

Instruction Concerning Interactions with Minors and Vulnerable Adults

Effective July 1, 2018

The public and private conduct of clergy, staff, and volunteers can inspire and motivate people, and can draw them to the Church, but it can also scandalize and undermine the people's faith. Clergy, staff, and volunteers must at all times be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They must also know that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry.

Working with minors is a special joy, but also carries special responsibilities. No one should ever compromise a minor's innocence or tarnish his or her openness to good relationships. Jesus preached:

*Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.
But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones who have faith in me,
it would be better for him to have a millstone hung round his neck
and be drowned in the depths of the sea. Mt. 18:5-6.*

While adult interactions with minors must be tailored for the particular context and individual, some guidelines and consideration can inform good ministry practices.

1. Minors look to adults for examples of appropriate behavior. *Actions speak louder than words. Adults should model the virtues of humility, chastity, and meekness. They should treat others with respect and courtesy; practice compassion; employ appropriate language; and avoid sexualized humor, language, or conversation. They should, in every regard, model honorable behavior, modesty, and relationships.*

- a) Those working with minors should generally not discuss their own sexual activities or desires, nor should they solicit such information from a minor.
- b) Humor regarding sexual issues usually models a lack of respect for men or women, or for sexual activity itself, and is never appropriate.
- c) Those working with minors should never express sexual desires for an individual who is not their spouse, or a desire to commit immoral acts with others (e.g. use illegal drugs, view sexual materials, drink alcohol with a minor, etc.), regardless of their marital status.
- d) Although there may be exceptions, generally, alcohol should not be present at youth ministry events when individuals under the age of 21 are present.
- e) Those working with minors should never create, discuss, or view pornography in any working environment especially any place where minors are located.

2. Some minors have had unhealthy experiences with relationships in the past. *Minors interpret actions through the lens of prior experiences and immature understanding. The laying on of hands and the embrace of fellowship are sacramental signs of Christ's love and healing. Human touch is part of the life of the Church and part of ministry. Yet, human touch can play other roles, some of which are disordered or sinful. Most understand the difference between appropriate and gracious touching that signifies fellowship, forgiveness, compassion, or the love of Christ, and touching that is sexual or capable of being perceived as sexual. Everyone in ministry with minors should carefully consider the character of their physical contact with the minors they serve.*

- a) Hugs or handshakes should generally be brief. However, if an adult is providing grief-counseling or other deeply emotional support, longer contact might be appropriate. Adults should remember that if a young person is pulling away from the adult, then the adult has "hung on" too long, and should immediately take the cue that shorter or less physical contact is more appropriate for that individual. In many

situations, it is wise for the adult to ask the individual, "Would you like a hug?" and then abide by the response.

- b) Other forms of touching, while rare, might be necessary in unusual situations. Examples include carrying a child who is injured, assisting a child who is ill, and bandaging a wound. In all cases, adults should focus on abiding by the minor's wishes when possible, and on attending to the minor's best interests.
 - c) Except in the case of swimming and other water activities, those who work with children should be modestly dressed.
 - d) Clothing worn by those who work with children and young people should be modest and appropriate to the activity or situation. For example, a low-cut top for women, or a muscle shirt for men, is not appropriate for an individual leading a youth activity.
3. *One-to-one ministry requires extraordinary judgment and care.* *Good ministry is about relationship. While Church relationships often occur in groups, they sometimes occur in two-person dialogues. Carefully weigh the signals and risks before getting involved in any one-to-one encounters. Might such an encounter be confusing to the young person? Where is the least confusing site for such a meeting? Is an office with the door open a better site than a restaurant? Is a car ever an appropriate site? Is significant travel alone with a child ever appropriate? Does a pattern of gifting a child suggest favoritism or relationship grooming? Does a one-to-one meeting put the minister at risk for a false accusation? Interactions with minors must both be appropriate and appear appropriate.*
- a) Giving rides to or gifting one minor consistently can be viewed as favoritism by both that minor and also other minors. It can also provide a gateway to immoral conduct.
 - b) A minor who asks for a one-to-one consultation should receive that support in a manner that allows the minor to feel supported but also to leave at anytime. For instance, a youth minister who is asked a difficult question on the way home from a youth activity might state, "Julie, I can see you want to talk about this more, but it's late and I want to get you home. Why don't we meet tomorrow at the Church and we can talk more?"
 - c) It is generally advisable to copy other Diocesan or Church staff on electronic communications with minors. Activity on Church Facebook sites should be accessible to more than one member of Diocesan or Church staff, and emails and texts should generally copy another Diocesan or Church staff member.
 - d) Frequently texting, emailing, or "Facebooking" a minor can be a sign that an inappropriately close relationship is developing between an adult and a minor. Adults who find themselves in one-to-one communication with a young person should immediately seek the assistance and oversight of another adult member of Diocesan or Church staff.
 - e) It is never appropriate to allow minors to have overnight stays in the residence of a member of clergy, a staff member, or a volunteer, and is never appropriate to allow them to share a bed in these circumstances.

4. Minors can have difficulty articulating their discomfort. Adults must be alert to a minor's physical and verbal cues because minors are often unskilled in identifying and protecting their own boundaries.
 - a. Give minors a safe way to "opt out" of working with a staff member they seem hesitant about. In some cases, there might not be any particular problem with the staff member, but the adult might remind the minor of a difficult or scary experience in their past. Allowing minors a choice gives them the opportunity to get to know the staff member at a more gradual pace and on their own terms.
 - b. Indirect cues should trigger further inquiry. In most cases, if a minor indicates a desire to avoid a particular staff person, other staff should follow up to find out if there has been any inappropriate behavior on the part of the staff person.

5. Minors can either exaggerate or trivialize incidents. While adults must take every complaint seriously, they must also verify facts before reaching conclusions.
 - a. Clergy, staff, and volunteers who receive a complaint of sexual misconduct must immediately consult the Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Policy and report the complaint consistent with that policy.
 - b. In order to protect the privacy concerns of the alleged victim, individuals who report complaints must never share details of the complaint with others without the expressed permission of the Vicar General, Chancellor, or Diocesan Director of Human Resources.
 - c. In order to protect the reputation of alleged offenders who might later be found not to be at fault, individuals who report complaints must never share information outside the reporting requirements.

6. Minors deserve personal privacy. Although most Church and Diocesan activities are in group settings, there are times when a minor needs individual attention. Such times may involve counseling a minor, or giving a minor physical care or assistance. In these situations, adults should provide such care with the needs of the minor remaining paramount and with due consideration to the appearances of propriety.
 - a. While there are few exceptions, minors should be given total privacy when performing activities that involve disrobing, such as showering, changing clothes, and bathroom activities.
 - b. If assistance with any form of bodily issue is absolutely required, this assistance should be given by an adult of the same gender as the minor, and more than one adult should be present in the immediate vicinity.

Diocesan clergy, staff, and volunteers should also refer to the Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Policy for more information regarding these issues.

Protection of the Vulnerable

Protection of vulnerable adults is also included in this Instruction, since many of our ministries involve interactions with vulnerable adults. The *Instructions Concerning Interactions with Minors and Vulnerable Adults* applies not just to minors but also vulnerable adults. If you suspect abuse of any type, including physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological neglect or abandonment, inform your parish priest. It is your responsibility to report suspected abuse to them AND to notify the Department of Family Services and/or the local police /sheriff.

EMPLOYEE'S / VOLUNTEER'S AFFIRMATION

Proper care of and example to minors and vulnerable adults is extremely important. As clergy, employee or volunteer, I promise to strictly follow the Sexual Misconduct Policy and give careful consideration to the *Instruction Concerning Interactions with Minors and Vulnerable Adults*, which I acknowledge and I have read, as a condition of my providing services to the minors and vulnerable adults of our Diocese.

As a cleric, employee or volunteer, I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Use positive reinforcement rather than criticism, competition, or comparison when working with minors or vulnerable adults.
- Refuse to accept expensive gifts from minors or their parents without prior written approval from the pastor or administrator.
- Refrain from giving expensive gifts to minors without prior written approval from the parents or guardian and the pastor or administrator.
- Report suspected abuse consistent with the Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Policy.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.

As a cleric, employee or volunteer I will not:

- Smoke or use tobacco products in the presence of minors or vulnerable adults.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol at any time while in a ministry role.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of illegal drugs (including medical marijuana) at any time.
- Pose any health risk to minors or vulnerable adults (e.g., no fevers or other contagious conditions).
- Strike, spank, shake or slap minors or vulnerable adults.
- Humiliate, ridicule, threaten, or degrade minors or vulnerable adults.
- Touch a minor or vulnerable adult in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Use any discipline that frightens or humiliates minors or vulnerable adults.
- Use profanity or other inappropriate speech in the presence of minors or vulnerable adults.
- Engage in frequent one-to-one personal or electronic communications with a minor without the knowledge of a member of Diocesan or Church staff.
- Acquire, possess or distribute pornographic images of minors under the age of 18.
- Introduce sexually explicit or pornographic topics, vocabulary, music, recordings, films, games, websites, computer software or entertainment to a minor or vulnerable adult.

I understand that as a cleric, employee or volunteer working with minors or vulnerable adults, I am subject to a background check, including criminal history. I understand that any action inconsistent with this Code of Conduct or failure to take action mandated by this Code of Conduct may result in my removal from ministry with minors and vulnerable adults and other disciplinary actions.

Cleric's / Employee's / Volunteer's Printed Name

Cleric's / Employee's / Volunteer's Signature

Date: _____