

Safe Environment Program Annual Update

Boundary Issues

The personal conduct of employees and volunteers can inspire young people to have a deeper faith and trust in Christ. Therefore, it is vital that all adults who work with minors treat each young person with care and respect, recognizing their inherent dignity as children of God. It is always the adult who must assume the responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in relationships with minors. The following guidelines outline proper boundaries for the protection of adults and young people in the Catholic parishes, schools, and agencies of the Diocese of Peoria:

- ♦ The physical boundaries of young people must be respected at all times. Handshakes, side hugs, “high fives,” a pat on the back or shoulder, etc. are important for a child’s development and self-esteem.¹ However, children should not be touched in a way that could be construed as being inappropriately affectionate or in any way sexual. The general rule is that no one is to be touched in an area that would be covered by a bathing suit. The only exception to this is if an adult must intervene in a situation where the threat of physical harm is imminent (e.g. separating students involved in a fight). Students should never be touched in anger or retaliation. Adults are prohibited from using physical discipline of any kind as a form of behavior management.
- ♦ When working with minors, it is important that adults be dressed appropriately.² Acceptable clothing is modest and appropriate to one’s responsibilities. Clothing may be casual or professional, depending upon the activity. Unacceptable is clothing that is immodest in design, clothing with offensive words or pictures, and/or clothing with references to drugs, alcohol, sex, or violence.
- ♦ Adults are expected to refrain from using profanity and/or inappropriate language or humor in the presence of young people. Adults should not speak to children in a manner that is or could be construed to be harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.³ Adults must not discuss anyone’s private sex life or activities with youth. Sexual jokes, slang, or innuendo are always inappropriate and are not permitted. Adults must not possess any sexually oriented or morally inappropriate materials (e.g. magazines, videos) or access similar materials on the Internet.
- ♦ Adults must be aware of their own and others’ vulnerability when working with young people. The ideal is that there are always at least two adults present when working with minors.⁴ If only one adult can be present, then another adult should be available onsite. Sport practices and/or games involving adults and young people should occur in the presence of parents or in a place openly accessible to others. Meeting areas should have transparent windows or open doors.⁵ Windows on doors are there for a reason and should not be covered. Adults can never be alone with a minor (except their own child) in a locker room, dressing facility, private residence, closed room, or similar isolated areas. Trips and all activities involving young people must have a sufficient number of adult chaperones to avoid the appearance of inappropriate involvement. Students are not permitted to ride alone in a vehicle with an adult unless they are riding with a parent or guardian.

- ♦ Adults are prohibited from the use, possession, or being impaired by alcohol or controlled substances when working with minors. They should not smoke in the presence of children. Furnishing alcohol, cigarettes, or controlled substances to young people or allowing minors to use alcohol, cigarettes, or controlled substances is not permitted.⁶ Adults may not use or possess firearms or other weapons when working with children.
- ♦ Young people need to receive individual attention. However, it is important to avoid showing favoritism.⁷ The creation of an excessive or exclusive relationship with a minor is not appropriate. Adults are not permitted to give gifts to a young person unless approved by their supervisor and everyone in the group receives similar gifts. Adults should avoid contacting and socializing with young people outside of the professional relationship.⁸ Adults are not permitted to share their home phone number or email address directly with children (when necessary, this information may be shared with parents).

Priests, religious, and lay employees & volunteers of the parishes, schools, and agencies of the Diocese of Peoria must uphold Christian values and conduct at all times. The *Code of Pastoral Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Staff, and Volunteers* provides a set of standards for conduct. The *Code of Pastoral Conduct* is available online at www.cdop.org under the “Safe Environment” link.

Harassment

Harassment can be defined as any conduct that demeans, intimidates, or offends an individual. It includes behavior or comments that offend a person based on their race, color, ethnicity, sex, age, family status, and/or disability. Sexual harassment includes any unwelcome sexual comment or behavior which demeans, intimidates, or offends an individual. In the workplace, behavior is considered sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is 1) either overtly or subtly suggested, 2) submission or rejection of the conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions, or 3) such conduct interferes with the employee’s job performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.⁹ Examples of sexual harassment include behaviors such as innuendo, inappropriate physical contact, requests for sexual favors, and/or the display of exploitive material. Amongst students, sexual harassment includes such forms of behavior as sexual jokes, graffiti, comments about body parts, looks, and brushing up against another in a sexual manner.¹⁰

Harassment, including sexual harassment, of any person working for or participating in the programs and/or institutions of the Diocese of Peoria is strictly prohibited. The diocesan policy statement on harassment is available at www.cdop.org under the “Safe Environment” link. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of personnel in situations involving possible harassment.

Bullying

Bullying is behavior perpetrated by an individual or group that involves a deliberate intent to hurt, threaten, frighten or humiliate someone over an extended period of time. It may take the form of physical, verbal or psychological harassment.¹¹ Examples of bullying include

threats, intimidation, extortion, mocking, taunting, hazing, false accusations, and/or social isolation. Bullying is not tolerated in any form in the schools of the diocese, and all members of the school community are responsible for recognizing bullying behavior and taking action to stop it. The diocesan policy statement on bullying is available at www.cdop.org/managedDocuments/lists/oocsSeriesD/D147.pdf. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of personnel in situations involving bullying.

Child Abuse/Neglect

Child abuse occurs when a parent, caretaker, or someone who works with or around children causes injury and/or creates a substantial risk of injury by other than accidental means to a person under the age of eighteen.¹² Child abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional. Child neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter, and/or adequate supervision.¹³ Adults who work with children in the Diocese of Peoria must take child abuse and neglect seriously, be able to recognize when it happens, and report anyone who has caused injury to a child and/or placed a child at risk of injury. Whenever an adult suspects child abuse or neglect, they must contact the Department of Children and Family Services Hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873). Under Illinois law, teachers and school personnel are mandated reporters.

In addition to contacting the DCFS Hotline, diocesan officials must be notified in the event that an instance of child abuse is sexual abuse and the alleged perpetrator is a member of the clergy and/or an employee/volunteer of a parish, school, or other institution of the diocese. Diocesan policy and procedures for the reporting of suspected sexual abuse are described in detail at www.cdop.org/managedDocuments/lists/oocsSeriesC/DiocesanSexualAbusePolicy.pdf. Should an adult suspect that a child has been sexually abused by a member of the clergy or a lay employee or volunteer, they are asked to contact one or more of the following diocesan officials:

(309) 671-1550

Rev. Msgr. Paul E. Showalter, Vicar General
Patricia Gibson, Chancellor

References

- ¹ *Prevention of Child Abuse in Early Childhood Programs*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996
- ² *Safety First: A Leader's Guide to Keeping Youth Safe*, Learning for Life®, 2005
- ³ *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*, NAEYC, 2005
- ⁴ "Youth Protection & Adult Leadership," *Guide to Safe Scouting*, Boy Scouts of America
- ⁵ *Prevention of Child Abuse in Early Childhood Programs*, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996
- ⁶ *NYSCA Coaches' Code of Ethics*, National Youth Sports Coaches Association, 2003
- ⁷ *Developing Codes of Conduct*, NSW Commission for Children & Young People
- ⁸ *Volunteer Conduct Standards*, Junior Achievement®
- ⁹ Illinois Human Rights Act (775 ILCS 5/2-101)
- ¹⁰ Walls, Lisa. *Bullying and Harassment at Schools*, Committee for Children, Seattle, WA
- ¹¹ *Safe at School: A Resource Manual for Self-Assessment, Planning and Training to Improve School Safety*, Illinois State Board of Education, 1999
- ¹² Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/3)
- ¹³ Ibid