



DIOCESE
OF ST. PETERSBURG
Office for Youth and
Young Adult Ministry

Protocols:
Ministry to Adolescents
Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL

1. Children and youth –referred to here as “adolescents”–should always be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as the “restricted individuals” they are, that is, they are not independent. Wherever they are and whatever they do should be with the explicit knowledge of their parents or guardians. Also, they are subject to specific Civil Laws which may prohibit certain activities or which require certain curfews. They are not adults and are not permitted unfettered decisions. Any and all involvement of youth ministers, catechists, aides or other adults with adolescents should be approached from this premise.

Confidentiality is to be kept unless the young person is in danger of harming him/herself or someone else.

2. Caution and professional attitudes are to be observed in all interactions with adolescents. All adults and aides of post high school age but below the age of 21 years who may have the care and responsibility of an adolescent must be screened by the Diocesan Safe Environment Program Office. This screening process involves a Level 2 criminal background records check using fingerprints and successful completion of a Safe Environment Program training session before being granted access to adolescents in any program within the Church.

Discipline should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

3. Youth ministers or aides of post high school age must be under the supervision of a screened adult (who is 21 years of age or older) when performing ministry functions. These youth ministers or aides should be monitored and guided as regards their leadership techniques and to insure that local and diocesan policies are followed.
4. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister should never be alone with an adolescent neither in one’s own home, nor in the home of the adolescent, nor in any closed room whatsoever.
5. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister may engage in games or sport activities with adolescents only when another screened adult is present to help supervise. Proper clothing for activities is required for both youth and adults.

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6. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister should never be present as the only adult in a locker room or in other dressing areas when adolescents are using such facilities. The privacy of youth in situations such as changing clothing and taking showers is to be respected. Intrusion should be made only to the extent that health and safety require.
7. Youth ministry trips should have a sufficient number of screened adults to chaperon adolescent youth. If the group includes both boys and girls, then sufficient screened adult chaperons of both genders should accompany the youths. One adult per every 7 youth is the ratio when high school youth are involved. One adult per every 5 youth is the ratio when junior high school youth are involved. It is always a safe practice to have at least two adults in an area where one or more youth are present.
8. Use caution in transporting youth by vehicles. Parishes are responsible for screening the driving records through the Diocesan Safe Environment Program Office of anyone driving adolescents or youth. All drivers must adhere to diocesan policy as defined on any form such as the Request for Transportation, Parental Request for Youth Events, or similar forms. Driving alone with a young person should be avoided.
9. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister must never make an overnight trip with an adolescent alone, nor should they stay overnight in the same room with an adolescent, even if there are two beds.
10. Attraction to, or from adolescents should be recognized and admitted, and greater caution and care taken in all interactions. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister must keep in mind that youth are easily given to infatuation or idolization of adults who befriend them, and therefore, they must be ever solicitous to keep their relations with the youth on a professional level.
11. One-on-one meetings with a young person are best held in a public area, or if that is not appropriate, then the door is left open, and someone on the parish staff is notified about the meeting. Youth ministers, catechists, aides, or any other adult minister should always meet with young people in areas that are visible and accessible.
12. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister should take care to avoid the trap of "father" or "mother-figure". This tends to create an excessive emotional attachment for all parties.
13. Know your own limits and learn when to refer the young person to a professional. True counseling is to be left to qualified and licensed professionals. Personal/physical attraction to or from an individual to a youth minister, catechist, aides or other adult ministers should be recognized and acknowledged by that minister and he/she should immediately refer the youth to another minister or licensed professional for help.
14. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister should always be aware of the "power" of their role/position. This can be a very seductive force.

15. A "three-way buddy system" of youth with other young persons is a good safety method when engaged in activities outside of the normal youth group meetings.
16. If a young person is uncomfortable with a hug then adults should not hug or ridicule that young person.
17. Topics or vocabulary which could not comfortably be used in the presence of parents or other adults should not be employed with adolescents.
18. A youth minister, catechist, an aide, or any other adult minister may never supply or serve alcohol or any controlled substance to adolescents.
19. Youth ministers, catechists, aides, or any other adult ministers are never to consume alcohol in the presence of adolescents, nor should it be consumed prior to activities scheduled with the youth.
20. Keep parents well-informed of events, activities, concerns and needs of your youth group. Regularly invite and encourage parents to volunteer and/or chaperone events. Solicit parental feedback on a regular basis.

"People were bringing little children to Jesus, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, "let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Then he put his arms around them, laid his hands on them, and gave them his blessing." Mark 10:13ff...