

Interviewing to Establish Suitability

The interview process is to attempt to eliminate unsuitable candidates from the recruitment process.

Interviews aim to identify personal attributes which render applicants unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.

In the near future all roles in parishes will have job descriptions and a set of appropriate interviewing questions that will help to act as a tool for assessing applicant suitability. These will be distributed in due course.

Until there are job descriptions, consider some key themes when thinking of questions to ask applicants who want to work with children. The important themes for assessing applicants can be summarised as follows:

- Authority: The person uses authority and leadership to build and enhance the capacity of others.
- Accountability: Accepts the need to consult (with someone) about risk situations.
- Integrity and values: Sets good standards in personal and professional relationships and in their behaviour with young people.
- Ethical standards: Is willing to accept a 'Duty of Care' towards children and young people in their role.
- Team player: Can work well with co-workers.

Interviewing for roles with children

The following sample questions are an example of

Q. *What are sensible boundaries to establish between yourself as the confirmation catechist and the young people in your group?*

With this question you are attempting to discern whether the applicant has thought about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour working with young people and children. Has the applicant thought about issues of:

- Physical contact (what is and is not appropriate).
- Do they consider it important to have a warm but professional relationship with young people?

These are important issues in trying to discern whether someone is mature in their attitude towards children or young people in groups, or immature and thoughtless.

Q. *What sort of boundaries should exist between a catechist and a young person in a one to one situation?*

Grooming very often begins with isolating a vulnerable child or young person and building a relationship of trust with them. It is in this context that abuse can occur most easily. With this question, you are seeking to understand the applicant's thoughts about one to one work with children or young people. If the applicant appears to have rigid opinions about this issue, eg:

"I would never see a child on their own",

or a thoughtless response such as:

"I would speak with them in private, to show them that I cared about what they were going through", or

"I'm very good with young people on their own".

then these attitudes should be explored. Too defensive and rigid an answer or too casual an answer should raise concerns. The protection of children or young people from abuse requires someone who will react sensibly to situations when they might need to speak with a child on a one to one basis.

Q. *Can you give an example where someone may be at risk of inappropriately crossing boundaries with a young person in a group or one to one situation? Give some time to think about an example.*

This question is really to check out whether the applicant has really understood the first two questions well in giving concrete situations.

Q. *Can you give an example of using authority in a positive way with young people? Give this a few moments thought.*

The issue of power is of utmost important in considering a volunteers suitability. In particular, oppressive and controlling attitudes should be questioned. Applicants who have strong views about wanting to control children or young people rather than set boundaries are not acting out of a child centred approach and may not be suitable to take on leadership or formative roles with children or young people.

Q. *What do you like most about working with children or young people?*

This question is focusing on the values of the applicant who is expressing an interest in working with children or young people. Do they value children or young people as persons in their own right/ Do they have distorted views about children, ie seeing them as inherently 'naughty', 'disobedient' or 'wayward' etc. People with rigid controlling personalities are being driven by their own needs rather than a child's and this should always raise concerns.

Q. *What is important to do when you have worries or concerns about a child or young person you are working with, either because of their behaviour, emotions or because of something they have said?*

This question seeks to ascertain whether the volunteer would consider it important to consult with someone if they had any concerns about a child or young person. Be very concerned if an applicant speaks about rescuing the child themselves by offering counselling or support, or problem solving with the child without consulting with others.

Q. *What would you do if a child had told you that they had been abused?*

If an applicant has difficulties with this question, ask them something more specific such as 'What would you do if a child told you that they were suffering violence at home?'

If their response is to try and deal with the situation themselves, without seeking help from others, this is a cause for concern. This question is not to check out their knowledge of child protection but to see whether they consider it important to seek advice. If after explaining to the applicant the need to seek consultation, you are not satisfied with their response, then this may be an indication of unsuitability. Lone Rangers are dangerous!