

Youth Ministry Safety Policy and Guidelines **in the Diocese of St. Augustine**

General. Below is a basic list of things we need to remember when working with youth. This is not meant to be a complete list, but an overview of items of note in relationship to youth ministry. This document provides best practices and supplements, rather than supersedes other diocesan policies, norms or guidelines touching upon ministry to youth. This document should be made available to all volunteers who work with youth in any youth ministry program. If there are any questions, please contact the Youth and Young Adult Office at the Catholic Center (904)262-3200 ext 112.

Annual Orientation. Review policy and procedure related to abuse prevention and reporting with all volunteers annually. The most current documents are on the diocesan website. Please be sure that you are using the most current version.

Parishes should keep an updated record of all who attend *as well as the date and a copy of the sign off sheet.*

Background Screening. All adults working with or having regular contact with children under the age of 18 must have prior approval. This involves the completion of a ***Protecting God's Children*** training session, fingerprinting and complete background screening before serving as catechists, core members, volunteer, chaperones, or any other role within youth ministry programs.

“Regular contact” constitutes more than 3 hours in a calendar year. Background screening forms can be obtained from the parish secretary/business manager and/or by contacting the Office of Human Resources at (904) 262-3200 at ext. 119.

The “Two-Adult” Rule. Two “safe” (cleared a background check and trained) non-related adults must be present at all times regardless of the number of children present and regardless of whether the church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children under 18 takes place on or off premises.

Every chaperone must be in compliance with all Safe Environment standards prior to the event. Two female chaperones and two male chaperones must always be present for activities where female and male minors are present.

Adults should always work in pairs when doing outreach with youth.

Six Month Waiting Rule. Individuals interested in volunteering should be registered at the parish for six (6) months before volunteering for youth activities.

No adults should be allowed to move from one parish to another to work with youth without registering in that parish. Compliance with diocesan expectations (PGC, fingerprinting, background screening) should be verified with the Human Resources at the Diocesan Catholic Center(904) 262-3200 at ext. 119.

No Workers under the age of eighteen. Teenagers under 18 may work as helpers or assistants, but should not be responsible for younger children.

Advance Notice to Parents. Always give the parents advance notice in written form and full information regarding the events in which their children/youth will be participating. This should include details on the modes of transportation and who the chaperones will be.

Parents must give written permission anytime a child/youth will be leaving church property. Forms are available from the parish secretary/business manager or thru the HR Office or on the diocesan website.

Appropriate Volunteer Behavior (including some extracted provisions of, *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Church Works in the Diocese of St. Augustine*, revised 6/13/2005, especially Standard 3.)

1. If both male and female youth will be at the event, there must also be male and female chaperones.
2. Separate sleeping accommodations must be provided for males and females.
3. No youth is permitted to sleep in the room of an adult other than his or her own legal guardian.
4. In hotel settings youth should be housed with youth and adults with adults.
5. In dormitory housing (being 6 or more youth) chaperones may be housed in with youth, but at no time should they be in the room alone with a single youth. There should be at least two chaperones per “dorm.”
6. Priests and seminarians must always be housed separate from youth.
7. No minor should be provided with alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs or any other substance prohibited by law.
8. Adults should not consume alcoholic beverages or use tobacco products in the presence of youth at church related events.
9. Adults should not use drugs or other substances prohibited by law.
10. Adults should be living by the moral teaching of the Catholic Church. Any adult living with a boyfriend or girlfriend outside of marriage should not be permitted to work with youth.
11. No adult is allowed to date youth (under age 21) with whom they have met through youth ministry events or programs. (This includes social or group dating).
12. Adults should monitor the music, movies, and television played at youth events for inappropriate language and behavior. Movies should be G, PG or PG13 (youth over 13 only).

Music should not contain obscene language or lyrics. Always preview any music, movies or television before showing.

13. No youth should be permitted to alter their body in anyway during a Youth Ministry event. (Body piercing, tattoos, shaved head or colored hair)

Diocesan Recommendations for Chaperone Rate and Ratio. Below you will find a quick reference tool of recommended adult-minor ratios. These are strong recommendations only. Every event and activity must be carefully reviewed to determine the appropriate number of chaperones needed. All parents should be aware of the pre-determined adult-minor ratio for every event in the parental permission form. It is the responsibility of the pastor and program supervisors to determine the final number of chaperones required to safely manage the trip or event.

Middle School: 1 adult to 6 youth

High School: 1 adult to 8 youth

Best practices (as recommended by the NCYCM): Effort should be made to keep the chaperone ratio gender specific. For example, if there are 36 females and 10 boys you need at least 6 chaperones. Ideally you would have at least 5 female and 2 male chaperones.

AGE	ONSITE ACTIVITIES [Limited to a building, room or designated area – this “best practice” does not apply to religious ed. Classes. (For example, Overnight Lock-in)]	OFFSITE [For example, a parish ski trip, a youth retreat, trip to a Museum]
Birth-5yr	Parent/Guardian must be present	Parent/Guardian must be present
6-9yr	1 adult present for every 3 children	Parent/Guardian must be present
10-13yr	1 adult present for every 6 children	It is recommended that a parent or guardian is present. The minimum recommended ratio is 1 adult present for every 4 minors
14-17	1 adult present for every 8 youth	It is recommended that a parent or guardian be present. The minimum recommended ratio is 1 adult present for every 7 youth.

You must individually determine the program or activity requirements for the total number of chaperones needed based on:

- Your complete information about the activity
- The safety of the location
- The range in area that the activity covers
- The length of the trip
- The ages and abilities of the children
- The total number of children present

- Consider any limitations of chaperones present (Can't swim, health condition etc.)
- The methods of transportation
- The safety of the accommodations
- Any known or obvious dangers (*high traffic area, crowded areas, high crime areas. Consider safety of areas commonly targeted by sexual predators such as amusement parks, and water parks. Is the area near water, near wooded or secluded areas where there is a risk of a child becoming lost? Is there is an increased risk of injury such as a white water rafting trip or ski trip? Will you be traveling to or through an area with limited or no cell phone service.*)

Note: A parent may always choose to attend and supervise their own children and youth even if their own number of children exceeds the recommended adult-minor ratio.

Safe Environment Considerations for Offsite Activities. It is important to think “safety first” when organizing day trips, overnight trips, retreats and activities sponsored by parish programs. Special events outside parish property are a unique risk because they are unfamiliar to chaperones and special precautions are required

Initiate a review and approval process for all events and activities. Begin with careful planning well in advance of any activity. Consider the nature of the event. Will youth be in one location or will youth be spread out in a public area like at a ski trip or at an amusement park? Is this an overnight trip or a day activity? Is the overnight trip and activity consistent with the goals, mission and objectives of the parish, school and the diocese? Do the benefits outweigh the risks involved?

Adequate supervision. Consider how many adults can safely monitor this type of activity and set a maximum number of participants and a minimum number of required adult chaperones. If this is a co-ed trip, there must be at least two male chaperones and two female chaperones. Chaperones should be a minimum of 21 years old. Notify parents of the chaperone requirements and all details of the trip in advance (see chaperone recommendations above).

Accommodations. If there will be female and male minors present, separate overnight accommodations must be arranged. Rooms should be close enough for proper supervision. Two female adults should always be present to supervise and conduct bed checks for female minors and two male adults should always be present to supervise and conduct bed checks for male minors. Adult chaperones must be non-related. No child may stay alone in a room or tent. Halls, rooms, building exits and entrances should be closely monitored at all times.

Best practices regarding accommodations: when selecting a hotel it is advisable to consider security as well as price. Some security issues to consider:

- *Does the hotel have 24 hour on-duty security?*
- *Is access to hotel rooms restricted? (To get to the rooms you should have to pass through the lobby and “after hours” guests have to have a room card or be buzzed in order to gain entry into the building).*
- *If there is an incident at a hotel, insist that the police are called and a full report is written up - call the police yourself if need be.*

- Set up “check-in” times throughout the day, even if at the hotel for an extended period of time.

Safe environment standards and policies must be in place and observed. All chaperones in charge of supervising children (other than their own child) must complete a criminal background check through their parish, sign the Code of Conduct, sign the Sexual Misconduct Policy and have completed VIRTUS training prior to the offsite activity.

Be aware of the environment at all times and be prepared for emergencies. Chaperones must always be aware of their surroundings and stay within close view of their group at all times. Chaperones must report any suspicious or unsafe situation to the proper authorities and to the pastor or his delegate immediately. Emergency cell phone numbers and contact information should be provided in advance. Parents of the youth involved in an emergency should also be called as soon as possible. The youth minister and pastor should determine if the situation deems it necessary for all parents to be informed of an incident and/or emergency.

Obtain proper liability / transportation insurance for all events and activities.

All drivers must be at least 25 years of age. They must have proof of auto insurance with limits of 100-300-50 when they are using personal or diocesan owned vehicles to transport children.

Best practices: Drivers would preferably be over the age of 25 years of age. It would be preferable to hire a bus or other transportation company over having volunteers driving youth. The driver should never be alone in a vehicle with a youth. It is a best practice to have two adults in the vehicle.

All drivers should have completed the Diocesan Driver Information Form (available from the parish secretary or business manager or Human Resources (904)262-3200 ext 119) and have the form, photocopy of insurance card and drivers license on file at the church.

No one is permitted to be transported in 15 passenger vans. (12 passenger vans are ok.)

When renting any car or van you must request a certificate of insurance from A.J. Gallagher. All parish secretaries/bookkeepers have this form available.

If you are transporting youth, they should be assigned a vehicle, and should always be in the same vehicle. “No switching” without the drivers of both vehicles being aware of who is driving with who.

There should be a “roll call” list of who is where and copies made for each car. Roll call should be taken every time you leave. A master copy of every person on the trip’s contact information should be in each vehicle.

When hiring a bus, get a copy of the bus company’s liability form with a minimum of \$1,000,000.00 insurance and place on file at the church as well as take a copy with you in the event of an emergency.

The diocese does not carry medical insurance on sporting events, all youth participating on church sponsored sports teams must have their own personal medical insurance.

All participants should have personal medical insurance to go on any overnight events. In the event a youth has no medical insurance, the individual may purchase trip insurance from a private insurance carrier.

When renting inflatable or amusement games make sure that you receive a copy of the company's liability policy in no less than \$1,000,000.00 naming "the parish, The Diocese of St. Augustine, Bishop Victor Galeone and his successors in office" as additional insurers. This type of entertainment should be cleared through the pastor prior to obtaining these items.

Note: if you are not sure of Diocesan liability or insurance coverage in any circumstance, contact Sharyn Schultz, Property and Liability Coordinator at (904)262-3200, ext 131.

Medication administration. Supplying medications to minors of any kind, including over the counter drugs on trips is prohibited. Medication must be distributed by the parent or legal guardian of a minor.

Written permission required. Obtain written permission from the parent(s) or legal guardians of all youth who will participate on the event or activity.

Note: The Diocese of St Augustine *Standards of Ethical Conduct* should be followed at all times; this is available at www.dosafl.com under Safe Environments.

Internet / Media Policies and Procedures for Youth Ministry Leaders and Volunteers

Internet Networking Communities. We cannot ignore the internet as a tool in communication in this day and age. However, it is imperative to adhere to specific guidelines when communicating to youth via any form of media (ie: internet, AIM, texting, etc). This is not a tool to be used to befriend teens but to be used as a support in communicating effectively in the ministry.

Social Networking Sites (MySpace & Facebook). In choosing to be a volunteer or employee for the Catholic Church, you acknowledge that you understand that you are seen as a role model to Catholic Youth. With being a role model comes certain responsibilities and obligations. *"Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving."* **Eph 5:3-4**

If you chose to have a social networking page (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) it should be seen as an extension of your ministry with young people. All information displayed on the sites must reflect the Catholic faith and should not call any teaching of the church into question. This includes, and is not limited to, language, photos, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs, podcasts, and applications.

If these services are used to connect youth to the parish/school programming, youth ministry and campus ministry leaders must set up a separate site from their own (if a personal site is set up).

- No one under 18 and still in high school should be in the “Top Friends.”
- Site must be set to PRIVATE.
- Site must adhere to the parish or diocesan policy on consent to use pictures.
- The Youth Ministry Leader or Volunteer must not ‘seek’ friends, teens must request you first.
- Password must be difficult and frequently changed to avoid phishing and spamming.
- Application/features and any wall to wall posting should reflect your Catholic values
- Do not post photos or videos of youth on to your personal albums. Photos and videos of youth can only be posted on “youth group” site if parental permission has been given in writing.
- Do not tag individual youth in pictures you have posted on the “youth group site.” If youth choose to tag themselves then that is different.

Email. Youth Ministers should not use their personal email account as their “work email account.”

Best practices: The Church should provide you with a “work email account”. (E.g. avoid using yahoo.com, hotmail.com, aol.com, gmail.com etc.)

When sending out information about the Parish’s Youth Ministry program to multiple people, the receivers of the email address should be bcc (blind carbon copied).

Youth Ministers and volunteers should not contact youth via email individually, without making the parents aware of the contact. Either by cc (carbon copy) to the parents email account, or mailing a hardcopy to the parents.

Keep a copy of all communication with all youth.

AIM or any Instant Messaging Provider. Keep conversations brief, to the point and in line with VIRTUS and volunteer Code of Conduct guidelines. Save copies of conversations! If you use this as a source of communication, give out your screen name and let them contact you first.

Transparency. In all cases, we must keep communications transparent. Parents must be fully aware of all mediums being used to keep in contact with their children for ministerial purposes.

Text Messaging. All texting should be seen as any other form of communication with youth and done so within the guidelines as presented in VIRTUS training.

Photos and Videos. Do not post any photos or videos of youth without parent’s written permission.

Best practices: The best way to get parents’ permission is to add an “opt out” clause in the normal permission form stating that your son / daughter’s picture or video may be taken and put

on the parish or diocesan website. It is best not to list the youth's first name with pictures. Do not list their last name.