

Policy - Personal and Professional Conduct of All Youth Workers

Department of Youth Ministry, Diocese of Central Florida

We live in an age where sexual abuse is a reality in our society and we as the church must deal with this issue taking steps to protect our children (infants, toddlers, children, and adolescents). It is believed this policy will safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry. The policies below are to be strictly followed by all youth workers (lay or ordained, volunteer or staff) in the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida.

All Youth Workers (volunteer, staffed, lay people or ordained) must complete a four hour workshop on sexual child abuse and declare an understanding of the material covered in the workshop.

All those who work with youth shall do their best to pattern their lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ, striving in all things to be wholesome examples to God's people. Thus it is not appropriate to have people working in youth ministry whose lifestyle is an affront to the Gospel, for instance, anyone known to perpetrating fraud, a malicious gossip or someone known to be engaging in sexual relations outside of Holy Matrimony.

TEAM LEADERSHIP

A youth should never be left in the primary care of one adult. Teams of adults (male and female) should supervise youth activities. This can protect youth and the adults from false accusations and questionable situations. Furthermore it diffuses the possibility of an adult becoming a "guru" who thrives on the dependency of the youth as well as an adult having too much influence over individual youth. There should always be an adequate ratio between Adults and youth. A ratio of five youth to one adult is recommended as a minimum. (Always having at least two adults at a youth event.)

Every Youth Event should provide adequate and proper training for its team. Minor youth leading small groups should be supervised and accountable to adult leadership.

OVERNIGHT ACTIVITIES

A minimum of two adults should be present at an overnight activity. If the participants are both male and female the chaperons must be both male and female. If these conditions are not met the activity must be canceled. It is never appropriate for an adult youth worker who is not a family member to share a bed with a youth. Males and females (both youth and adult) should sleep in separate rooms at all events and have separate access to bathroom facilities. Experienced adult youth workers are to be included with adults that are newcomers to youth ministry.

TRANSPORTING

Avoid dropping off and/or picking up youth without being accompanied by another adult. Encourage families to arrange their own transportation.

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

At times when one on one interactions are needed, notify another adult of the place of consultation and with whom you are counseling. Try to counsel in a public place such as a corner of the youth room where you can talk privately but are still in plain view of others. Guard yourself against seclusion. Make every attempt to have female adults counsel female youth and male adults counsel male youth. A more favorable option is team counseling, a male and female adult team counseling an individual youth. Many times in counseling youth, issues of abuse, alcoholism, neglect and such are raised. We

need to be aware of these issues and be ready to refer the youth who have these issues to qualified professionals. We also need to be sure that we are following the legal guidelines the State of Florida has for reporting instances of abuse, neglect or any criminal actions.

AGE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION

It is not allowed to leave older minor children responsible for the care of younger minor children. (this includes Sunday School and nurseries). Older minor children can assist in supervision but must not be solely responsible. An adult's presence is required.

GIFTS

All adult youth workers are to refrain from giving personal gifts or money privately to youth without first notifying the parents and the youth ministry supervisor or clergy, remembering that gifts can be easily misinterpreted.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

All youth events are to function with an open door policy. Clergy, staff, parents, church members have a right to observe any youth activity.

SUPERVISION AND COMMUNICATION

The youth worker must meet on a regular basis with their Clergy supervisor (or in their absence the Senior Warden) to openly discuss problems, accountability, policy clarification, personal feelings and issues that interfere with youth ministry efforts.

THE BASICS

No adult youth worker is to date or be romantically, sexually, involved with a minor youth in the parish. Sexual misconduct at least can be devastating to the parties involved and can lead to civil action as well as felony conviction and imprisonment.

Screening of adult youth workers is mandatory. An interview with church leaders, the checking of references, and even an internship period are normative. Any adult with prior incidents of sexual child abuse may not be used in any capacity of a youth ministry program.

These policies shall be reviewed regularly by youth workers and as a condition of working with the youth. A copy of these policies should be signed by all youth workers acknowledging their understanding and compliance with these policies. This should be kept on file at the church.

Diocesan Youth Event Guidelines

Evaluations forms completed by participants should be developed and are to be used after each diocesan event in order to evaluate, strengthen, improve and correct aspects of all diocesan youth programs.

Anyone involved in youth ministry leadership on the diocesan level is expected to be involved in their local parish/mission. Young people who are not actively involved in their local youth group will not be considered service on diocesan youth committees.

All diocesan youth events must provide 8 hours of scheduled time for sleep on all overnight events.