



Diocese of Steubenville

Safe Environment Training for Adults

Appropriate Boundaries when ministering to or working with Minors

I. INTRODUCTION:

All adults (whether they be members of the clergy or laity, volunteers or employees) shall maintain clear and appropriate relational boundaries with the minors they serve. Establishing and respecting proper boundaries for adults who work with children is a proactive way to ensure a safe environment for children. A proper relationship between adults and minors will always remain focused on the specific role in which the adult is serving the minor.

It is essential therefore, that the training of adults in the Safe Environment Program for the Diocese of Steubenville include a clear understanding of well- defined boundaries between adults and minors. In this respect, adults bear the responsibility to ensure that:

- Their relationship with minors is clearly appropriate in nature and in keeping with conduct expected of those involved in any type of Christian ministry or Parish/Catholic School sponsored activity;
- That proper boundaries are maintained AT ALL TIMES;
- That minors are made aware of these boundaries, and counseled as to proper behavior when they have breached those boundaries;
- That breaches in boundaries are not ignored but rather reported to another supervising adult, such as a chaperon, teacher, Principal, Pastor, or diocesan official.

Adults should ask themselves two questions when working with minors. First, “Whose needs are being met, mine or the child’s?” And second, “If a parent or another adult were to enter into the room or situation, would I be comfortable in continuing my interactions with this minor?” In addition to these determining questions, two cardinal guidelines serve well for maintaining appropriate boundaries:

- Adults should **limit or eliminate one adult/one child contact**, as this is the context in which most child sexual abuse takes place;
- **ALL contacts that adults have with minors should be observable and interruptible.** Admittedly, there are specific ministerial situations when a great deal of privacy is required (such as a counseling session or the Sacrament of Reconciliation), yet even in these settings, this privacy should not be absolute when a minor is involved.¹

II. GUIDELINES:

- **Excessive familiarity or intimacy between adults and minors.** Adults should not relate to minors as if they were peers or friends. Adults should not take on the role of a confidant or show undue interest in the private lives of minors, beyond the proper context of a professional counseling relationship (i.e., school guidance counselors or pastoral counselors). Nor should adults share information about their own private lives with minors (particularly in such areas as relationships, marriage, dating, or sexual activity). Adults should avoid giving undue attention or favorable treatment to a minor. Adults should not offer exclusive gifts (no matter how inexpensive) to a minor without the consent of a parent or guardian. Adults should not offer or accept excessive or inappropriate compliments, remarks or gestures that focus on physical appearance. Adults should not engage in private correspondence with minors. Adults should not visit minors in their homes (even for professional reasons) when parents or other responsible adults are not present, nor should adults invite minors to a private residence or other private dwelling which is not then and there being used as a venue for a church/school-sponsored gathering.
- **Using a Rectory or clerical residence for ministry with minors.** A clear distinction between the public and private areas in the rectory should be made. Access to a cleric's private quarters should be limited to the cleric, rectory staff, other clergy and the cleric's relatives. Meetings that take place in the Rectory should never be held in private areas of the rectory.
- **Social related activities (activities not sponsored by the church or school).** Adults should never request or permit minors to accompany them on vacation trips or overnight or day trips.² Adults should avoid purely social and exclusive engagements with minors (Adults might arrange to meet in groups with minors for such things as fast food or pizza, but the outing should not be exclusive).
- **Communications technology.** Adults should be very cautious when using such forms of communication as cell phones, emails, text messaging and websites like MySpace and Facebook, when communicating with minors. Using these types of communication with minors should be for "business only" and not in any way personal. Adults should not use personal email accounts or personal cell phones to communicate with minors. Adults should avoid phone calls/text messaging to a minor's personal cell phone. Adults should not give out their personal email or cell phone contact information to minors. Adults should not participate in on-line "chatting" with minors nor should adults consent to being a "friend" with a minor on websites like MySpace, Twitter or Facebook (with the exception of relatives). These actions cross boundaries and can lead to questions of impropriety.
- **School/Classroom Environments.** Teachers (both Catholic school and PSR) should maintain a professional demeanor at all times remembering that they are witnesses of Christ and his Gospel even when the subject being taught is not of a religious nature. Teachers should not use abusive, crass or vulgar language in the classroom. No minor shall be disciplined corporally or corrected with demeaning, abusive, or vulgar language (See C.4, *Decree on Child Protection*). The classroom setting is not an exception to the general guideline that contacts with minors should be "observable and interruptible." Therefore when minors are present, classroom doors (when closed) should not be locked and classroom doors should have windows that allow for an unobstructed view. Minors who indicate that they need to use the restroom should not be denied permission to do so. Very young minors who still need to be accompanied to the restroom (e.g., pre-school students), should be accompanied by two adults.

- **Extra-curricular activities.** *Transportation:* Adults who provide transportation to sporting events/ practices, field trips or other activities shall meet the requirements stipulated in the *Diocese of Steubenville Safe Environment: Field Trip Transportation Policy*. At no time shall an adult driver offer or provide transportation to a single minor (i.e., only one minor in the vehicle) without the express written permission of the minor's parent or guardian. *Over-night events:* Policy C.3 from the *Decree on Child Protection* must be adhered to strictly for any overnight activity. Adult chaperons for over-night activities shall under no circumstances sleep in the same room with a minor who is not their own child or relative, even when a second adult is present or that second adult is the parent of the minor. *Locker rooms and showering:* Under no circumstances shall adults (including coaches) take showers with minors. Adults should not observe minors showering or be observed by minors showering.
- **Confidentiality.** Adults must avoid promising confidentiality when speaking with minors because there are limits to confidentiality. When a minor says, "I want to tell you something but you must promise not to tell," a proper response would be, "I will only keep that promise if it does not threaten your health and safety or the health and safety of another person." If it becomes apparent that the minor's (or another person's) health or safety are in jeopardy, the adult shall notify their supervisor (if abuse or neglect is suspected, mandated reporters must notify civil authorities).
- **Physical Boundaries.** Adults must use extreme caution to ensure that any kind of physical contact with a minor cannot be misconstrued by an observer or by the minor, and that they do not violate appropriate boundaries. Physical contact with minors may never take place in private. Physical contact in the context of any kind of counseling should never take place. Physical contact with minors should not be routine behavior for an adult. Adults shall avoid creating a situation whereby a child cannot freely exit a space (i.e. boxing a child in). Otherwise unacceptable behavior does not become acceptable if it is initiated by a minor. Cultural customs, or the ordinary behavior of minors towards their peers, do not justify otherwise inappropriate physical contact with an adult. *Some examples of inappropriate physical contact with minors include:* any type of massage, including a simple neck massage, given by a minor to an adult or an adult to a minor. Tickling or wrestling with a minor³; giving/receiving piggy back rides; any contact with areas of the body that are ordinarily covered by a bathing suit; kissing on the mouth or prolonged hugs; holding hands (other than briefly holding the hand of a minor in public for their safety); placing and leaving one's arm around a minor's shoulder, back or waist for a prolonged period; patting a minor on the backside (even during sporting events or with the same sex); repeatedly touching on the arm, back or legs; touching on any part of the body in a way that may be construed as a caress; placing and leaving hands on the shoulders of a child sitting at a desk; placing and leaving hands on the legs of a minor who is seated alongside; sitting with one's legs crossed with the legs of a minor. Physical contact with a minor should never be forceful (to move a child one way or another).⁴ Adults shall never use corporal punishment when disciplining a minor; Adults must never physically retaliate on behalf of a minor towards another minor (e.g., pinching a child who pinched another child), Adults shall never place tape over a minor's mouth or tape a minor into a chair. *Some examples of physical contact with minors that may be appropriate would include:* Briefly shaking hands as a social greeting; very brief public social contact in connection with a special event or circumstance (e.g. such as a public greeting hug, an arm placed around the shoulder for a moment, or a short pat on the back, to congratulate a student at graduation); lightly and briefly tapping on the arm or shoulder to get their attention; an arm briefly placed around the shoulder of an upset or injured minor in public.

III. Response. What to do when boundaries are being violated:

Respecting proper boundaries for adults who work with children is a proactive way to ensure a safe environment for children and prevent the possibility of child abuse from taking place. Therefore, when appropriate boundaries (as they are defined above) are being violated, it is extremely important that observers come forward to report these violations (whether they are a cleric, religious or lay person, a paid or volunteer worker, or anyone serving on behalf of the church in the Diocese of Steubenville). Those who observe boundary violations taking place should be aware that such violations *could be* a sign that abuse is taking place, or at the very least, the potential for abuse is present. Even if the observer does not suspect that child abuse is taking place, the boundary violation should be reported so that diocesan officials can address the concerns.

Adults who observe or are made aware of boundary violations, or who have been approached by a minor concerning a boundary violation, are encouraged to contact Msgr. Kurt H. Kemo, Diocesan Vicar General at the chancery, 422 Washington Street, Steubenville, **via telephone at (740) 282-3631**. If the Vicar General cannot be reached, please contact Tom Wilson, Diocesan Attorney (at the same location and phone number).

“[When] boundaries are starting to be crossed, an intervention is warranted. Move quickly to re-establish appropriate boundaries with minors. Inquire into the well-being of any minors involved. Additional inquiries are needed to determine any hidden activities. Current abuse is possible.”

- USCCB OCYP 2012 Webinar, Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

1. Most opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, when it is regularly scheduled and takes place in the Church would be regarded as “observable and interruptible,” even when a child chooses to make use of an enclosed confessional. The guideline may however preclude “privately” arranged opportunities for confession.
2. An exception to this guideline would be a family trip setting where the minor involved is a friend of the family.
3. An exception for wrestling would be in the context of coaching during a wrestling practice as a school sporting activity.
4. An exception would be when some forceful physical contact is necessary to prevent a minor from harming another person (e.g., breaking up a fight or self-defense).