

Encounter Schools Detached Youth Work Policy

Principles and Values

Encounter is a Christian Organisation that works with schools by running voluntary clubs, supporting collective worship and the RE and PSHE curriculum and mentoring students. We also make ourselves available for informal detached work within schools during break and lunchtimes. Our aim in detached work is to provide safe and friendly chat with students about any subject they want to talk about including spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues should they naturally arise.

The world view we represent is Christian and the volunteers and staff of Encounter have agreed to a statement of faith and lifestyle. This should be displayed in every part of our lives including when we are working with children and young people. Detached work enables Encounter to connect with young people and role model Christianity in a relevant, personal and clear way.

Definitions

Detached youth work takes place within school during young people's 'free time'. Some of the practise will be with young people who are isolated or lonely, and sometimes youth leaders will be conversing with young people who are known to them.

Detached youth work begins from where young people are in terms of their social and moral values, attitudes, concerns and ambitions. It is a holistic approach to youth work concerned with a young person's personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is characterised by positive interaction between youth workers and young people.

Detached work is a well established part of youth work which complements formal youth work. Historically it has been and continues to be a beneficial work forming a wider network of young people who may not otherwise have access to youth workers. County Councils are not the only agencies that value the work of detached youth workers. Many churches include detached youth work as part of their community social action. Encounter offers detached youth work in and outside of schools as one aspect of their youth and schools work.

Some young people respond negatively to authority and a detached worker can be less threatening than formal youth work. Detached youth work also allows for contact with different groups of young people; those who are marginalised or need some support and those who are unlikely to participate in any structured/formal club or activity.

Good Practice Guide

As a Christian organisation our ideal model for detached work is based on the way in which Jesus Christ dealt with people in the Bible. All Encounter work must be done in accordance with the Encounter Child Protection Policy.

Section 1 – young people

During detached work youth workers will probably encounter many different young people wanting to discuss many different things. It is important to allow each young person to shape the conversation. Young people should never feel trapped in a situation and should always be allowed to come and go, dictating the boundaries of the interaction. There may be a need to carry on a conversation outside of the school in which case the young person will be encouraged to come to an already existing building based youth work activity where they can talk more with a youth

worker or other appropriate agency. Contact with young people outside of the context of school, should always be in line with the Child Protection Policy set out by Encounter.

A young person should not feel that they have to talk about a particular issue or share more than they want to. Assessment of a young person's communication will tell the youth worker whether the young person is comfortable in the situation or not. If the conversation is getting uncomfortable for the young person then the youth worker should re-direct it.

Young people need to have youth workers who will listen to them and value their input in a conversation. A young person may have come to a conclusion on a particular issue without having fully thought it through. The youth worker can challenge that young person to encourage them to think more broadly about the issue, offering suggestions as to how others may disagree with them. Any challenge needs to be made in a way that encourages a mature way of discussing issues. It is also necessary for the young person to be able to challenge a youth worker's opinion if they disagree over an issue. If a youth worker's personal boundaries are being compromised and it is necessary to deflect the conversation then this needs to be done in a way that still encourages the young person and doesn't demoralise them.

Section 2 – Team

Detached work should ideally be done by more than one person and the size of the team should be appropriate for the circumstances. Within each team, the workers should preferably stay within ear shot of each other. This is for the purposes of accountability and the safeguard of children and workers.

The youth worker must be aware that they are working in team at all times and therefore are required to support each other. Particular wisdom, discernment and sensitivity are needed when conversing about issues such as sexual practice, sexuality, spiritual practices and bereavement.

Any dispute amongst the team should be dealt with away from the young people in a debrief after the detached work has finished. If there is a situation where workers are in disagreement with how to handle the circumstance or issue then they should deflect the situation and discuss it more thoroughly when they are away from the young people.

This example of team work enables young people to learn how they can interact in a mature way with other people.

Section 3 – Others

Due to the nature of detached work there are likely to be many other people who are passing, listening or just nearby to the particular conversation that is taking place between the youth worker and young person. Detached youth workers need to consider what is being overheard and what is understood by those around the conversation. There may be situations where there needs to be special care to respect a young person's privacy during a conversation, or where the youth worker may need to clarify what is being said if it is partially overheard or misunderstood by those in close proximity.

Section 4 – School

There must always be consideration towards the school's ethos, discipline procedures and the authority of the staff. Detached youth workers are in the school under the authority of the Head Teacher and should never undermine staff of the school.

Section 5 – Youth Worker

The youth worker needs to know where their personal boundaries are and to protect these. It is advisable that these boundaries are considered before detached work begins. It is wholly acceptable for the youth worker to say "I'm not going to answer that" or "That's a personal

question and one I don't want to answer, let's talk about something else". Detached workers reserve the right to withdraw themselves from a conversation. In a situation where the integrity of the team, child, boundaries, school rules or law are compromised, the team can say to a young person "if you do that we cannot/will not continue chatting with you" and resume contact at another more appropriate time. A youth worker should never give money to a young person.

There is a log book available for teams at the Encounter office, where they can inform the Encounter staff of any concerns they have with a particular situation and explain the circumstances and action taken if any. If a complaint is made regarding detached work, if at all possible the Encounter handbook complaints procedure should be referred to before action is taken.

Best practise for detached youth work is ultimately an assessment on the part of the youth worker of each interaction that arises. The youth worker needs to assess the needs of: the young person, their team, others who are in close proximity, the school, and themselves and then to respond appropriately in the situation. Although this seems to be a large task to undertake, much of the time it comes down to being aware and using common sense.

A Young People's Charter

What can you as a young person expect from Encounter workers?

- To be treated fairly, with respect and understanding as a unique individual created and loved by God.
- To meet Christian youth workers whose faith impacts every area of their lives and through this to encounter something of what Christianity is about.
- To be given respect for your privacy and confidentiality. We will give an explanation of where we cannot promise you total confidentiality (this is in 'exceptional circumstances' ie child protection and when a person's life may be in serious danger).
- To allow you the space and give you the encouragement to challenge others' views of you.
- To be offered other youth work activities in which you may wish to participate.
- To be offered direction as to information, advice or support available from agencies other than ourselves.
- To be helped to make informed choices taking into account your legal rights and responsibilities.