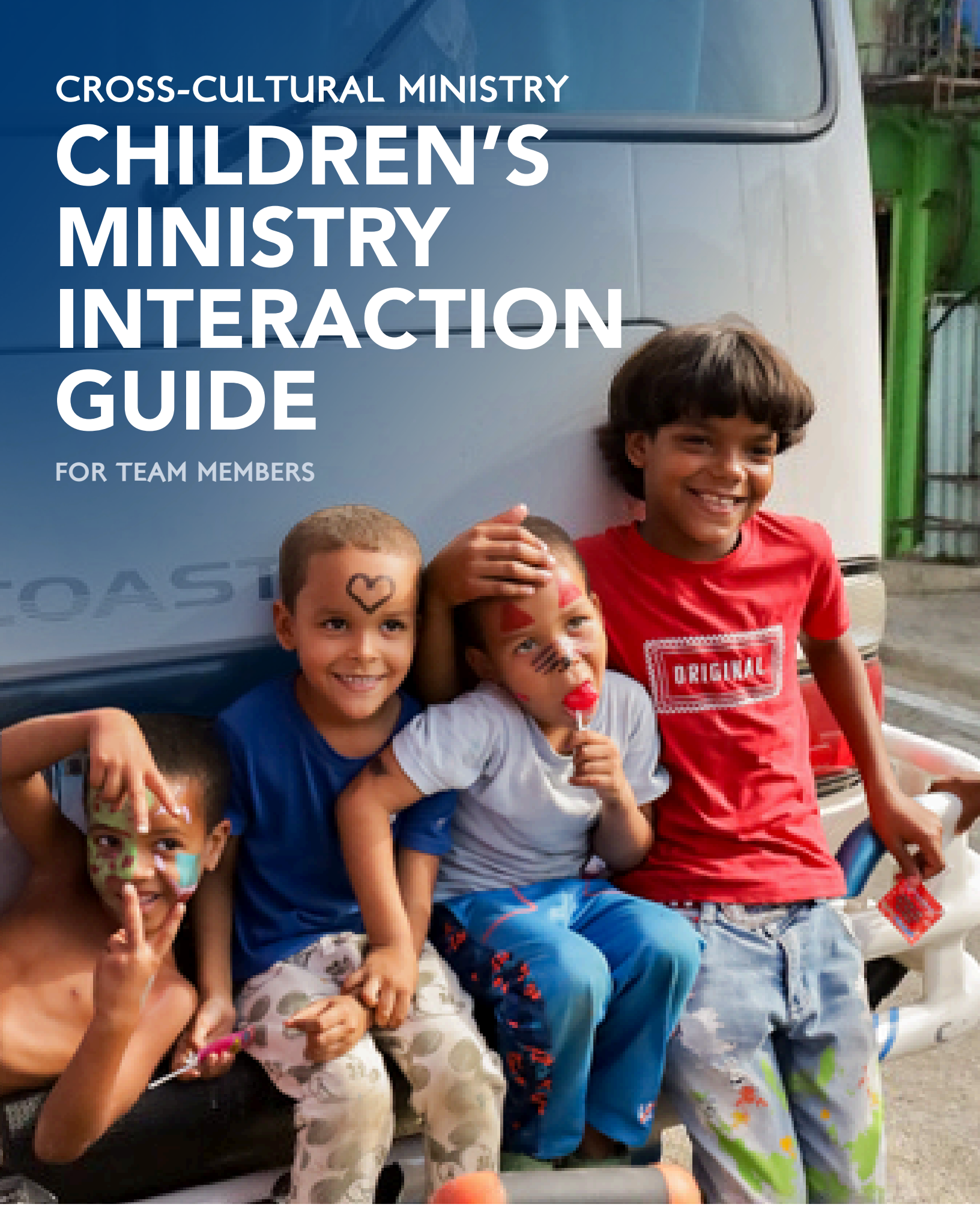
CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY INTERACTION GUIDE

FOR TEAM MEMBERS



2026 / 2027 VERSION



WELCOME!

Thank you for your commitment to serving children through overseas mission work. Working alongside children is one of the most rewarding and serious responsibilities you can carry as a team member.

THIS GUIDE EXISTS FOR THREE REASONS:

- To protect every child you encounter from harm - including unintentional harm
- To protect you as a team member from misunderstandings, false accusations, or compromising situations
- To ensure that your time on the island is mutually transforming.

A NOTE ON APPROACH:
This guide is not about distrust. It is about equipping you to serve with wisdom, skill, and integrity.

Children deserve nothing less than our very best care and intentionality.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING & PROTECTION

1.1 WHY SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

Children in overseas ministry contexts are often among the most vulnerable in the world. Many have experienced poverty, loss, abuse, displacement, or other forms of trauma. This vulnerability means they deserve an elevated standard of protection, not a lesser one.

Safeguarding is not just a policy but a reflection of our duty as Christians. If we believe children bear the image of God (Genesis 1:27), then protecting their dignity, safety, and wellbeing is an act of worship.

1.2 THE TWO-TEAM MEMBER RULE

No team member should ever be alone with a child or group of children without a second team member present. This rule has no exceptions.

TWO-TEAM MEMBER RULE

- Always maintain line-of-sight with at least one other team member when near children.
- If a child seeks you out privately, redirect the conversation to a visible, public space.
- If you find yourself alone with a child, calmly call another team member to join immediately.
- This rule protects children and you from false accusations.

1.3 APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT

Physical touch is a natural part of connecting with children, but boundaries must be clearly understood and consistently maintained.

Appropriate Contact	Inappropriate Contact
Side hugs (child-initiated)	Full-frontal hugs (team member-initiated)
High-fives, fist bumps	Kisses on the cheek or forehead
Holding hands in a group activity	Any contact with private areas of the body
Patting a child's back or shoulder	
Kneeling down to speak at eye level	

When in doubt: ask yourself, 'Would I be comfortable if the child's parents saw this right now?' If not, don't do it.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

2.1 THE DANGER OF THE SAVIOR MENTALITY

One of the most common and harmful patterns in short-term mission work is the unconscious belief that volunteers are arriving to "rescue" children from their culture or circumstances. This mindset is damaging to children, families, and communities.

Children in your ministry context are not objects of pity. They are image-bearers of God, members of rich communities with deep histories, wisdom, and strengths that predate your arrival.

Reframe Your Role

- You are a guest in this community
- You are a learner first and a teacher second
- You are a supporter of local leaders and the church
- The local staff and community are the local leaders. Your role is to serve them.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL NORMS AROUND CHILDREN

Child-rearing practices, norms around physical affection, gender interaction, discipline, and respect vary enormously across cultures. What is warm and nurturing in your home culture may be confusing, disrespectful, or even harmful in another.

Before You Arrive:

- Recognize that cultures across the world have their own norms and standards. What you know as normal may not be the case in another culture. Please come with a humbled spirit open to a new normal.

During Your Service:

- Observe. Watch how local leaders interact with children and follow their lead
- Never mock, minimize, or compare local customs unfavorably to your home culture
- Do not give gifts, candy, money, or other items directly to a child or adult. All gifts must be given to your facilitator, who will work with the local pastor to distribute them appropriately. This helps ensure that our giving supports the local church, empowers local leaders, and strengthens their ministry within the community.





CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

2.3 LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

Healthy communication with children requires extra care in cross-cultural settings.

- Try to communicate with kids while here. You may not speak the same language but a smile and trying to learn some words goes a long way. In addition, there is always someone who is bilingual with your team so please feel free to ask them to translate.
- Non-verbal communication matters: maintain culturally appropriate eye contact, posture, and gestures
- Never talk down to children - speak with respect regardless of age or language barrier
- Do not make promises you cannot keep. "I will pray for you" is a promise. "I will come back" is a promise. Mean what you say.

2.4 AVOIDING DEPENDENCY & ENTITLEMENT DYNAMICS

When volunteers consistently bring gifts, sweets, or special attention, children can begin to see outsiders primarily as sources of material provision. GO Ministries' goal is always to lift up the name of Jesus through the local church. As team members, your job is to come and empower local leaders to make disciples through assisting with ministry. Your job is not to be seen as a source of provision.

- Do not distribute gifts without consulting your facilitator first
- Never give children money or your personal contact information
- Be consistent: treat all children equally, avoiding singling out favorites
- Redirect any child who seems to be seeking individual attention for material reasons, gently and with dignity

PHOTOGRAPHY & SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

3.1 WHY THIS MATTERS

Images of children, especially vulnerable children in developing contexts, carry enormous power. Misused, they can exploit children's dignity, expose them to danger, or reinforce harmful narratives about poverty and helplessness.

The children you serve are not props for your social media content. Every photo taken must serve their dignity and wellbeing.

The Dignity Standard

- Ask yourself before every photo: "Would this child be proud to see this image shared publicly?"
- If the answer is no, or if you are not sure, do not take or share it.
- A child in tears, in poverty, or in distress is not a compelling story to share. It is a private moment to protect.

3.2 WHAT YOU MAY NOT DO

- Never photograph children in private moments: eating, sleeping, using the restroom, in states of undress, or in distress
- If a child says "no" or withdraws from the camera stop immediately and respect that boundary
- Never photograph children in their homes without explicit family consent
- Never share children's full names, locations, schools, or any identifying details online
- Never share images that depict children in illness or distress in a way that strips their dignity

3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA DURING YOUR TRIP

"Before Posting, Ask Yourself..."	"And Remember..."
Could this image identify or locate a child?	Predators actively search mission trip content.
Does this post tell the child's story for them?	Everyone has the right to own their own story.
Am I sharing this for them or for my own validation?	Motivation matters. Examine your intent honestly.

RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

4.1 THE PROBLEM OF TRANSIENT ATTACHMENTS

Forming quick and meaningful friendship is one of the most overlooked risks in short-term mission work. Your presence matters. Your departure matters too.

The Relationships That Matter Most...

- The most meaningful and lasting relationships in a child's life are often with the family and friends they live alongside, as well as the local leaders and ministry staff who are consistently present in their community.

4.2 HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP GUIDELINES

Do:

- Speak honestly about your departure when children ask: "I am only here for a short time, but [local leader name] is here and cares about you!"
- Redirect children's affection and trust toward local leaders who will remain.
- Participate in group activities rather than solely seeking one-on-one relational moments.

Do Not:

- Make promises to return if you cannot guarantee it.
- Exchange personal contact information (email, phone, social media) with children.
- Tell a child they are your "favorite" or single them out for special treatment.
- Attempt to maintain contact with specific children after your trip without ministry authorization.



4.3 MANAGING YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

Short-term mission work can be emotionally intense. You may meet children whose circumstances move you deeply. You may want to do more than the situation allows. These feelings are natural and they require healthy management.

- Daily, process your emotions with your team and team leader.
- Maintain your own spiritual and emotional health through prayer, journaling, and peer support.
- If you feel overwhelmed by a particular child's situation, speak with your team leader or facilitator.
- Avoid the impulse to "rescue" individual children through individual action - work within the ministry structure to empower the local leader which will in return help the kids.
- After returning home, debrief thoroughly with your sending church and team members.

4.4 SCENARIO-BASED PRACTICE

Review the following scenarios and consider how you would respond:

Scenario	What NOT to do:	What you CAN do:
A child asks for your phone number so you can talk after you leave.	Give it, the connection seems important and innocent.	Explain you cannot share it, point them to local leaders who will always be there.
A child pulls you aside to tell you something privately.	Follow them to have an intimate, private conversation.	Stay visible, call another team member or the pastor over, listen carefully in a group setting.
A child cries when they hear you are leaving.	Promise to come back so they feel better.	Comfort honestly: acknowledge the sadness, affirm the local leaders and pastor who stays.

SUPPORTING LOCAL MINISTRY

5.1 YOUR ROLE AS A SUPPORTER

The local ministry staff have built relationships, trust, and understanding in this community over months and years. Your role is to support, empower and strengthen their work. Not to take over, or change.

- Defer to local leaders on all decisions involving children's routines, discipline, and relationships
- Never override or publicly contradict a local leader's decision in front of children
- Ask before initiating activities: "Is there anything I should know before doing this with the children?"
- Bring your skills in service to their vision. Not your vision served by their children

5.2 LANGUAGE OF EMPOWERMENT

Avoid Saying...	Try Saying Instead...
"We went to help the poor children"	"We supported an incredible local ministry"
"Those kids had nothing, but they were so happy"	"The community showed remarkable resilience and joy"
"I really made a difference in that child's life"	"The local leaders are doing life-changing work"
"They need so much help"	"We were honored to serve alongside this community"





TEAM MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT

Child Safety

- I will never be alone with a child without a second adult present
- I will maintain appropriate physical boundaries at all times
- I will immediately report any concern about a child's safety to my team leader or facilitator
- I will not allow any person to harm or exploit a child in my presence

Cultural Respect

- I will approach this community as a learner and guest
- I will defer to local staff on all decisions related to children
- I will not distribute gifts, money, or personal contact information to children

Photography & Media

- I will not photograph or film children if they don’t want to be photographed
- I will not share any identifying information about children online

Relationship Boundaries

- I will not make promises I cannot keep to children
- I will not exchange personal contact information with children
- I will process my emotions with my team, not with the children