

Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Safe Environment Program

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT WHEN INTERACTING WITH A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

The diocese's clergy, religious, employees, and volunteers working in and on behalf of its schools, parishes, Offices of Catechesis and of Youth Ministry, and other diocesan programs or agencies engage in extensive services with and counseling, educational, and spiritual ministries to children and young persons ("children"). Children are dependent on adults, particularly adults in positions of trust and leadership. It is vitally important, therefore, that reasonable prudence be exercised by all adults who perform services on behalf of the diocese which involves interaction. The following is a set of practical guidelines for conducting yourself which must be observed by all clergy, religious, lay employees, and volunteers of the diocese when dealing with children. These guidelines are not intended to prevent you from performing your service or ministry but rather to assist you in employing good sense when interacting with children. If you find it necessary to depart from these guidelines due to some extraordinary circumstance, you should be aware of your departure and must be able to justify your actions. If one-on-one involvement with a child is unavoidable, you must use extreme discretion in your dealings with the child.

Definition - Child or Children - Anyone who has not yet reached his or her eighteenth birthday. All clergy, religious, lay employees, and volunteers of the diocese will observe the following guidelines when engaging in ministry to or otherwise interacting with children:

1. Children under eighteen (18) years of age who are not relatives may not stay overnight in a parish rectory in the diocese. No one, except priests, may live in a rectory on a long-term basis, that is, for more than a few days. Exceptions may be made for housekeepers who have worked in a rectory in the diocese for twenty (20) years or more and, of course, for members of a priest's immediate family.
2. Avoid physical contact with a child. Never engage in any corporal punishment. In situations where physical contact is necessary and proper, such as in sacramental preparation, use sound discretion and moderation. If a child initiates innocent physical contact out of acceptable affection, an appropriate response is proper if not prolonged.
3. Except in unavoidable circumstances that require otherwise, for example a pre-school student who needs assistance in the restroom, do not be alone with a child in a residence, school, sleeping facility, locker room, rest room, dressing facility, or other closed area.
4. Any one-on-one counseling, tutoring, training, or other assistance or service with a child must be conducted in an open room setting without closed doors, except for a door with a window, and only if readily observable by others who may be in the room or in the hallway outside the room.
5. Seek responsible adults to be present at events involving children, such as games and athletic activities.

6. Youth group trips and school field trips must have enough adult chaperones, preferably of the same sex as participating children, to provide adequate supervision based upon the type of activity. Adult chaperones should supervise in opposite sex pairs whenever possible.
7. Never take an overnight trip alone with a child.
8. Topics or vocabulary that would not be discussed or used comfortably in the presence of parents should not be discussed or used with children.
9. Alcohol, in the form of wine, may be given to those under the age of 21 only in very limited quantity and only in preparation for First Communion. Otherwise, never provide alcohol to anyone under the age of 21. Alcohol should not be used by adult supervisors or chaperones if activities with or responsibilities for children are scheduled.
10. Always maintain a professional posture in dealing with children. Avoid unwarranted emotional attachment and be aware of the attraction that children may have for adults in positions of authority and trust. If you perceive emotional or physical attraction developing, refer the child to another qualified adult, particularly in counseling situations.
11. If one-on-one counseling, tutoring, or other training or care of a child requires frequent or regular appointments, parents should be notified that these appointments are occurring and provided the schedule of appointments. If you believe the subject matter properly precludes notification, you must consult with and receive the approval of your supervisor on the local or diocesan level before engaging in such appointments.
12. The following lodging standards which apply to hotel and dormitory room accommodations for adults and children who participate in overnight events. These standards have been followed in practice for diocesan youth ministry events and are now committed to writing to promote a uniform set of guidelines for use in the diocese. These standards are consistent with the model proposed by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry which discourages the rooming of adults with children. The Office of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend endorses this position.

A. Hotel Rooms

A typical hotel room is a room consisting of at least two beds with quad occupancy. No adult shall room with or occupy the same hotel room with a child except in the case of a parent and the parent's child(ren) only; in the rare case where a child may need the presence of an adult for medical reasons; or, in the event that unscheduled and unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of event participants occur which necessitate at least two adults to occupy the same hotel room with at least two children. A married couple may share the same hotel room, with or without their children, assuming appropriate facilities are available, but no other mixed gender hotel room arrangements are allowed. Adult participants should room in proximity to the rooms occupied by children, either by staggering rooms across from or next to those rooms occupied by children. Adults may conduct brief bed checks of hotel rooms occupied by children only at pre-determined times.

B. Dormitory-Type Accommodations

Adults and children of the same gender may occupy dormitory room type accommodations provided there is a minimum of two adults and four children per room and no separate accommodations are available for the adults. Adults must establish separation barriers or privacy zones in the dormitory room which shall include a temporary blanket or sheet wall when possible in order to keep their sleeping and dressing area separate from the child area. No mixed gender dormitory room arrangements are allowed.

C. Respect of Privacy

Adult participants must respect the privacy of child participants in situations such as changing clothes, taking showers, etc. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations. Other than for pre-determined bed checks and the limited time necessary to assist children in settling into or vacating from their rooms, an adult participant should not intrude into a child's room or designated area except to the extent that health, safety or Behavior Code enforcement require.

D. Non-Conforming Conduct

A Behavior Code which describes expected conduct of trip participants, including disciplinary action for violations, should be developed and communicated at the local level to all participants in advance of the overnight trip. In addition, before the overnight trip occurs, all child and adult participants should be made aware of the consequences for non-compliance with these lodging standards. Such consequences shall include a requirement that individuals who violate the lodging standards may be required to return home early, if practical, and be denied the opportunity to participate in future overnight events.

13. All of us have an obligation to take appropriate steps to protect children, particularly when they are in the care of the church. If you observe another adult violating these guidelines or engaging in other conduct which causes you to have reason for concern for the well-being of a child, you should confront that adult in a forthright manner and report your concerns to your supervisor, pastor, or a Vicar General. If you have reason to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred or is occurring, you must follow the diocesan policy on reporting incidents of child abuse to civil authorities and report the matter to your supervisor or Vicar General at (260) 422- 4611.