

## Ministry with Minors

### General Information

Minors, those who have not reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, are to be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as 'restricted individuals.'

Minors are not independent when participating in youth activities directed by the parish or diocese. Wherever they are and whatever they do is to be with the explicit knowledge of the parent(s) or legal guardian(s), respecting the boundaries that are listed here and expected between an adult and a minor.

Minors are subject to specific Civil Laws in their own proper state and city which may prohibit certain activities. They are not adults and are not permitted unfettered decisions.

### Ministry to Minors

- Professional attitudes and relationships are observed with minors at all times.
- Two or more adults must be present in all situations involving minors. The ratio of adults to youth is never less than two.
- Adults are not alone with a minor in:
  - A home;
  - A closed room;
  - One-on-one games or sports;
  - A locker room or any other dressing area; or
  - A vehicle.
- Boundaries are respected in interactions with minors. Avoid the following:
  - Inappropriate physical touch;
  - Any form of excessive familiarity; or
  - Inappropriate language or topics of conversation.
- Whenever working with or in situations involving minors, adults will not:
  - Supply / serve alcohol;
  - Supply / serve controlled substances; or
  - Consume / use alcohol or controlled substances.
- Pastoral Counseling should only be conducted by a cleric, a licensed social worker, or a trained pastoral counselor.

## Communications with Minors

With the explosion of technology use among minors as well as adults, the following guidelines serve to clarify safe measures in communications between any adult having contact with minors within our diocese and between minors and youth ministers and teachers.

- Always avoid the appearance and opportunity for secrecy.
- The same boundaries observed in oral / personal communication should be adhered to when communicating via messaging.
- Friend / connection requests should be initiated by the minors, not the adult.
- Phone communication with minors should be minimal and only used to exchange needed information.
- Adults should maintain separate e-mail and social networking accounts for professional / Church Organization and personal communications.
- Written permission (from parents or legal guardians of minors) must be obtained prior to posting photographs, or other personally identifiable information of minors on the organization's website.
- Parents or legal guardians of minors must be informed that a social networking site is being utilized as a part of the Church Organization.
- Prudent judgment should always be used with text based communication tools. As with verbal communication, some individuals may misunderstand or misinterpret meaning and emotion.
- Parents or legal guardians of minors must be informed of the use of messaging for communication purposes with minors by the Church Organization.
- Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such messaging received from minors; instead, make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator / pastor / supervisor.

Reference: *Social Networking / Technology Directives*, Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, March 2011. *Used and cited with permission.*

## Overnight Youth Events

- All chaperones / drivers must attend a Safe Conduct In-service and sign a background check release form **prior** to the event.
- All appropriate forms must be completed and submitted to the lead staff person.
- One copy of the appropriate forms should travel with the lead staff member and a copy should stay in the parish / school office.
- The ratio between chaperones to youth should be age appropriate. A younger age necessitates a higher ratio of adults to children.

<u>Recommended Ratios</u>	
High School Events	1 Adult / 8 youth
High School Overnights	1 Adult / 6 youth
Junior High Events	1 Adult / 6 youth
Elementary / Preschool	1 Adult / 3-5 youth

- If the participants in the event are male and female, chaperones of both sexes must be present.
- Adults should consider themselves working during the entire event.
- When staying in a hotel, youth should be paired up with an “age appropriate buddy.” Chaperones must be informed of the youth’s whereabouts at all times.
- At no time should an adult chaperone be a buddy for anyone younger than themselves.
- Youth and young adults under the age of 25 should not transport other youth in a vehicle during any Church / School related / sponsored event.
- Youth should be assigned rooms according to the same gender. Youth cannot be present in rooms assigned to the opposite gender.