

# DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

## A. SAFETY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee is committed to safeguarding the well being of children and youth. The people of God have a right to be able to trust those who minister to them in God's name. The violation of this well-being through any sexual abuse by Church personnel is a source of great pain, not only for those involved, but also for the entire Church community.

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee will make every reasonable effort to prevent sexual abuse, and to respond promptly to all allegations of abuse where there is a reasonable belief that abuse has occurred. The diocese will also comply with all obligations of civil law, and support the rights of the priests, deacons, religious, and lay personnel in such matters, while upholding the right of the people to be safe and secure from risk of harm.

### Background Screening

All adults working with or having regular contact with children and youth must be fingerprinted and screened before being employed or serving as catechists, core team members, chaperones, or any other role in programs with children and youth.

- All Diocesan Employees, volunteers who work or assist with children and those who minister to the home bound are required to have a Level 2 Criminal Background Search **completed and approved** before employment or volunteering may begin. Contact your home Parish or School Office for directions on completing a background/fingerprint Level 2 Search, called VECHS.
- Allow two weeks for processing.
- All adults must be reprocessed every 5 years.

### Shield the Vulnerable

The diocese has selected *Shield the Vulnerable* (STV) as its provider for safe environment training. These educational programs are provided through online courses for those who have significant contact with children or vulnerable adults to help them recognize, report, and prevent abuse.

Adults working with children and youth:

- Complete the *Shield the Vulnerable* courses "Recognize, Report & Prevent Child Abuse" and "Detecting Predators: Guard the Children." (STV)
- May be required to take additional STV courses depending on their ministry responsibilities.
- Will be recertified through Shield the Vulnerable every five years.

The diocese and parish will keep records of all who complete this program.

### Credit Report

Any employee or volunteer who handles funds or credit cards must have a credit report completed and approved by the diocese.

## **B. STAFF AND ADULT TEAM MEMBERS**

### **Parish Youth Ministers**

- Parish youth ministers must be at least 21 years of age.
- Credit report is required for anyone handling money or using a parish/diocesan credit card.
- Youth ministers driving on behalf of the parish/diocese must be at least 21 years of age, have an approved Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) and provide declaration page from insurance provider showing proof of \$100,000/\$300,000 insurance liability coverage on the car you are driving. Motor Vehicle Report must be re-processed every two years.
- Lowering amount of required coverage after approval will invalidate your ability to drive on behalf of parish/diocese.
- Youth ministers under 25 years of age are **never** allowed to drive children and youth.

### **Adult to Youth Ratio**

- One adult chaperone is required for every 6 youths with a minimum of 2 adults. The first 1 to 12 youths require a minimum of 2 adult chaperones.
- If youth of both genders are present then the chaperones should include both genders. Group leaders should have one adult male for every six male youths and one adult female for every six female youths.
- No fewer than two adults must be present at all times during any church-sponsored youth group meeting, outreach program, retreat, trip or other activity involving youth under the age of 18.
- Adults should always work in pairs when doing outreach to youth.

### **Requirements for Adults**

- Must be 21 years of age or older. Anyone under 21 is considered a “junior core team member” and should be supervised by a trained adult when working with teens.
- There should be at least three years between the age of adults and the youth with whom they are working.
- Should be given training on policies, boundaries and responsibilities of adult leaders.
- Should be interviewed by the youth minister or pastor to determine whether youth ministry is right for that person, what is motivating that person to volunteer, and what experience he or she has.
- Should clearly understand their role in youth ministry and expectations for their behavior.
- Should have at least a yearly evaluation.

### **Formation for Adults**

Youth ministers and adult members of youth ministry teams are expected to:

- Achieve Level 1 of diocesan Catechist Certification program within three years of beginning ministry.
- Be involved in ongoing faith formation provided at the parish or diocesan level.
- Attend diocesan or parish training for youth ministry.

Parishes are expected to:

- Provide training for all members of youth ministry teams or provide access to diocesan sponsored training.

### **Conduct of Adults**

Adults should understand the pastoral needs of youth within their care and respond in Christian charity. It is the responsibility of all adults to be aware of the surroundings and behavior of others when ministering to youth.

- Adult should never be alone with a single youth in a room, home, car or other closed-door setting. If an adult finds him or herself in such a circumstance, despite best efforts to the contrary, measures are to be taken to avoid the appearance of impropriety. It is recommended that you immediately contact someone and let them know about the situation.
- If a young person wants to talk to an adult privately, the adult should find a spot where both of them are clearly visible to other people.
- Adults are not allowed to date a young person (under 21) whom they have met through youth ministry events or programs.
- While relational ministry is a very important part of youth ministry, adults should remember that youth are not peers.
- Adults should schedule one-on-one sessions or meetings, such as Confirmation interviews, with youth at times and locations that promote accountability and meet accepted standards of propriety.
- Adults should never put themselves in a position where touch may be misconstrued. The following examples are always considered inappropriate behaviors:

Extended full-body hugs

Tickling and wrestling with youth

Playing with the hands, hair, or feet of a young person

Patting young people on the bottom, chest, or genital areas

Dressing in the same room as a young person

Kisses on the mouth

- These are examples of appropriate ways to interact with youth:
  - Side hugs
  - High fives
  - Fist pumps
  - Hand shakes
- Any indecent exposure by an adult should result in immediate removal from ministry to children and youth.
- Dress should be modest and determined by the activity and should not advertise alcohol, drugs, or sexual behavior.
- Adults carry the burden of setting and maintaining appropriate physical and emotional boundaries. They never initiate sexual behavior with a minor and refuse it if the other invites or consents to it.

- Any incidents of inappropriate behavior should be reported immediately to the youth minister or pastor.
- Adults are not to speak to youth in a manner that is, or could be misconstrued as derogatory, demeaning, threatening, intimidating, suggestive, or harassing. They should not swear or use inappropriate terms or foul language.
- At no time should an adult invite a young person to his or her home or apartment for a one-to-one meeting..
- Adults working with youth should be a living example of moral values as taught by the Catholic church.
- Adults working with youth need to be very careful when sharing stories from their personal life or past about dating, sexuality, drugs, etc.

### **Junior Core Team Members**

The following guidelines have been set up for people who are out of high school and between the ages of 18 and 20. He/she functions in a leadership capacity as determined by the parish youth minister and/or pastor within the parish community. He or she follows the same guidelines established for adults on the Core Team, including background checks and Shield the Vulnerable, and understands that he or she is an example or mentor for younger youth.

Junior Core Team Members should:

- Function in a leadership capacity within their parish or community.
- Follow all the same guidelines as outlined by the parish youth minister for adult leadership.
- Understand that they are examples and mentors for younger youth and as such should always be keenly aware of their actions, attitudes, and behavior in all situations.
- Understand that their role is designed to help facilitate the youth ministry program of their parish, not the diocesan youth ministry program.
- Understand that their responsibilities are limited to their individual parish.

**Note:** *It is important to remember that most young people just out of high school do not have the maturity to understand and know the difference between their role as adults and their choice to be with youth. It is in the best interest of our high school youth that junior core team members not be allowed to take on leadership roles outside of their own parish.*

### **Counseling**

Counseling is to be left to qualified and licensed professionals. All adults working with youth should refer youth to professional counselors in cases that require more than a sympathetic listener.

- When a referral is necessary, both the parents and pastor should be notified and this should be documented for parish records.
- Adults should inform the parish youth minister or pastor in situations that present a danger to a young person. (Drugs, suicide, dangerous or illegal behavior)
- Any adult working with youth should never promise a young person that he or she would not make a necessary report but should promise to support the young person through the reporting process.

## Reporting Abuse

**Florida Statute 39.201** Mandatory reports of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect; mandatory reports of death; central abuse hotline.—

(1)(a) Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, or that a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department in the manner prescribed in subsection (2).

- Failure to report child abuse to DCF is a third degree felony.

The Florida Abuse Hotline accepts reports 24 hours a day and 7 days a week of known or suspected child abuse, neglect, or abandonment and reports of known or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult. To make a report you can -

- report online at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us/>
- call 1-800-962-2873
- use 711 for Florida Relay Services
- fax your report to 1-800-914-0004

If you suspect or know of a child or vulnerable adult in immediate danger, call 911.

## C. USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MINISTRY

The following guidelines are designed to aid youth ministers and church personnel in determining appropriate boundaries in regards to their use of technology within their professional ministerial relationships.

### Parental Permission

Be sure to have permission from a minor's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media, texting, instant messaging or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor. The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has a media release form that can be signed at the beginning of each school year. This release form is also included in the Parent/Guardian Consent and Emergency Medical Release Form.

Every effort should be made to give parents access to everything provided to their children. For example, parents should be made aware of how social media is being used, be told how to access the sites, and be given the opportunity to be included on all material sent to their children via social networking (including text messages).

### Social Networking

- Use a parish account when communicating parish business; not home or personal accounts. Adult ministers should establish separate sites, email and pages for personal and professional use.
- No personal photographs or information of parish staff or volunteers should appear on parish page/site. This includes home phone numbers, addresses, personal e-mail accounts, etc.

- Communications should be professional and are being rendered on behalf of the parish to young people.
- A minimum of two adults functioning with an official parish capacity should have full administrative access to the account/site(s).
- Both adults should be registered to have e-mail alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational e-mail addresses. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.
- There is a difference between initiating a “friend request” and accepting one. Friend requests should be initiated by the young people, not the adult representative of the parish.
- In photographs of youth activities, youth should not be “tagged” or identified by name in the photograph on a public site.

### **Texting, Instant Messaging and E-Mail**

- Use a parish, school, or organizational e-mail account when communicating parish, school, or organizational business; not home or personal accounts.
- Good judgment should always be used with text based communication tools.
- It is recommended that ministers and volunteers should maintain separate e-mail accounts for professional/church and personal communications.
- Communications should be professional and are being rendered on behalf of the parish, school, or organization to young people. Communicate only about matters relative to the ministry (i.e., parish, school, or organizational matters or pastoral care matters that are appropriate for discussion.)
- Avoid engaging in any postings/communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.
- It is recommended that clear guidelines or parameters be established with regard to times of communication between adults and young people. While young people may be on the phone/texting in the late evening hours, those who minister with young people should pre-determine a timeframe when it is too late to take a professional call or send a text message except in the case of serious urgency.
- E-mail and instant messaging should only be used with the matters that deal with one’s professional relationship. Communicate only about matters relative to the ministry (i.e., parish, school, or organizational matters or pastoral care matters that are appropriate for discussion.)
- Care should be taken to maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communication. Do not overstep the boundaries of adult/student relationships.
- Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such e-mail received from teens; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator/pastor/supervisor immediately.
- Write as though others will read what is written. Messages may easily be shared or forwarded with students and others.
- There is no such thing as a private e-mail/instant message. All such communications are organizational in nature, may be viewed by the organization at any time, and may be subject to legal action.
- Ask, “If my bishop/pastor/principal asked to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I have written?” If the answer is “yes,” do not send the message.

- E-mail can be misinterpreted. Always double check messages to see if someone reading it might read something into it that is not intended or if your message might be misinterpreted. If you think an e-mail might somehow be misunderstood, do not send it.
- Do not send messages in haste or when emotions are involved.
- If at any time you are uncomfortable with a communication with a young person, copy another adult on that conversation.

### **Personal Sites**

Personal sites of church personnel (paid or unpaid) should also reflect Catholic values. Church personnel should understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether “public” or “private.”

Ministry leaders utilizing social networking sites, either for ministerial or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves as ministers of the Catholic Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Anything that could cause scandal to the ministry should be avoided. Such may include mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music/movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, or the expression of opinions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Monitor postings from other people that may reflect negatively on you.

***Violations of these policies can result in responses ranging from denial of future access to termination of employment.***

## **D. COPYRIGHT LAWS**

- Photocopying song sheets or words of songs to make song books is against the law unless you obtain permission from the publisher. For a one time use of a song, publishers may not charge you. Always ask for permission to print the songs and acknowledge author, publisher, etc.
- Rented DVD’s containing the statement “For home use only” or “Not for public viewing” or something similar, are prohibited from classroom or other school or church broadcast use without prior written permission from the copyright owner or a statement which specifies permission granted for educational use.
- Downloading music or other media files is also a violation of copyright laws unless it is done at a legal site and a fee is paid for the right to download the file.
- Information located on the internet may be subject to copyright laws. Reproduction, reprinting, republishing and reposting require permission in writing from the legal owner except for the purpose of private use and study. Copyright and intellectual property laws are to be followed when downloading information from the internet.

## **E. HOUSING**

- Priests and seminarians are always housed separately from youth.
- Housing should always be gender-specific. If an adult must go into the sleeping quarters with a young person, especially of the opposite sex, a second adult must be present.

- Adults may not share beds, hotel rooms, or tents with youth even if more than one youth is present.
- The only appropriate setting for adults and youth to share a room is dormitory style rooms. Dormitory rooms should be gender-specific with at least 2 adult chaperones per dormitory. In this situation, it is always best to check with the diocesan director.

## F. TRIP POLICY

Trips and outings to places of cultural, educational, religious interest, or diocesan-sponsored events give enrichment to the youth ministry program. To insure the desired outcomes of such trips, youth ministers should prepare the youth for the place that is to be visited or the activity they are attending.

- A discussion should be held regarding the purpose and goals of the trip.
- The following information should be given to the parents:
  1. Name, location, and dates of the event
  2. Cost of the trip
  3. Mode of transportation to be used
  4. Name of adult in charge of the activity
  5. Parents' responsibility
  6. Youth code of behavior
- Whenever possible, bus transportation should be provided. The use of private vehicles is discouraged. When private vehicles are necessary, drivers must meet specific diocesan criteria. (see Section G)
- Leaders should discuss specific safety rules with youth before the planned activity. The group should review procedures in case of emergency or separation from the group.
- Prearranged meeting times and places should be made clear beforehand.
- Events at theme parks should always have check-in times. Parents should be notified on permission slips if youth will be allowed to enjoy the park in groups without chaperones.
- When taking middle school youth to a theme park, it is never a good idea to send them off in groups without adults. Check-in times are still necessary if groups have adults.

## G. TRANSPORTATION

### 1. Drivers

- Drivers who transport children or youth must be 25 years of age or older.
- Must have a valid, non-probationary Florida driver's license. (Out of state drivers moving to Florida are required by law to obtain a Florida license within ten days after moving.)
- Must have three years of clean driving record history or less than six points on their license within the last year.
- Must be fingerprinted and cleared for the diocese and complete online Shield the Vulnerable courses.
- Must have an approved Motor Vehicle Report through the diocesan Safe Environment Office. **Please allow at least two weeks for processing.**

- Must not have any medical condition nor be taking any medications that would impair their ability to operate a motor vehicle.
- Parishes are responsible for submitting Driver Information Forms to the diocesan Human Resources Department for a motor vehicle report (MVR). Once approved, drivers are approved for two years.

## **2. Insurance**

- Drivers must have \$100,000/\$300,000 insurance liability on the car they are driving and provide a declaration page from insurance provider showing proof of this coverage.
- Lowering amount of required coverage after approval will invalidate your ability to drive on behalf of parish/diocese.
- Employees and volunteers are not covered by parish or diocesan insurance. The driver's insurance covers any accidents when driving on behalf of the parish/diocese.

## **3. Vehicles**

- Parishes and schools may not use 15 passenger vans to transport children and youth. This includes private and rented vehicles.

## **H. MEDICAL FORMS, PERMISSION SLIPS AND MEDICATION**

- No young person may participate in a trip, diocesan event or other off-site youth activity unless the parish has a signed Parent/Guardian Consent and Emergency Medical Release Form for the specific event.
- Youth who require prescription or non-prescription medications during a church function must present a written request signed by a parent/guardian or physician before any church representative can administer medication. Medication must be in a pharmacy issued container or original packaging for over-the-counter products.
- Health is primarily the responsibility of parents/guardians. The church should be assured that the participants are in good health and able to join in activities.
- Anyone with a serious illness/injury should secure their physician's permission in writing to participate in diocesan/parish activities. Disabled youth are encouraged to participate within their capacities.
- Any activity involving a greater risk than usual to participants or which may be considered controversial should be approved by the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry, the pastor of the parish and discussed with parents/guardians beforehand. The adults should describe clearly the nature of the activity and safety precautions involved.

### **Parent/Guardian Consent and Emergency Medical Release Form**

This form should have information for the specific event which is filled in by the church. This form is to be used for all activities off the parish grounds or overnight activities regardless of who provides transportation. This form is signed by a parent or guardian.

### **Annual Medical Information Form**

Must be filled out annually and kept on file at the church. This form should be available at activities held at the parish since it contains emergency medical information.

### **Adult Consent and Release for Medical Treatment Form**

All adults going to Youth Ministry sponsored events should fill out and sign an Adult Consent Form since this form provides vital information and emergency contacts.

### **Permission for Direct Contact with Minors**

Use this form to obtain permission from a minor's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media, texting, instant messaging or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor.

***All documents including registrations, Parent/Guardian Consent and Emergency Medical Release Forms, Permission for Direct Contact with Minors and Annual Medical Information Forms must be retained by the parish for 7 years. These documents may be scanned and saved electronically.***

## **I. POSSESSION OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

- At no time during a youth event should there be possession or consumption of alcohol or use of illegal drugs by youth or adults.
- Selling or providing tobacco products to youth under the age of 18 is illegal.
- By law, youth under age 18 are not allowed to use tobacco products.
- In the event that tobacco products, alcohol or drugs are discovered at a youth event, the parents and pastor must be notified immediately.
- Adults who have firsthand knowledge of underage drinking by young people in youth group should report this to the parish youth minister or pastor. (e.g., you see a young person drinking alcohol in public setting)
- At no time should an adult give or purchase alcohol or cigarettes for anyone under the age of 21. This includes an adult being in the presence of a minor in possession or consuming alcohol. This is a crime and is grounds for immediate dismissal.
- At no time should an adult give or purchase illegal drugs for a minor or another adult.
- At no time should an adult be in the presence of youth using illegal drugs.

## **J. GUIDELINES FOR PARISH YOUTH EVENTS**

- Adult to youth ratio is 1 adult for every 6 youth but a minimum of 2 adults for 1 to 12 youth.
- The parish youth minister should never leave a youth event until all youth have left the property. If the parish youth minister will not be at an event, then the designated adult in charge would be responsible for the event and all the youth.
- **Always have two adults present until all the youth have left the activity or event.**

- No adult will be alone with a single youth in a room, car, or other closed-door setting.
- If a young person is left at a youth ministry event and must be transported home, there must be parental permission obtained for two adults to take the young person home.
- The parish youth minister and/or adult chaperone should always know the location of the youth they are responsible for. Boundaries should be set as to where youth are allowed to be, with whom, and at what times. Expectations for behavior should always be defined for parish and diocesan events.
- When youth are allowed to go off in groups without an adult (trust walks, nature walks, recreation time, theme parks) be sure that they are in groups of three or more.
- Youth and adults will not permit the use of inappropriate sexual jokes, comments, or behavior. Inappropriate remarks that belittle anyone should not be acceptable at youth/church events. We are all members of the Body of Christ and our behavior should lift each other up at all times.
- Music, movies, and television played at youth events should be monitored for inappropriate language or behavior. Movies should be G, PG or PG-13 (only when all participants are over age 13 and context of movie has been checked and deemed appropriate.) Music should not have obscene lyrics. No adult advisor should attend a restricted (R rating) movie with youth.
- No young person should be permitted to alter his or her body in any way during a youth ministry event. (body piercing, tattoos, shaved head, or hair coloring)
- A dress code should be in place for events where swimsuits may be worn.