Episcopal Diocese *of* Washington Diócesis Episcopal *de* Washington

Standards for Youth and Children's Ministries: In Our Congregations

The Diocese of Washington is committed to welcoming and protecting the well-being of all children and youth to participate in activities at our congregations. Toward this end, we have established the following Standards for Youth and Children's Ministries. These Standards are rooted in our Baptismal Covenant and seek to embody our commitment to safeguard the children and youth who are entrusted to our care.

OUR COMMITMENT TO PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION AND SAFETY

We will strive to respect the dignity of every human being. In doing so, we will welcome every child and youth regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, origin, ancestry or religion. We will ensure that basic human needs of food, shelter, sleep and/or clothing at any parish or diocesan event are met. We will do everything in our power to ensure that no staff or attendee of any event, on either a parish level or a diocesan level, is exposed to behavior that is physically, emotionally, spiritually, or sexually abusive or harassing of others.

SCREENING OF YOUTH WORKERS

Working as a leader among the children and youth in our congregations is a privilege. Individuals desiring to work with children and youth must meet with the rector or a person designated by the rector. Congregations are encouraged to institute an appropriate application process for persons seeking to work as leaders of children and youth using a form similar to the application form included among the resource materials published on the website of the Diocese. Before beginning service, youth workers must be provided with a copy of these Standards.

Volunteer adult leaders must have participated regularly in the life of a congregation for at least six months before serving in ministries with youth and children. In addition, individuals who regularly work with children and youth must have a background check in accordance with the Diocesan policies prior to beginning service.

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TRAINING

All parochial clergy and leaders of Youth & Children and Sunday School teachers (volunteer, staffed, lay people or ordained) must complete the Diocese of Washington's Safe Church, Safe Communities training.

OPERATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Team Leadership.

- A young person should never be left in the primary care of one adult.
- Teams of adults (male and female) should supervise youth activities.
- There should always be an adequate ratio between adults and youth. A ratio of five youth to one adult is recommended as a minimum.
- Adult leadership should reflect young peoples' participation, meaning that if there are male and female youth and children, there needs to be male and female adults. Non-related adults should be paired for team leadership.
- For youth events (grades 6-12), adult leaders must be at least 18 years old and at least two years older than the oldest participant. Experienced youth leaders should be included with leaders who are newcomers to youth ministry.

Overnight Activities.

- At least two adults must be present at an overnight activity. If this condition is not met, the activity must be canceled. If the participants are both male and female, there must be both male and female chaperones.
- It is never appropriate for two people to share a bed or other sleeping space (i.e. sleeping bag) designed for one person or for a young person and a chaperone to share a bed or sleeping space.
- Males and females (both youth and adult) should sleep in separate rooms at all events and have separate access to bathroom facilities.
- It is desirable that youth and adults should have separate sleeping quarters, and, when possible, separate bathing facilities. If separate sleeping quarters for adults and youth are not possible, adults should sleep at a different end or side of the room.

Transportation.

- Adult advisors are to avoid transporting youth during a parish or diocesan-sponsored event without being accompanied by another adult.
- Families are encouraged to arrange their own transportation.
- No one under the age of 18 should transport any minor during a parish or diocesan-sponsored event. Another acceptable method of transportation would be for vehicles to caravan in close but safe formation.
- Young people should only transport other young people with the prior written consent from the parents of all of the youth involved.

Individual Counseling.

- At times when one-on-one interactions are needed, an adult leader who is not participating in the one-on-one interaction should be provided advance knowledge of the time and place where such interaction is to take place.
- One-on-one counseling must happen in a public place where affording privacy yet is in plain view of others (e.g., an office with a window or with the door cracked, or the corner of the youth room or at a local coffee shop).
- When meeting with a young person one-on-one, youth leaders must tell a clergyperson or other supervisor in the parish office who they are meeting with, where they will be meeting and an approximate amount of time.
- Counseling youth normally should take place in a team context. Where this is not possible, female adults should counsel female youth and male adults should counsel male youth.

Age-Appropriate Supervision. Although older minor children may assist adults in supervising younger minors, minor children may never be solely entrusted with the care of other minor children.

Open Door Policy. All youth events are to function with an open door policy.

Incident Reporting. A written report must be provided to the rector with respect to any incident where there has been a claim of misconduct or which could give rise to such a claim. The rector shall consult with Diocesan officials where appropriate to determine whether the incident is within the scope of applicable laws that require filing of a report with governmental authorities.

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