hrs.

Materials Needed:

Pens, A5 blank pages for writing, Blu Tack, markers, flipchart pages & A4 page with 'Group Contract / Code of Conduct' as the title and 'As a member of this group I' repeated several times with spacing left for each unfinished sentence to be completed. One copy for each participant (see Appendix 1 & photocopy as required).

Stage 1 – Personal Reflection

Distribute 3 x A5 pages to each participant and instruct them to separately mark the top of each page 1, 2 & 3, respectively. Then display the following three questions on a flipchart page. Ask each participant to write 3/4 answers (e.g. words and/or images) to each of the following questions in turn on a separate page (i.e. answers to Q.1 on page 1 etc.):

1. *What will make you feel welcome in this group?*
2. *What will I expect from others in this group?*
3. *What can others expect of me?*

After Q.1 is answered by the participants gather those pages in a pile for safe keeping. Move on to the 2nd and 3rd question in the same way and then gather the relevant pages in two more separate piles.

Stage 2 – Group Considerations

Break the participants into three equal groups (e.g. Bananas, Apples & Oranges). Distribute one set of answers to each group (i.e. Q.1 to Bananas etc.). Ask each group to read the answers given to them and to draw up a single list without repetition. If they choose to leave something out, then they must explain why during their feedback to the large group. Give 15/20 mins. to complete the task with each group displaying their question and list of

responses set out clearly on a flipchart page. Each group to appoint a spokesperson. The allocated time may vary depending upon the size of the small groups.

Stage 3 – Feedback & Group Consensus

Ask each group to present their list so that everyone together can react and comment. See if agreement can be reached on a final list with everyone's participation (e.g. What strikes you about these words, images or answers? Is there anything missing that you would have expected to see here? What would be your top three words or ideas from this list?).

When all three presentations and discussions have taken place, ask the participants whether they can see any common ideas or values across the three flip-chart pages. Common areas can be colour coded by circling them with the same marker and/or drawing a coloured line between the points across the pages without marking the wall. It should then be possible to see the full range of ideas created by the group participants. Visually it might be helpful to number them, so long as everyone understands you are not putting them in order of priority.

Take a 5 Mins. break here (Optional).

Stage 4 – Drafting the 'Group Contract or Code of Conduct'

Part 1 - Mix-up the participants again into three new groups for the next part of the exercise (e.g. Red, Yellow and Green). Hand out the A4 page to each participant. Working off the three flipchart sheets, ask the participants to complete the following sentences by using some of the words or statements on display: 'By being a member of this group I will (e.g. *treat everyone with respect; help with the room set-up; participate in group activities; turn my mobile off; look after my own safety and that of others; ask for help when I need it*).

When ready, ask each group to share their answers with each other and to then compile a single list for display on a flipchart page for discussion in the larger group. It will be helpful to explore some of the statements to tease out the meaning (e.g. What would treating everyone fairly in the group look like? How would you know if 'respect' was present in the group?).

Let them know that there are two additional questions at the bottom of the page for individual reflection but that you will deal with those later.

When the three presentations have been made and discussed, invite a person from each group to work on making a single list before the next meeting.

Take a 5 mins. break here (Optional).

Part 2 - At this point, ask all participants to consider and complete the two remaining questions on the A4 page. Then ask if these aspects of group membership have been reflected in the 'Code of Conduct'. If so, ask how that is the case and If not, ask for contributions. You may need to say a little here about everyone needs to know how to ask for help or how to seek advice when a situation arises. The final 'Contract' or 'Code' could include a statement, such as, 'If worried or concerned about someone, including yourself, please let someone else know like your parents or best friend. You can talk to any of the leaders at any time.'

This is a good place to explore Leaders' responsibility to share information about a young person's safety with their parents or guardians and, in some cases, with Tusla or the Gardaí if someone is being harmed or at risk of being harmed.

When a participant is not, for whatever reason, in keeping with the 'Contract' then how this is to be handled should be spelt out (e.g. Co-ordinator and/or Group Leader will speak with him/her; person is asked to take some time out; parents are contacted). Remember to keep the Prior/PP informed and to seek his advice before any final decision is made. Each step should be named and considered as part of the group discussion now taking place.

Emphasis the 'duty of care' each parent has to their children and that Leaders share when members are present in the group. This point can be linked back to the Parental Consent Form already completed when each member joined the group.

Part 3 - Arrange for two leaders to work with the 3 identified volunteers (Stage 4, Part 1) in finalising the 'Code of Conduct' while including reference to asking for help and seeking advice. Ask those three members to inform their parents of this commitment and separately, the Group Leader should send a text to confirm when, where and who will be present as the task is completed.

Some groups recite their 'Code' at the beginning of each meeting or have a framed copy permanently on display and/or produce small colourful pocket size versions for members use.

Remember to format the 'Contract' in such a way that allows each individual to co-sign and date two copies, along with a parent or guardian. Each member should retain one signed copy and the another should be placed securely and confidentially on file in the relevant church office.

Well done to all.

End.



GROUP CONTRACT or CODE of CONDUCT

Complete each sentence below in turn using words or statements displayed on the flipchart pages in front of you.

1. As a member of this group I will

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2. As a member of the group I will

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3. As a member of the group I will

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4. As a member of the group I will.....

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5. As a member of the group I will.....

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6. As a member of the group I will.....

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7. As a member of the group I will.....

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8. As a member of the group I will.....

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What will you do if you need a listening ear and/or are concerned for somebody else?

If a group member is 'letting the side down' how should this be handled?
