

# **SAFETY FIRST HANDBOOK**

## **Ministry to Minors:** **Guidelines for Adults who work with Youth**

*Mk 10:13-16 "And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you; whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.' Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them."*

### **Part I**

What an awesome and joyful call Jesus gives to us, a call that reminds us of the precious gift a child is! As we ponder our own ministry to God's children, let us reflect on the Lord's own words as He called the children to Him, asking them to place their trust in Him.

The trust the children of our parish and their parents place at St. Gabriel Church is not a trust taken lightly. Keeping our children safe is a vital goal, one that must be shared by all who work with the youth of our parish, seeking to bring them ever closer to the Lord. That same trust is given to those who work with vulnerable adult populations, and these guidelines shall serve for volunteers working with the aged, infirm or otherwise vulnerable adults in our parish.

The guidelines below will be used in conjunction with specified training and supervision for adults who work on a significance basis with the youth of our parish, including those working with: Sunday Preschool, Special Education PSR, Parish School of Religion, BOK Youth Group, Vacation Bible School, Junior High Summer Camp, Day School and Learning Loft, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, CYO sports programs, sacramental preparation teams, and other youth-related ministries, as well as those working with vulnerable adults as stated above.[\[1\]](#)

1. The safety, health or welfare of a child is always the ultimate concern of the adult leader. Common sense should be used when implementing this policy.
2. Who is eligible to serve in direct contact with youth?
  - 2a. Adults must complete appropriate training through St. Gabriel Church before commencing the ministry with children, or have made appropriate arrangements with supervisors until such training can be made.
  - 2b. Only those who have been fingerprinted and given an initial BCI background check, or FBI check, if not a resident of the State of Ohio for the past five years, will be allowed to minister to minors. Occasional and periodic background checks may be made at the discretion of the parish administration.
  - 2c. Appropriate paperwork, including application, photo identification and reference check, must be on file and reviewed before ministry at the parish may begin.
3. What is a minor? A minor should always be viewed, whether in special or ministerial situations, as "protected." That is, they are not independent. Where they are and what they are doing should always be done with the explicit knowledge and approval of their parents and guardians. Also, they are subject to specific civil laws, which may prohibit certain activities, such as prohibition of alcohol or driving privileges.

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[1] For reasons of simplicity, the above draft refers to children and leaders who work with youth, though these policies are also designed for volunteers working with vulnerable adult populations. All policies apply.

## **Part II Specific Instances**

4. Buddy System. A child or teen should not be sent on errands or be alone in a learning, sports, school or field trip environment.

5. Two Adult Policy.

5a. When transporting minors in a vehicle for a St. Gabriel-sponsored activity, no adult leader may be alone in a car with a child, unless that child is his or her own. In addition, the person driving must have appropriate licensing, insurance and a signed permission slips and diocesan forms from the parent or guardian. When parents are transporting their own children (and only their own children), they assume all responsibility.

5b. The minor should not be allowed alone in the personal living quarters of any adult leader, at any time.

5c. Adult leaders in contact with minors should not be left alone with a minor in any closed building or room. There is always more safety in public places. Doors to classrooms or rooms where leaders are ministering to children must be left open if no window is on the door, regardless of requests for privacy by the minor.

5d. Adult leaders must never be alone with a minor using such facilities as the lavatory or locker room.

6. Meetings with Minors

6a. No unauthorized persons may meet with minors at St. Gabriel. All guest speakers must be cleared by proper administration and meet with the children only in the presence of the parish leader.

6b. All meetings shall be observable and interruptible.

6c. Requests by a minor to meet with leaders outside of normal meeting time should be discouraged. If, however, leaders meet with minors outside prescribed meeting times, such meetings must be held in a place that is observable and interruptible. If the leader and the minor are the only two individuals in the building at the time of the meeting, the meeting must be moved to a public place. When possible, the presence of the parent or guardian should be requested.

7. Work Situation. Minors shall be permitted to work, in compliance with the child labor laws, in the parish office, preschool or day school, food bank, Gabriel's Wings or parish grounds only when there is parental permission and such activity is observable and interruptible.

8. Sports.

8a. Adults may engage in games or sports, including practices, with minors only in the presence of another

authorized adult. At least one adult must be the same gender as the team being supervised.

8b. Adult leaders must never be present as the only adult in a lavatory, locker room or other dressing area when minors are using such facilities.

## 9. Trips and Events.

9a. Youth group trips should have sufficient number of adult chaperones so that none of the adult leaders should ever be alone with minors. At least two male chaperones shall supervise male youth, and at least two female chaperones shall supervise female youth.

9b. When on field trips, youth leaders shall remain professional and socialize along with the other adult chaperones.

9c. There shall never be an overnight trip with a minor alone.

## 10. Respect and Dignity for all

10a. Adult leaders in contact with minors do not engage in emotional abuse: putting down the person, making the person feel bad about himself, excessive criticism.

10b. No acts of intimidation designed to frighten a person, such as gestures or smashing objects.

10c. Attractions to or from minors need to be recognized and greater care taken in further interactions.

10d. If an adult has a strong physical attraction to an individual minor and seeks him or her out, the adult must reflect upon the reasons for the attraction, and seek the help of a mentor, spiritual director or mental health professional. All contact with the minor must cease immediately.

10e. Adult leaders must be aware of the power of their role or position and the perception it might hold for the minor.

10f. No inappropriate touching should occur on the part of the adult leader. Caution should be used when contact is initiated by a minor.

11. Adult Relationships. Relationship between adults in the presence of minors shall remain appropriate, with no flirtatious behavior in the presence of the minors.

## 12. Conversations.

12a. Comments of a sexual nature should be made only in response to a specific question, never introduced, professionally worded and in accordance with church doctrine.

12b. Topics or vocabulary that cannot be comfortably discussed in the presence of another adult shall not be discussed in front of minors.

12c. Speech by adults or children in parish setting shall not abuse, exploit or harass.

12d. Instances of sexual behavior (including but not limited to verbal jokes, cartoons, unwanted or wanted displays of affection between minors) must be stopped by the adult leader. Instances and the victim's response must be reported immediately to the appropriate administrator.

12e. Parents shall be advised and invited to religious education classes pertaining to sex or sexuality.

### 13. Use of Alcohol.

13a. Adults in supervision of minors must never possess, use, supply or serve alcohol or controlled substances to minors.

13b. Alcohol shall never be consumed by adults if activities with minors are scheduled.

### 14. Counseling of Minors

14a. Pastoral counseling of minors must take place only in areas that are for common use and open to the public, never in a personal residence, automobile or private living quarters. Parental permission should be obtained whenever possible.

14b. The office door should have a window or must be left open during counseling. Another staff member – either priest, receptionist, staff member or program coordinator, must be notified of the meeting, and whenever possible another adult should be in close proximity during the counseling.

14c. Unless the subject precludes the parents, all parents or guardians should be notified prior to the meeting or immediately following the meeting if the meeting is impromptu or a crisis session. Parental notification is precluded when the subject matter involves parental abuse, in which case proper authorities must be contacted.

14d. The relationship must remain professional during the session, and if the minor seems to have formed a physical attraction to the adult, another leader must be called in to work with the minor.

14e. If the counseling seems needs to be on-going (more than two sessions), evaluation of the situation must be made with the parents, an advisor or a licensed professional.

14f. Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated in the place in church designated for such use. Only an extreme inconvenience or impossibility would justify a change, and the pastor must be notified.

15. Procedures for Policy Violations. If an allegation of policy violation on the part of any adult leader is brought to the attention of a priest, principal, director of religious education, youth minister, catechist or other parish staff member, the following action must be taken:

15a. If the allegation involves physical or sexual abuse, contact Lake County Department of Health and Human Services at 440-350-4000 (after hours at 440-352-6154), or the Lake County Sheriff's Department at 350-2794 and contact a parish priest or appropriate supervisor immediately. Appropriate documentation of the allegation must be made.

15b. If the policy violated is one other than those listed in 15a, the accused adult leader shall be given a copy of the policies and should be alerted to the violation and inappropriate behavior by the program coordinator. A warning will be given that further violation could result in the removal

of the adult leader from his or her position, and documentation will be made of the allegation and resultant meeting in the parish files.

15c. Under Ohio Law, all sexual, physical or emotional abuse must be reported to legal authorities.

16. Reporting Responsibility: All personnel of the Cleveland Diocese, parishes and schools are obligated to report all instances of suspected abuse to proper authorities. Knowledge or suspicion justifies reporting. Ohio law protects the confidentiality of the report and reporting person. All employees are mandated reporters for physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Yearly training will be given on signs of abuse.

**The Catholic Community of St. Gabriel – June 2003**  
**Reviewed and approved by Diocesan Legal Office 4-10-03**

I have received and read the Guidelines for Adults who work with Youth and agree to uphold and Follow all policies set forth therein.

I understand that I need to attend a safety training Session.

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(Signature)

(Date)

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(Print Name)