



# Protection of Children and Young People

pcyp@diosav.org · 912.201.4100

Dear Program Director, Parent or Guardian:

The Diocese of Savannah thanks you for encouraging and allowing your child to volunteer at our churches and schools! Volunteer ministry is vital to the Church and we all receive spiritual blessings and renewal when we give selflessly of our time and talent.

We take the protection of children very seriously, including your children. Because misunderstandings can happen, we ask that before your child begins to volunteer, they understand how they can also become protectors of other children, and protect themselves as well from any misunderstood behavior.

The director of the program your teen will be helping with has reviewed the guidelines with your child, and we encourage you to be familiar with them as well. These guidelines have been developed to give guidance to your child in the event they are put in a situation where they may notice boundary and grooming behaviors. At the same time, your child will also understand that those same behaviors should not be forced upon them, and they should not behave in the same manner with other youth they are working with.

Thank you for your support. Thank you for helping us by being the eyes and ears that keep children safe.

Joan B. Altmeyer

Director Safe Environment





## Youth Volunteer Guidelines

### Understanding Safe Environments and Code of Conduct

#### How to Understand Your Role as a Protector of Younger Children

As a volunteer, you will be helping children younger than yourself. Those children will look up to you as an authority figure. The main way you can protect them is to understand Boundaries.

- Respect personal boundaries
- Recognize your boundaries
- Realize someone else's boundaries may be different

#### **What are Boundaries?**

Boundaries give us a sense of 'self.' Boundaries bring order to our lives and help us decide how we will allow others to interact with us. Boundaries keep us safe.

*Can you think of any boundaries you have?*

*How do you feel when a loved family member greets you with a hug?*

*How do you feel when a 'not-so-close' friend wants to look in your school locker?*

#### **Boundary Concerns**

There are different ways boundaries protect ourselves from harm, and they vary depending upon who we are interacting with. The following terms help us understand some of the negative ways boundaries can be broken.

- **Unsafe Touch**  
A touch that harms an individual physically, sexually or psychologically
  - A punch to an arm
  - Rubbing someone's lower back
  - Pushing someone aggressively
- **Peer Pressure**  
The strong influence of a group – especially young people – on members to behave as everyone else does

*Can you think of any time that a friend has punched or bullied another person?*

*How do you feel when you witnessed your friend's behavior?*

*Did you feel like the other person deserved to be treated that way, or did you feel bad for the other person?*

You can help! By understanding when different boundaries are appropriate, limits can be set to protect others and to protect you.



### **Boundaries change for different relationships.**

Each of these groups have different boundaries:

- *Yourself and your parents*
- *Yourself and your teacher or coach*
- *Yourself and your siblings*
- *Yourself and your close friends*
- *Yourself and younger children*

Know your limits, and recognize signs in others for what their limits are.

*How many differences can you think of?*

*Which relationships would be allowed in your bedroom at home?*

*Which relationships would be allowed to share a table with you at Vacation Bible School?*

*Which relationships would you ride in a car with?*

### **Limits are important.**

Boundaries must be kept appropriate because they both protect the child and protect you from being falsely accused of violating a boundary.

### **How do you know when others are violating boundaries?**

As a protector of the children you work with, be on the lookout for **Suspicious Behaviors**.

- Lack of respect
- Harassment
- Stalking
- Giving Gifts

People who mean want to harm others will often use these behaviors as a way to gain a victim's trust. Often the victim will not complain if their boundaries are being violated.

If you witness this behavior, whether from a caretaker or another child in your care, tell the adult in charge immediately so they can stop that behavior.

*Which of these times should you report a suspicious behavior to an adult in charge?*

1. *When you see a teen or adult volunteer stand in the hallway outside the restroom while children are inside*
2. *When you see a teen or adult volunteer holding hands with a young child who is crying*
3. *When you see a teen or adult volunteer bringing candy to their favorite children without permission from the adult in charge*



*(If you chose #3, you got it right!)*

### **The Hard Part - Reporting Bad Behaviors**

It's important to trust your instincts. You will have a 'gut feeling' when something doesn't seem right. If you feel this way, and even if it is discovered nothing bad is actually happening, you should always report suspicious behaviors.

Avoid thinking

- *'I think I can deal with it myself'*
- *'I'm not sure exactly what happened'*
- *'It was my fault because I did something to cause it to happen'*
- *'I don't want to get anyone in trouble. I don't want to be a snitch or a rat'*
- *'I don't want to be blamed for what happens'*
- *'I don't want to upset my parents, family, friends or teachers'*

Even if nothing bad is happening, it is the job of the adult in charge to stop the boundary violation. You will not get in trouble for bringing this to the adult's attention, and you are still protecting the child. You are not 'tattling' on anyone, you are protecting someone. The adult in charge can help both the child and the teen or adult who initiates the boundary violation to understand why the behavior is wrong.

### **Who do you report to?**

There will be an adult in charge of the volunteer ministry you are helping with. Always report to that person first. If you cannot talk to them, talk to one of the priests at the church or teachers at the school.



Understanding that you are very important! You are helping the children you are working with and you are also helping your church or school. Please let us know you understand this by signing this page and giving it to the adult in charge on the first day you show up to volunteer. Thank you for your volunteer ministry!

**Agreement**

I have read and understand the importance of boundaries and limits when working with children, and promise to make certain the children in my care are as safe as possible.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or Guardian**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_