[Parish/School]

**Youth Ministry Standing Operating Procedures (SOP)**

These standing operating procedures are in place to ensure the safety of our youth as well as the professional and personal integrity of those who work with youth.

All who work with youth in any way are to be familiar with these procedures and carry out the procedures as outlined, at all times.

**PROCEDURES WHEN TEENS ARE PRESENT**

* Never allow yourself to be alone with a teen.
* Always have at least two adults present in designated drop-off and pick up areas when teens start arriving and after meetings until all teens have left campus.
* Do not drive or walk a teen home. Require that teens have their own transportation or that parents make arrangements for them to be picked up.
* If you are the only adult, and one or more teens are present, be sure that you remain in open, public areas.
  + During this time, you may find it useful to engage the teen or teens in some task or recreational activity that creates some distance between you.
  + Make an active effort to recruit assistance from other adults.
* When it is necessary to have a private meeting with a teen, do not do so in an isolated space or at a time when no one else is around.
  + When possible, do not close the door to an office in which you are meeting.
  + If you must close the door, be sure the door has a window through which you are visible to others.
  + Let another adult know of your meeting. Ask the adult to check in on you.
* Involve parents in your work with teens.
  + Do not criticize parents in front of teens.
  + Do not go to a teen’s home or have a teen at yours unless parents are present.
  + If a teen needs to speak with you privately on an urgent basis, follow up as soon as possible thereafter, depending on the content of the teen’s communication, with your supervisor, his or her parent, or law enforcement.
* Remember that you are in a professional role in your interaction with teens.
  + Dress in a manner appropriate to your role.
  + Act as a professional, not as a peer to the teens.
  + Do not engage in activities with teens outside your ministerial role.
* Teens have enough distractions – don’t be another one. The following actions are inappropriate:
  + Dating between leaders and teens.
  + Dating between the youth minister and volunteers.
  + Dating between leaders and parents or relatives of a teen.
  + Dating among volunteer leaders.
* Communicate to teens their responsibility for appropriate conduct.
  + Distribute the *Diocese of Tucson Teen Code of Conduct* and make clear that it applies to all teens uniformly.
  + Honor it by your own behavior.
* You are responsible for the protection of teens. Be aware of your surroundings and the behavior of others (on your team or not) when ministering to teens.

**PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATIONS WITH TEENS**

* Communicate primarily through parish phones and parish email accounts. Although cell phones are an expedient contemporary method of communication, communication by cell phone should be limited. Do not text.
  + Ask teens to respect your privacy, contacting you only within certain days and times except in case of an emergency.
* Call teens only about parish-related business.
* When you must call for pastoral follow-up regarding an issue brought to you by a teen, call the teen’s home phone and introduce yourself to whoever answers the phone. Your relationship with a teen must never be covert.
  + Privacy is not the same thing as secrecy; you can involve parents without violating privacy.
  + For example: *“Sally brought up an issue at youth group last night and I wanted to follow up and see how she was doing today.” Typical response “What is the issue?” Your response: “Sally shared in confidence something that was on her mind. If it were very serious, please know that I would have contacted you right away. If you are not comfortable with me speaking with her, please let her know that I called to check in and will see her at our next youth group.”*
* Do not invite yourself into a teen’s life.
  + Do not invite yourself to go to their events – games, plays, concerts etc.
  + Do not invite yourself to their parties or hangouts
  + Do not call a teen for small talk.
  + If you are invited to come to one of their events, coordinate your response with the parents.
    - Call the parents to let them know you were invited.
    - Ask the parents if this is acceptable to them.
    - Make every effort to sit with the parents. (Think of it as intergenerational or family ministry.)
    - After the event, congratulate the teen and the parents, and leave.
* Internet Issues
  + Communicate through parish sponsored websites and emails. Any social networking sites or the like should be sponsored by the parish.
  + Inspect regularly…
    - to be sure all staff social media profiles that are linked to the parish page reflect the vocational call to ministry and our Catholic identity
    - to be sure all web pages that can be found by entering the staff member’s name in a search engine reflect the vocational call to ministry
* Be familiar with the *Diocese of Tucson Guidelines for Pastoral Use of Technology.*

**TO MAINTIAN THE PROFESSIONAL AND VOCATIONAL CALL TO YOUTH MINISTRY**

* **Remember that you are not God! You are a minister working for and with God.**
* **You do not need to do everything yourself. Empower and utilize those in your community who have gifts to share.**
  + Establish a Youth Ministry Staff or Team.
  + Empower each other; share and celebrate each other’s accomplishments.
  + Learn together.
  + Be vulnerable enough to share with each other and hold each other accountable.
* **Find a mentor or peer-supervision relationship.**
  + Establish a professional relationship with another youth minister from another parish.
  + Share your stories about ministry and listen to your mentor’s stories.
  + Seek advice, and offer advice.
* **Work as part of community**.
  + Be sure you are on the Diocesan email list for Youth Ministry
  + Take part in diocese sponsored days for youth ministers. Share these days with your youth staff/team.
  + Meet other youth ministers from around town and start new relationships.
* Educate yourself.
  + Utilize the Diocese of Tucson Formation Programs.
  + Attend conferences, workshops, retreats at the diocesan and national level.
  + Balance learning across the Spiritual, Pastoral, Human, and Intellectual dimensions of personal formation.
* **Join professional associations**.
  + National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM)
  + National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL)
* **Respect boundaries at all times; your boundaries as well as those of others.**
  + If you feel attracted to someone you work with or to a teen, confide in your mentor, your peer supervisory companions and/or someone on your youth ministry staff/team.
  + Ask them to help you stay focused on ministry and to hold you accountable.
  + Seek professional help if the attraction becomes an obsession.
  + If necessary, leave ministry for the protection of yourself, those you serve, the parish and the mission with which we have been entrusted.
* **Be familiar with key documents and policies**.
  + The *Diocese of Tucson Teen Code of Conduct* applies to you and your interactions with teens and other adults.
  + Distribute and digest the Diocese of Tucson *Code of Conduct, t*he *Summary of the Guidelines for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct*, and the Mandatory Reporting Law in the State of Arizona.
  + Know and comply with the parish Compliance Plan.

**Appendix 1: Response to Peer-to-Peer Abuse**

Children and youth are engaged in many types of relationships: parents, relatives, mentors, teachers, coaches, pastors, youth ministers, classmates, friends, neighbors, teammates, dating partners, acquaintances, online “friends.” They interact with their peers in a variety of settings: family, neighborhood, school, church, online, cell… All types of relationships have the potential for positive interactions and any type of relationship can be abusive.

**Key strategies in preventing Peer to Peer Abuse include not only: providing adequate supervision and having a clear response plan, but maintaining an environment of respect.**

**Bullying and Harassment**:

**DEFINITION**

Pattern of aggressive / hurtful behavior

Unprovoked, intentional harm or invoking of fear in another. Repeated over a period of time

Imbalance of power

May include: physical or verbal aggression, threats, social exclusion, rumors / gossip, relational aggression, non-verbal communication, sexual comments / gestures.

**RESPONSE**

1. Intervene to stop behavior.
2. Assess for signs of physical injury and tend to physical needs of victim.
3. If incident involves physical injury, sexual assault, or other criminal behavior, contact local law enforcement immediately.
4. Provide outreach to victim
5. Contact Parent(s):

Meet with targeted youth / parent(s) & develop safety plan.

Meet with youth who engaged in bullying / harassment and parent(s) & enforce consequences.

Re-evaluate prevention strategies.

## Cyberbullying and Sexting:

**DEFINITION**

Cyberbullying uses technology to: Intimidate, Harass or Enact relational aggression  
Sexting uses technology to communicate sexually explicit content through words or visual depictions: Production/distribution of images without consent;

**RESPONSE**

1. Secure involved device
2. Do not delete message or image.
3. Report to Appropriate Authority:
   1. Local Law Enforcement
   2. CyberTipline [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com/); 1-800-843-5678
   3. Arizona Attorney General Office: 800-352-8431
4. Provide outreach to victim
5. Contact parent(s)
   1. Meet with targeted youth/parent(s) & develop safety plan.
   2. Meet with parent(s)/youth who produced/distributed image/text & enforce consequences.
6. Re-evaluate prevention strategies.

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