



Child Protection Unit

Safeguarding Children and Young People

**Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide**

# **Best Practice Guidelines**

*For Archdiocesan Clergy, Religious, Employees and  
Volunteers Interacting with Children and Young People*

*Safe Environments For All: A Church where God's children  
can flourish, where all are welcomed, valued and respected*



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## Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to inform all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide about their interactions with children and young people, to ensure these are respectful, safe and underpinned by best practice principles. These guidelines help to raise awareness, maintain professional boundaries and promote positive relationships in ways that do not compromise children and young people's welfare.

Following these guidelines will not only enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people in the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, but ensures that the Archdiocese creates a welcoming environment where children and young people feel respected, cared for and heard.

## Background

Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers often interact with children and young people on a regular basis. It is during these interactions that children and young people have a right to feel safe, be safe and protected at all times. It is therefore the responsibility of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide to uphold these rights whenever those with roles participate in church based activities. The Archdiocese also has a duty of care towards clergy, religious, employees and volunteers, which aims to ensure that all individuals are aware of how to interact with children in a way which keeps both children and young people and themselves safe. This is known as 'protective practice' - a way of preventing behaviours that could lead to harm, be seen as harmful, or be harmful to children and young people.

## Legislation

The guidelines set out in this document are in accordance with the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (chapter 5, part 1)*, which states that certain non-government organisations, including those providing religious or spiritual services wholly or partly for children, have a duty to ensure the protection of children and young people through the development, implementation, monitoring and review of appropriate policies and procedures to establish and maintain child safe environments.

## Scope

These guidelines apply to all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers of the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide who engage with children or young people within the Church community. The guidelines must be adhered to in all physical and online settings, whether it be in Church, home-visiting, at an activity/ event or online. The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount and should be a priority in our interactions with them at all times.

Children and parents may be provided with a copy of these guidelines so that they know what is expected of Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers. This empowers children, young people and their parents/caregivers to recognise harmful behaviours and raise concerns if they feel these guidelines are not being adhered to.

## Children and Young People with Disabilities and Additional Needs

Some children and young people are particularly at risk of harm due to disability, additional needs or their background, and extra care may need to be taken to avoid risk of harm to these children. At times children and young people with disabilities may exhibit challenging behaviours, including sexualised behaviours, which can make ensuring appropriate interaction more difficult. Whilst these guidelines apply in all circumstances and for all children and young people, persons working with children with disability or additional needs may contact the Child Protection Unit for further guidance and support.



## Children and Young People from Different Cultural Backgrounds

The Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide recognises the importance of implementing principles which are culturally competent and sensitive. The diversity of culture is acknowledged, respected and reflected in our approach to interacting with children and young people. The Best Practice Guidelines aim to ensure the protection of all children and young people through practices which are open, transparent and safe. The Child Protection Unit can provide guidance and support if you have any queries about applying these guidelines in a particular cultural community or setting.

### Definitions

#### **Legislative Definition of Child or Young Person**

A person who is under 18 years of age.

*s16(1) Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*

Term may be used interchangeably with 'children and young people' in this document.

#### **Legislative Definition of Harm**

Physical harm or psychological harm (whether caused by an act or omission) and includes such harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect.

Psychological harm does not include emotional reactions such as distress, grief, fear or anger that are a response to the ordinary vicissitudes of life.

*s17 Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*

#### **Legislative Definition of 'At Risk'**

A child or young person will be taken at risk if -

- the child or young person has suffered harm (being harm of a kind against which a child or young person is ordinarily protected); or
- there is a likelihood that the child or young person will suffer harm (being of a kind against which a child or young person is ordinarily protected).

*s18 Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*

#### **Safeguarding**

Practices which help to support and protect the health, development and wellbeing of children and young people, including supporting families to provide safe and appropriate care, implementing practices which minimise the risk of harm, and responding appropriately if risk of harm or harm of children is disclosed, or suspected.

#### **Child Safe Contact Person**

The Child Safe Contact Person is someone nominated by the parish to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The Child Safe Contact Person can support notifiers and mandated notifiers to report concerns about a child or young person to the Department for Child Protection. The Archdiocesan Child Protection Unit oversees and guides the role of the Child Safe Contact Person.

# Guideline 1:

## Physical Contact

Physical contact is important for children – it can help to keep them safe, provide comfort, and enhance the quality of adult-child interactions. Holding a child’s hand to cross the road, picking up a crying toddler, or placing a hand on the shoulder of a distressed child or teenager are all appropriate ways of meeting children’s physical and emotional needs when the circumstances require it. In some instances however, physical contact with children has been used as a way of grooming for sexual abuse, or has been harmful in itself.

These guidelines are intended to define appropriate physical contact with children, and to keep children safe while also helping our church to remain a welcoming and responsive environment for children and young people.

### Do

- ✓ **Always ask children and young people for consent before initiating physical contact.**
- ✓ **If congratulating or comforting a child this should take place in a public setting, in view of other adults.**
- ✓ **Use appropriate physical contact to comfort and connect with children and young people, or to keep them safe.**

Examples of appropriate physical contact include:

- A high five
  - Holding a hand of a young child or child with additional needs when crossing a road to ensure safety and prevent injury
  - Showing care for a distressed child or young person seeking comfort through a reassuring gesture, such as a gentle pat on an arm or shoulder
  - Administering first aid when a child is injured, (seeking consent of the child and caregivers first where possible)
  - Assisting when a child seeks help
- ✓ **Be alert to and respect signs of discomfort such as shying away, squirming or withdrawing.** Children have a right to determine their own physical boundaries.
  - ✓ **If taking a child to the toilet or changing a nappy is necessary,** always discuss this with another appropriate adult beforehand and if possible have another adult accompany you. Inform the child’s parent/caregiver as soon as possible that this was necessary, after the event/activity is over. Where possible change nappies in view of another adult. Take children to the toilet in groups of two or more children or have another appropriate adult accompany you.

### Do not

- ✗ **Do not use physical contact in a way that is not necessary, not age appropriate and/or does not meet the needs of the child or young person.**

Examples of inappropriate physical contact include:

- Tickling games
  - Kissing
  - Fondling
  - Rough play
  - Pulling or encouraging a child onto your lap.
  - Full body or prolonged hugging
  - Touching of genitals or any part of the body that may cause distress, discomfort or embarrassment
- ✗ **Do not use any form of corporal punishment.**
  - ✗ **Do not restrain a child or young person physically** unless this is necessary to ensure their immediate safety or the immediate safety of other people. This may include reaching out to a child who is about to step into the path of oncoming traffic.
  - ✗ **Do not assist children with physical tasks that they are old enough to do alone** unless they ask for assistance. For example, never physically assist a child in toileting unless absolutely necessary and, when it is, this should be done in the presence of another adult.
  - ✗ **Do not have any type of sexual interaction with a child or young person under the age of 18.** Such behaviour is legally defined as sexual abuse, and deemed a criminal offence in South Australia.



## How to respond if a child or young person is seeking physical contact that is not appropriate

If a child is frequently seeking physical contact that is not appropriate, such as full body hugging, excessive touching or touching genital areas, this may be reflective of difficulties, a disability or potentially abuse-related trauma. Gently redirect the child or young person to appropriate physical touch (as suggested below). If harm or risk of harm is suspected make a report to the **Child Abuse Report Line (13 14 78)**. Following notification, call the Child Protection Unit (8210 8159) for support.

Explain to a young child that they can sit next to you, rather than sit on your lap, or turn to the side.

If a child is seeking a hug, explain that certain gestures are for family and other people that we are very close to and suggest an alternative such as a high five.

For older children explain that there are rules about physical contact to keep everyone safe. You could ask them and help agree to an alternative with which they are happy, e.g. "we have rules about hugging because not everyone feels comfortable with being hugged, would you feel okay if I put my hand on your shoulder instead?"

Establishing appropriate physical boundaries models to children that they too have a right to say no to physical contact and to determine their own level of comfort.

## Guideline 2: General Interacting with Children and Young People

It is important that, in the course of performing official duties, whether it be in Church or home-visiting or online, a positive example is set for children and young people, which models kindness, compassion, and respect. Safeguard your integrity and abide by the same rules of behaviour that you expect of children and young people.

### Do

- ✓ **Ensure that children and young people know that they have a right to be safe and feel safe at all times and that they can say 'no' if they don't feel comfortable doing something.**

Ways to communicate this could be:

- **Verbal** e.g. a standard announcement at the start of an activity
  - **Visual** e.g. a poster on the wall of an activity venue
  - **Written** e.g. part of a permission/consent form or information leaflet
- ✓ **Work in pairs of adults or in clear view of another responsible adult.** Avoid being alone with a child or group of children. If it is not possible to have another adult present try to ensure children are in a group.

- ✓ **Be open and transparent.** Always communicate with another responsible adult and/or the parent/caregiver of the child, particularly in situations where being alone with a child may be unavoidable. Consider:
  - The physical environment – keep doors open or choose a space that has windows, glass panels or provides a direct line of sight, to ensure clear visibility in the area. **Never lock doors.**
  - Seeking parental permission, making it clear if you will be alone with the child and why this is unavoidable.
  - Giving parents/caregivers as much information as possible about where you will be situated and the purpose of the contact/activity.
- ✓ Ensuring you can be contacted by a parent/caregiver and that the child is able to contact their parents/caregivers at all times.
- ✓ **Treat all children with equal respect and compassion.** All children deserve to feel valued and accepted regardless of their gender, race, cultural background, disability/abilities or sexuality.





## Do not

- ✗ **Do not discriminate against children** due to their gender, race, cultural background, disability or sexuality or minority.
- ✗ **Do not single a particular child/young person out repeatedly for attention**, either positively (favouritism) or negatively.
- ✗ **Do not use power or influence** to get children or young people to do things they would not otherwise do or could be uncomfortable with, or to intimidate, scare or control children and young people.
- ✗ **Do not make sexually suggestive comments** towards or in the presence of children or young people, even in jest.
- ✗ **Do not carry out your role with children or young people while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.** Do not use drugs (other than prescription medication being used as directed) in the presence of children and young people.
- ✗ **Do not supply children/young people with alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs<sup>1</sup>.** If you are a smoker, please ensure you smoke away from children and young people. It is never appropriate to serve or consume alcohol at an event specifically for children and young people, but if children and young people are present or part of an event at which alcohol is served, ensure responsible consumption is practiced by all adults.
- ✗ **Do not make statements (including on social media) or act in a way that condones, or appears to condone, drug use, smoking or excessive alcohol consumption.** Modelling safe and responsible behaviour is important.
- ✗ **Do not create or refer to a child/young person using a pet name or nickname.** Seek consent if a child wishes to be known by an alternative name.

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<sup>1</sup> It is an offence to supply alcohol, cigarettes, other tobacco products or any illicit or controlled drugs to any person under the age of 18.

## Guideline 3: Consent

Seeking parent or caregiver consent for any activities involving children and young people is important, not only to keep them safe but also to build respectful relationships with families. Open and transparent communication is an essential element of a child safe organisation and helps children, parents and caregivers to feel valued, heard and able to speak up if they have any concerns.

With increasing awareness and education about harm and risk of harm to children and young people, we now have a greater understanding of the need to seek consent for some things that we may not have in the past, such as taking and sharing photographs or engaging children in discussions which may be sensitive. The reasons for needing this consent are varied and include protecting families who have fled domestic violence, keeping children safe from online predators and recognition of children that may have experienced or currently be experiencing harm that involves abuse-related trauma.

### Do

- ✓ **Ensure you have permission from parents/caregivers for any activities that involve any risk to children or that require consent.** This includes but is not limited to: transport, taking or sharing photographs of children, activities which present a physical risk or activities which present a psychological risk such as sharing personal experiences.
- ✓ **Obtain generalised permission slips from parents/caregivers at the beginning of each year to cover any impromptu occasions where children may attend and be photographed or filmed.** This ensures that necessary permissions are in place and do not have to be sought each time such an occasion arises.
- ✓ **Where it is age appropriate, seek verbal consent from children and young people themselves before engaging them in an activity.** Always respect a child's wish not to engage in a particular activity or discussion.

### Do not

- ✗ **Do not take or keep photographs of a child on your personal device.<sup>1</sup>**
- ✗ **Do not publish or distribute photographs or images of children and young people** without first seeking permission from parents or caregivers.
- ✗ **Do not publish or distribute full names or contact details** of children without permission from parents or caregivers.

<sup>1</sup> This rule applies generally to all clergy, religious, staff and volunteers but it is recognised that there will be instances where the child is a relative of the adult. It is not intended that these guidelines would apply to prevent, for example, parents and grandparents (and possibly other relatives) having and sharing photos of relatives and close friends, in the context of appropriate consent (as outlined above).



## Guideline 4: Social Media and Other Digital Communications

Electronic communications and social media offer many positive opportunities for interacting and communicating with children and young people, an example being the Twitter account used by Pope Francis. It is reasonable that Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers may want and need to utilise electronic devices such as mobile phones, internet and social media in their ministry but it is important that this is done in a way that protects children and young people as well as the individual. Boundaries are important, as is transparency and positive role modelling.

### Do

- ✓ **Consider that comments or pictures posted online may be seen by children and young people or their parents / caregivers even if settings are private.** Ensure that communication sets a positive example by being respectful of others, not promoting illegal or abusive behaviours, and not discussing the children or young people you work/volunteer with online.
- ✓ **Use official parish, organisation or group social media pages as an effective and transparent way of communicating with children, young people and their parents / caregivers.** When using any media platforms always ensure you have read and understood key safety links, privacy policies, age restrictions and ways to report concerning online content or behaviour. Ensure that any online posts relate only to the Church, organisation or group business.
- ✓ **Respond appropriately if inappropriate contact through social media or text message is initiated by a child or young person.** Explain respectfully that you cannot communicate with them this way and suggest appropriate alternative ways to interact. If the inappropriate contact persists, discuss this with the Child Protection Unit and keep a record of any communications that occur.
- ✓ **Discuss behavioural expectations regarding online forums and provide e-safety information and resources to both the parent/caregiver and young person.** The E-Safety Commissioner has a range of resources for online safety.

### Do not

- ✗ **Do not interact with or befriend children or young people via a personal social media account, other personal online account, or via individual text message.** Group text messages, parish or group social media accounts, or messages to parents are good alternatives.
- ✗ **Do not post/publish any personal information (names, contact details,) on any online platforms including social media about children or young people you are engaged with through church activities.** Seek parental permission before posting pictures of children on social media or the internet.
- ✗ **Do not be in a 1:1 private conversation or video conference with a child or young person.** Work in pairs and ensure all communication is transparent and open.

### Reporting Concerning Online Content or Behaviour

If you have information about online predatory behaviour contact Crime Stoppers **1800 333 000** or report online at [crimestoppers.com.au](http://crimestoppers.com.au)

Offensive and illegal content complaints should be made to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner at [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au) for investigation.



## **Guideline 5:** Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries

Volunteering, working or providing ministry and pastoral care for the church may be different from performing duties for another organisation because it is likely you were part of the church community prior to commencing your role. This means that you are likely to already know at least some of the children and young people, and there may be times when it is appropriate to interact with them outside of your role. It is however important to maintain appropriate boundaries to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and safeguard your integrity.

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## Do

- ✓ **Continue any appropriate relationship/role** that you had with a child or young person or their family prior to commencing your official role in the Church, such as a family friendship. If you begin a friendship with a family whose child you are involved with via your role please discuss this with the Child Protection Unit to clarify the boundaries between your official role and any social interactions you may have with a family.
- ✓ **Interact with children and young people at Church and organisational events** in the presence of other responsible adults, including parents/caregivers. This includes any home-visits required for providing ministry.
- ✓ **Be open, transparent, and inform others if you feel there is a need to extend/adapt your official role with a child or young person, or their family, beyond what is in your original role description.** This may be appropriate if a child, young person or family is at risk or needs particular support. In this instance any meetings or home visits should involve more than one responsible person and should be carefully planned and documented. Please call the Child Protection Unit for guidance and to discuss first.
- ✓ **Keep your interactions within the scope of your role.** If in doubt about whether an interaction is within the scope of your role, refer to your position description. Remember that some issues or concerns raised by children and young people or their parents may be better addressed by a professional such as a psychologist, social worker or health professional. The Child Protection Unit can offer advice on referring children and families to appropriate support services available in the community.

## Do not

- ✗ **Do not deliberately pursue interaction or a relationship with a child or young person beyond your official role (other than continuing established relationships as previously discussed).** Accepting or extending invitations by or to children to external social events, arranging to meet a child or young person one on one, or offering to care/babysit for a child, are not appropriate interactions if you have come to know the child or young person or their family through your official role. If you feel there are special circumstances that require you to engage with a family or child in such a way, please contact the Child Protection Unit to discuss the situation in advance.
- ✗ **Do not engage in any sexual contact, activity or behaviour with a child or young person under any circumstances.** It is not possible to have any type of sexual or intimate contact between a child and an adult – any sexual interaction between an adult and a child is sexual abuse and deemed a criminal offence in South Australia. This is not limited to physical sexual interaction and includes acts such as:
  - showing children pornography,
  - encouraging a child or young person to engage in sexual activity,
  - verbally interacting with a child in a sexual manner, and,
  - using an electronic device to groom a child or young person for sexual purposes. Online grooming occurs when an adult uses an electronic device, like a computer, laptop or smartphone, to contact a child or young person with the intent to commit a sexual offence.



## Guideline 6: Transporting Children and Young People

Transportation of children and young people is not encouraged but may at times be necessary to support children or young people in getting to or from an activity, or as part of an activity.

If children are transported by Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, it is important that both the physical safety, and the risk of harm for the child or young person is considered. The following points are designed to cover both of these areas and to assist in safeguarding your integrity.

### Do

- ✓ **Ensure the vehicle is registered, roadworthy and in safe condition, and that you have a current drivers licence.**
- ✓ **Travel with another responsible adult in the vehicle.** If this is not possible inform at least one other adult and try to ensure more than one child is in the car. If more than one car is involved, travel in convoy in visible sight. If possible, inform the person at the destination when you depart so that they know when to expect your arrival.

- ✓ **Seat children/young people in the back seat** of the vehicle.
- ✓ **Obtain permission from parents/caregivers to transport children/young people.** Written permission is preferable but, at minimum, obtain verbal permission. The only exception would be if a child would be at risk of harm if the transport did not occur, and it is not possible to reach a parent or caregiver to obtain consent, for example transport to a hospital or parents are not contactable and child needs to be transported home.
- ✓ **Discuss details of the transport with a parent/caregiver** departure time and anticipated time of arrival and who else will be in the vehicle.
- ✓ **Inform another responsible adult** (in addition to the parent/caregiver) when you leave, and again when you return (this can be via phone or text message, or in person).
- ✓ **Follow Australian road rules at all times** when transporting a child or young person, including regulations regarding seatbelts and child seats and speed limits.





## **Guideline 7:** Responding to Allegations, Disclosures or Concerns of Child-Related Harm and Risk of Harm

All Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are mandated notifiers as per the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, and for those engaging directly with children this responsibility is particularly important. As well as a mandatory requirement to report suspicion of risk of harm, and/or harm, we also have an ethical / moral and pastoral care obligation to report any concerns about children and young people. This includes concerns about the behaviour or conduct of other Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers towards a child or young person.

The church is often a closely connected community in which adults have established personal relationships. It can be hard to believe that someone liked and trusted could harm children. Questioning or reporting the conduct of an individual who may be a friend, co-worker or volunteer can feel very uncomfortable, particularly if you are not sure whether harm has occurred. Unfortunately this discomfort has in the past protected abusers, and children have remained in situations where they have been harmed.



## Do

- ✓ **Attend a 'Safe Environments for Children and Young People' or equivalent training session to ensure you are familiar with the signs and indicators of the types of abuse-related trauma and how to respond and report.** Contact the Child Protection Unit if you have not yet undertaken training or equivalent.
- ✓ **Contact the Child Protection Unit for any breaches of these guidelines.** This applies to all Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees or volunteers.
- ✓ **Listen to and support a child or young person if they disclose harm or risk of harm to you.** Where possible, mask your own emotions to ensure the child/young person does not become distressed by your reaction. Tell the child or young person that you may have to tell someone what they have told you because you want to help to keep them safe, but you will not tell/approach the alleged perpetrator. Explain that being harmed by an adult is never okay, that it is not the child's fault and thank them for telling you.
- ✓ **You must make a report to the Department for Child Protection's Child Abuse Report Line (13 14 78) if you believe a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm. Call Emergency 000 if a child is at immediate risk of harm.** Refer to the 'Procedure for Child-Related Mandatory Notification Responsibilities'.
- ✓ **Believe children and young people if they disclose harm or risk of harm.** Children rarely lie about being harmed and disclosing is a sign of trust that must be upheld for that child to continue to feel safe and heard by adults. If you are in doubt contact the Child Protection Unit or the Child Abuse Report Line on 13 14 78 and err on the side of caution.
- ✓ **If you are unsure of how to respond, consult the Child Protection Unit for further guidance.** Even if you don't think you need to make a notification to the Department for Child Protection or SA Police, there may be other supports that can be put in place to assist a child or family.

## Do not

- ✗ **Do not hesitate to report suspicion of harm or risk of harm to the Child Abuse Report Line (13 14 78).** You can contact the Child Protection Unit to discuss concerns should you believe someone is acting in a way that indicates they are a risk to children. Some individuals who harm children are often 'charming' and can be trusted members of the community who are seeking opportunities to have direct contact with children, particularly in organisations which do not have appropriate policies and guidelines in place.
- ✗ **Do not investigate allegations or disclosures regarding a child being harmed, or at risk of harm, yourself. Do not approach and discuss the matter with the alleged perpetrator, as sharing this information may place the child at further risk of retribution and compromise any investigations or evidence used later in a court of law.** While it may be necessary to try to find out more information, such as a child's full name and address, for the purposes of making a report to the Department for Child Protection or SA Police, remember that it is not your role to determine whether the concern, allegation or disclosure is true or not.
- ✗ **Do not promise a child you will keep what they have told you a secret.** If a child discloses harm, or something that makes you believe they are at risk of harm, you are obliged by law to report it. Making promises you are unable to keep may damage a child's trust in adults and prevent them from making further disclosures.
- ✗ **Do not ask leading questions of a child, even if you believe they have been harmed or are at risk of harm.** Keep your questions open ended in order to allow the child to take the lead, and ensure you do not compromise any current or future investigations by the Department for Child Protection or SA Police. Call the Child Protection Unit for guidance if you are unsure what this means.
- ✗ **Do not ignore the signs of child abuse-related trauma.** Children need adults to speak out for them because they often cannot speak up for themselves. Many children have been made safer because an adult observed and reported suspicion of harm or risk of harm. Reporting any concerns to the relevant authority is an important part of our pastoral care of children and young people. If you are unsure of the types of abuse-related trauma, you can contact the Child Protection Unit for guidance.

**Child Abuse Report Line ☎ 13 14 78**  
**SA Police ☎ 000**  
**Child Protection Unit ☎ 8210 8159**

## Contact us:

The Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide Child Protection Unit shares the responsibility for all safeguarding matters relating to children and young people in the Archdiocese. The Unit is staffed by professionals who have experience in working with children and young people.

The Unit can be contacted by phoning **8210 8159** or emailing [childprotection@adelaide.catholic.org.au](mailto:childprotection@adelaide.catholic.org.au) for further guidance, advice and support.







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