

## **Diocesan Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors**

To foster and maintain an atmosphere of trust and safety in its ministry to minors, the Diocese of Savannah has established a *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*. The Diocese expects all Church personnel to maintain high standards of professional, ministerial and moral behavior.

### **A. Definitions**

1. A minor is defined as anyone under the age of 18. For the purposes of these standards, the term “minors” also includes adults who would be considered uniquely vulnerable to abuse because of physical or mental disabilities.
2. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury intentionally inflicted on a minor.
3. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a minor and an adult. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult. Abuse of minors is contrary to the teachings of the Church and is never permissible. Church personnel have a responsibility to actively protect minors from all forms of abuse.
4. Church personnel are defined as any persons, lay, religious or clergy, who are employed by or who volunteer for a diocesan agency or parish.

### **B. General Guidelines**

The following guidelines are intended to assist Church personnel in making decisions about interactions with minors in Church sponsored and affiliated programs. They are not designed or intended to address the interactions within families. For clarification of any guideline or any inquiry about behaviors not addressed here, one’s immediate supervisor should be contacted. These guidelines do not supersede state law or DFACS requirements.

1. Ministry to minors within the Church is at the service of the parents who have the first responsibility to care for and educate their children. Therefore, activities with minors are to be conducted with the explicit knowledge and consent of parents or legal guardians.
2. Church personnel are responsible for releasing minors in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. In the event that Church personnel are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a minor, they are to immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor before releasing the child.
3. Church personnel are to immediately report uncontrollable or highly unusual behavior of minors to parents.
4. While working with minors, Church personnel are prohibited from the use, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs. They are also prohibited from furnishing alcohol or illegal drugs to minors or permitting minors to use such in their presence.

5. Church personnel may occasionally be in a position to provide transportation for minors. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when Church personnel are involved in the transportation of minors:
  - a. Ordinarily, minors are never to be transported without written permission.
  - b. Minors are to be transported directly to their destination.
  - c. Church personnel are to avoid unnecessary and/or inappropriate contact with minors while in vehicles.
  - d. Drivers who are assigned to transport minors must be at least 25 years old. (Requests for specific exceptions must be submitted in writing to the pastor).
6. Church personnel are prohibited from speaking to minors in a way that is or could be reasonably construed as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Church personnel are to refrain from using inappropriate language in the presence of minors.
7. Church personnel are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with minors. However, it is expected that from time to time youth ministry lessons and discussions for teenagers may address human sexuality issues related to dating and sex. These lessons will convey to youth the Church's views on these topics. If youth have questions not answered or addressed by their individual teachers they are to be referred to their parents or guardians for clarification and counseling. In addition, Church personnel are never permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with minors.
8. Church personnel are never to be nude in the presence of minors in their care. Changing and showering facilities or arrangements for adults are to be separate from facilities or arrangements for minors.
9. Church personnel are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented or morally inappropriate printed materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on Church property or in the presence of minors.
10. Church personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds, sleeping bags or small tents with minors.
11. Houses used as residences for priests and religious are exclusively for their use. Minors should not be allowed in the private quarters of those residences. With the exception of occasional visits from immediate family members, minors are not permitted to be overnight guests in the residences of priests or religious.
12. Counseling areas should have transparent windows or open doors. Care should be made to have another adult in the general vicinity during counseling sessions.

## C. Physical Contact

The Diocese of Savannah has implemented a physical contact policy that will promote a positive, nurturing, safe environment for children and youth ministries while protecting both children and Church personnel from misunderstandings. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church personnel working with children and in youth programs.

1. Church personnel are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of minors. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behavior by minors.
2. Appropriate affection between Church personnel and minors is important for a child's development and a positive part of Church life and ministry. The following forms of affection are regarded as appropriate examples for most Church sponsored and affiliated programs:
  - Side hugs.
  - Shoulder to shoulder hugs.
  - Pats on the shoulder or back.
  - Handshakes.
  - "High-fives" and hand slapping.
  - Verbal praise.
  - Touching hands, faces, shoulders or arms of minors.
  - Arms around shoulders.
  - Holding hands while walking with small children.
  - Pats on the head when culturally appropriate. (For example, this gesture should typically be avoided in some Asian communities).
3. Some forms of physical affection have been used to initiate inappropriate contact with minors. The following are examples of affection that are not to be used in Church sponsored and affiliated programs:
  - Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
  - Kisses on the mouth.
  - Holding minors over two years old on the lap.
  - Touching buttocks, chests or genital areas.
  - Showing affection in isolated areas of the program such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms.
  - Sleeping in bed with a child.
  - Touching the knees or legs of minors.

- Tickling minors.
- Wrestling and/or roughhousing.
- Piggyback rides.
- Any type of massage given by a minor to an adult.
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a minor.
- Any form of unwanted affection.
- Compliments that relate to physique or body development.

#### **D. Undue Attention**

Certain conduct has been used by adults to develop inappropriate relationships with minors. Activities include singling out minors or showing them unusual attention. Some examples of this behavior prohibited for Church personnel are:

- Presenting gifts to a particular child (relatives excluded).
- Allowing a minor to drive automobiles of Church personnel even though another adult may be present.
- Singling out a particular child for special dinners, events, trips or outings.

#### **E. Screening**

1. Without exception, all applicants for Church positions working with minors will be required to complete the following:
  - a. A release of information to conduct a criminal background check.
  - b. Applicants will also be required to read and sign the *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*.
2. Church personnel who transfer within the Diocese are to request in writing that their personnel files be transferred to the new parish or school.

#### **F. Education and Training**

1. Church personnel are required to review and agree to comply with the *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*.
2. Members of the clergy, religious, employees and all volunteers who work with minors will be required to receive instruction in the VIRTUS Program, "Protecting God's Children".
3. Minors who work as employees or volunteers will be informed that they have a right to a safe working environment and a right to disclose behavior not in accord with these standards.

## **G. Program Supervision**

1. Parents are encouraged to be a part of any and all services and programs in which their children are involved in the Diocese of Savannah. Parents are always welcome to observe programs and activities in which their children are involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have ongoing contact with their child's programs in the Church will be required to complete the volunteer application process.
2. Programs for minors are not to be sponsored or administered by only one adult.
3. Church personnel under the age of 21 must work under the direction of an adult supervisor.
4. Church personnel responsible for supervision of parish and school activities must be aware of all programs for minors that are sponsored by a parish or school. A list of these programs is to be maintained and include purpose, activities, sponsors or coordinators, meeting times and locations. Leaders are to examine these programs and decide whether there is adequate supervision.
5. Individual Church personnel are not permitted to develop new programs for minors without proper consent and review by the pastor or proper designee. Requests to develop new programs are to be submitted in writing to the pastor. The pastor is to decide whether such requests include adequate adult supervision and are in compliance with the *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*.

## **H. Reporting Violations**

All Church personnel are required to report violations of the *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors* by an adult employee or volunteer to the appropriate principal or pastor.

**I. Dissemination**

The *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors* will be given to all diocesan and parish employees as well as to volunteers.



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

**I have read and understand the *Code of Conduct for Those Working with Minors*. I voluntarily agree to abide by these standards and conduct myself in complete accord with them.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of parish, school or institution:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please retain this in the individual's personnel file. Signed by all employees & volunteers.**

July 31, 2003