

06 - 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.

Safe Environment. All adults 18 years of age or older must comply with the Diocese of St. Augustine's **Safe-Environment Policy**. This includes a cleared fingerprint-background check, having completed a **Protecting God's Children** training session, and having read and signed the "Standards of Ethical Conduct for Lay Employees and Volunteers Conduct" *before serving* as catechists, core members, volunteer, chaperones, or any other role within youth ministry programs.

Note that the Florida DCF may have separate screening requirements that will also require compliance.

Information and resources are available on the DOSA website under "Safe Environment."
<http://www.dosafl.com/>

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, “Breakfast with Santa,” a magic show)]	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 adults and chaperones must be in full compliance with DOSA Safe Environment policies prior to the offsite activity. See “Safe Environment” above.

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 transporting children must be at least 25 years of age. They must have proof of auto insurance with limits of 100,000/300,000/50,000.

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.

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.

If transporting children, the vehicle to be used must meet Diocesan qualifications. Please contact Bill Ramsey in the Fiscal Office (904)262-3200 ext. 131 for approval.

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, request a copy of the bus company’s Certificate of Insurance with a minimum of \$1,000,000 of Automobile Liability Insurance, and the parish and school, if applicable, as well as Felipe J. Estevez, as Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine, a corporation sole, are to be named as “Additional Insureds” on the Certificate of Insurance. A copy of that Certificate of Insurance should be sent to the Fiscal Office, a copy should be kept 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 request a Certificate of Insurance of the company’s General Liability policy in no less than \$1,000,000, naming “the parish and school, if applicable, Felipe J. Estevez, as Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine, a corporation sole, as “Additional Insureds”. This type of entertainment should be cleared through the Pastor and the Fiscal Office prior to renting these items. A copy of the Certificate of Insurance should be sent to the Fiscal Office, and a copy should be kept on file at the church,

Note: if you are not sure of Diocesan liability or insurance coverage in any circumstance, contact Bill Ramsey, Insurance and Risk Control 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.

Approved 14 September, 2015

**/S/ Most Reverend Bishop Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine**