

## **Code of Conduct: Adults & Youth**

### **Code of Conduct for Adults working with Youth**

#### **Introduction**

The Catholic Church in west central Florida is blessed with a great diversity of persons created in the divine image. We respect, honor and celebrate the image of God revealed in human uniqueness, dignity and diversity, as suggested in Genesis 1:27: *"On the sixth and last day of the creation, God created a man to His own image: to the image of God He created him."*

**We believe that every child is a gift from God from the moment of conception.** We believe that the children enrolled in our schools, parish religious education programs and other youth programs must be treated with dignity, respect and care, as described in "A Sacred Trust, The Safety of Our Children" (National Catholic Education Association, 2003).

An adult involved in any role of a program is defined as a person who is at least twenty-one years of age, and who has been approved to work with young people by the pastor, principal, community organization leader or a designate. (McCarthy, 2002 a) We serve all young people without regard to gender, creed, national origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, political beliefs or disabilities. All adults working with youth in any capacity must be approved through the proper background checks and screening as required by the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

This code is not intended to otherwise limit the expectations of staff, children, students, and volunteers to engage fully in the traditions of teaching, celebrating, participating in and being formed by the Catholic faith, including but not limited to curriculum, catechesis, the sacraments, other liturgies, worship services, and ministries. This code is used in conjunction with existing diocesan policies, protocols or other codes and is not intended to supersede them.

#### **Professional Role**

1. Adults recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from behaviors or words that are disrespectful to anyone of any group.
2. Adults work collaboratively with the pastor, supervisors and associates in community, ministry, or school programs. These adults distinguish their own private opinions from those of the Catholic faith or their profession in all publicity, public announcements or publications.
3. Adults have a responsibility in all relationships to witness the

chastity appropriate to their vocation in life, whether celibate, married, or single.

4. Adult leaders are competent and receive education and training commensurate with their role(s) and responsibilities working with youth. They are to be made aware of all diocesan policies for working with youth.

5. Adults are aware they have considerable personal power because of their position or ministry. Therefore, they will sustain respectful relationships, avoiding manipulation and other abuses of power.

6. Adults maintain appropriate professional boundaries, e.g., physical, sexual, relational and emotional. Appropriate use of time for working with, speaking with and engaging with children and youth is an important boundary. Adults are not to be available 24/7, but rather work within normal expected time frames.

7. Adults model healthy and positive behaviors with young children, adolescents, and other adults.

### **Professional Conduct**

8. Adults must never engage in sexual intimacies, or overt sexual behaviors with children and/or youth. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, covert or overt seductive speech or gestures that sexually abuses, exploits, or harasses another person.

9. Touching should be age appropriate and based on the need of the minor and not on the need of the adult. An adult is to avoid physical contact when alone with a minor. If a minor initiates physical contact, an appropriate, limited response is proper.

10. Procuring, providing, or using alcohol and/or controlled substances for or with youth is inappropriate and unethical.

11. Adults should never possess or use alcohol or drugs while supervising and/or participating in a youth activity.

12. Adults always meet with young people in areas that are visible and accessible.

13. One-on-one meetings with a young person are best held in a public area, or if that is not possible, then the door to the room is left open. Another adult is to be notified about the meeting whenever feasible. Notify parents of meetings.

14. It is always a preferred practice to have two adults present in the area where youth are present.

15. Driving alone with a young person should be avoided.

16. Adults are not to be alone with minors in a residence, sleeping facility, locker room, rest room, dressing facility, other closed room, or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship.

17. Audiovisual, music, and print resources used in programs must be screened prior to use to ensure their appropriateness for the participants. It is never appropriate to use an "R" rated movie without parental consent or without screening for sexual content, nudity, language, violence, and themes or content which harm the dignity of the human person. Even "PG" movies should be reviewed carefully. Movies with ratings stronger than "R" are never appropriate. Music lyrics should also be reviewed to ensure their appropriateness. Parents should be informed of movies that will be used in conjunction with any program.

18. The computer and internet are acceptable and common means of communication and entertainment. Adults must never engage with sexually explicit and/or pornographic materials or chat rooms with children and youth. They should not use any computer software, games or any form of internet personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents.

### **Professional Accountability**

19. Adults are trained to be aware of the signs of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and neglect.

20. Adults are aware of their limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and will make appropriate referrals.

21. Adults agree to adhere to civil and ecclesial law, policy and procedure for reporting abuse, suspected abuse or neglect.

22. Adults are aware of and comply with all applicable parish, organizational and/or diocesan policies with special attention to sexual misconduct, harassment, safety, transportation, parental permission, and medical emergency policies.

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### **References**

- Diocese of Dallas, TX (2003). Policy on Sexual Misconduct.  
Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL (2003). Lay Pastoral Ministry Institute's Code of Ethics.  
Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL (2002). Harassment Policy for Non-Employment Situations.  
McCarthy, Robert J. (2002a). Protecting Young People. Washington, D.C.: National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry  
McCarthy, Robert J. (2002b). Restoring Trust: A Response to Sexual Abuse. National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry.

National Catholic Educational Association (2003). *A Sacred Trust: The Safety of Our Children*, Washington, D.C.: Author.

National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. (2003) *Code of Ethics for Youth Ministry Leaders*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Adapted by permission. St. Mary's Press (2000). *Catholic Youth Bible*. Winona, MN.