Retreat Guidelines

Professional Boundaries

Follow school and diocesan policies for safe environment and programs:

- Every adult working on a youth retreat in the Diocese of Columbus must be in compliance with diocesan policies established for creating a safe environment for children and teens.
- Guest presenters or retreat leaders from outside the diocese must prove compliance with their diocesan standards.
- The school or parish is responsible for providing the proper ratio of adult supervision and chaperoning.

Guest speakers or retreat leaders must be pre-approved by the Catholic High School Principal or pastor for parish youth retreats.

All physical contact with students must be appropriate, respecting personal and emotional space.

Retreat models that have copyrighted status must be respected and used appropriately.

- Most retreat models sold in books are free and open to modification and probably should be modified to fit your situation.
- National or international models like Kairos, TEC, Search and others, generally have a set manual and should be used as written. The integrity of the model must be respected. Any major changes in the model should be approved by the national office if one exists.

Parents should have prior information about the theme of the retreat and some basic program content information on what their child will be doing.

Students should receive a list of rules and expectations before the retreat begins and should understand the consequences for disregarding the rules.
Emotional Boundaries

All interactions must be based on honesty and respect.

Retreat leaders must not attempt to manipulate, confuse, or intimidate a young person.

- Any display of emotion or faith expression must be authentic and not coerced.
- A young person should not be left to feel “outside the experience” or “odd” because he or she is not experiencing the retreat in the same way as others or expressing himself or herself in the same ways.
- A retreat is not successful just because everyone cries or has a dynamic outward spiritual experience. Any expression of emotion should be authentic and not manipulated.
- No one should feel compelled to share if he or she doesn’t want to and should not feel compelled to share anything they are not comfortable sharing.
- Confidentiality about what is shared is important to stress. But let the teens know in advance that confidentiality is waived if the person sharing is at risk for self- harm, harm by someone else, or harming another.

The retreat leaders need to have a protocol ready in the event a young person discloses a serious risk behavior or demonstrates the need for professional counseling or spiritual help.

- Steps to respond to a crisis situation should be prepared in advance.
- A list of referral agencies or counselors should be available.

Retreats should be constructed and presented in such a way that the entire experience isn’t emotionally charged and draining.

- The retreat schedule should have a mix of fun, games, serious presentations, sharing, prayer—communal and individual, interaction, breaks, silence, worship, and other balanced activities.
- The retreat schedule should allow for proper rest and should never deprive participants of needed sleep. Typical sleep time is eight hours.
Competency boundaries:

Adult retreat leaders must be spiritually and emotionally healthy persons who have demonstrated competency in leading youth retreats. They must understand the basic principles of ministry with young people and adolescent development.

Adult retreat leaders must keep teaching and discussion within the official teaching of the Church.

Adults must know their limits in terms of dealing with crisis issues and refer when a situation is beyond their levels of training and expertise.

Presentations and witness talks should be appropriate to the retreat experience:

- The assigned theme or outline should be covered.
- Witness talks can share a personal story but any stories of loss, loneliness, broken relationships, or distance from God need to show how the speaker got through the darkness and found a sense of hope, or is working to do that. If the speaker didn’t get past the darkness, then the talk is probably not appropriate. Talks should give hope and not leave the listeners with a feeling of hopelessness.
- Not all witness talks should be focused on a bad experience or sad experience.

Peer leadership (teen leaders) is a valuable asset for youth retreats with the following recommendations:

- Witness talks given by teens should be previewed by an adult leader.
- Teens are never given responsibilities reserved for chaperones.
- Teen leaders must be mentored and prepared for their retreat roles by the adult leaders.
- Teens can be very effective as small group co-leaders when paired with a capable adult.