

The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth

Statement of Intent

The aim of this policy is to make the Diocese of Vermont a safe place, safe for those who worship, safe for those who minister, safe for those who come in need, safe for children and safe for all who seek or serve Christ. We believe that this policy helps us live out our Baptismal Covenant to respect the dignity of every human being. A set of expected standards provides the Diocese, its institutions and congregations with practical guidance in achieving the goals of this policy.

Congregations and diocesan institutions shall adopt safe church policies that are at a minimum consistent with the requirements in this policy.

Screening and Selection for Ministry with Children and Youth

The Diocese will do background checks on all clergy who are deployed or licensed to officiate within the Diocese, on all diocesan employees and on those who have leadership responsibilities for youth or children at diocesan events.

Congregations shall do background checks on all employees and any volunteers who regularly work with children or youth.

Volunteers shall not be permitted to work with children or youth until they have been known to the clergy or congregation for at least six months.

Monitoring Programs and Interaction with Children and Youth

Monitoring is essential for keeping children and youth safe, in that it can allow detection of problems before they lead to an incident of abuse.

The current “Standards and Practical Applications for Anyone Volunteering with Children and Youth” shall be followed at diocesan events and activities for children and youth.

At the congregational level, the responsibility for seeing that appropriate monitoring standards are in place rests with the rector or clergy person in charge, the vestry and the congregation’s safe church minister.

Education and Training

Congregational policies for the protection of children and youth shall be posted in areas where activities for children and youth usually take place and shall be given to all adults who regularly work with children or youth and to parents.

Congregations shall direct clergy and lay employees, as well as volunteers who work with children or youth, to attend the diocesan Training for a Safer Church on how to prevent child abuse and promote healthy boundaries in church settings. Each congregation shall maintain a record of those who have attended such training. Individuals will attend re-certification training every five years.

The Diocese shall require all clergy and employees and volunteers who work with children or youth at diocesan events to attend Training for a Safer Church on how to prevent child abuse and promote healthy boundaries in church settings and will maintain records of those who have attended the training.

The Bishop's Office will approve curriculum and trainers for the requisite training. Current training should be available for those who screen, train or supervise those who regularly work with children or youth.

Responding to Concerns

Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a parish environment shall immediately report the violation to the Rector and Senior Warden. Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a diocesan environment or by a clergy person shall immediately report the violation to the Safe Church Officer.

Anyone who has reason to suspect that child abuse has taken place at church or in another setting, is strongly encouraged to tell the parish priest or another member of ordained clergy. Any individual mandated by state law to report who has reason to suspect that child abuse has taken place shall report it to the appropriate civil authority.

Contact Information

The Safe Church Officer for the Diocese is: Auburn Watersong, Canon to the Ordinary, 802-863-3431; awatersong@diovermont.org

Vermont's Child Protection Line for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect is 1-800-649-5285, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Web site of the Vermont Department of Children and Families is www.dcf.vermont.gov.

The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

Standards and Practical Applications for Anyone Volunteering or Working with Children and Youth

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and are central to the life of the church. Relationships in ministry should always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or allow harm to occur. These standards and practical applications have been approved by Diocesan Council to help those who minister with children or youth create and maintain safe environments. Policies, standards and codes of conduct are meant to assist in defining healthy and safe relationships as well as behaviors and practices that allow the church to demonstrate love and compassion to children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

All adults ministering with children or youth at diocesan events and activities are asked to review carefully each statement within these Standards before agreeing to adhere to the statements and serving the diocese in ministry with children or youth.

Standards for Screening and Selection for Ministry with Children and Youth

Screening is an essential element in keeping children and youth safe. It is an opportunity to prevent a molester from having contact with children and youth in church programs.

All those working with children or youth must complete and sign an application form [see sample, Appendix A], which specifically includes a request for personal references, information concerning any prior adjudication in regard to sexual misconduct and acknowledgement of the church's right to conduct a confidential background check.

Background checks shall include the following:

- a. the written application
- b. a public records check
- c. an interview
- d. reference checks.

The more access an individual has to children or youth, the more detailed a background check should be.

Adults with leadership responsibilities at an overnight camp or on an extended trip must have a background and reference screening prior to beginning the activity.

Any adult attending an overnight event must have a current safe church certificate filed with their rector or clergy person in charge, and the clergy person must sign off on the adult's registration form.

Adults are defined as 18 years of age or older and at least one full year past high school graduation. Whenever possible, an older person should be placed in a group with older youth participants.

No convicted sex offender should **ever** be involved with children. No person accused of being a sex offender should be involved with youth or children until the investigation is complete and the person has been cleared.

Standards for Monitoring Programs for Children and Youth

Monitoring is essential for keeping children and youth safe in that it can allow detection of problems before they turn into an incident of abuse.

Plans for all events and ministries for children and youth should include at least two unrelated adults present at all times. If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youth, that adult shall immediately report those circumstances to the Bishop's Office in the case of diocesan events or to the Rector or Senior Warden for congregational events, as appropriate.

Parents should be given appropriate details for all events or activities.

The following are standard ratios of adults to children and youth throughout every event and/or gathering:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Infant to 5 years of age: | 1 adult for every 4 children |
| 6-18 years of age: | 1 adult for every 5 children or youth |

When there are both boys and girls, it is best if both male and female leaders are present; in an overnight event, where there are male and female participants, this is mandatory.

If a situation should arise in which a child or youth must be alone with an adult, they should remain in the sight of another adult.

A media release must be signed for pictures to be displayed on the diocesan Web site, in the diocesan newspaper, or any flyer or publication for the Diocese of Vermont. Names of minors are never used with photographs.

Use rooms that are visible through glass doors or leave doors open.

Show only age appropriate videos and movies. Appropriate means the movie or video is reviewed and screened for sexual content, language, violence and overall message.

G rated films may be shown.

PG videos and movies should not be shown to anyone under the age of 13.

PG13 movies and videos should not be shown to anyone under the age of 13. In addition, parents should be made aware of and approve any PG 13 videos or movies prior to showing it.

If a youth comes to any diocesan activity or event intoxicated (from either drugs or alcohol), arrange to have the person taken home and consult with the event coordinator as to further intervention.

Firearms and concealed weapons are prohibited at any child or youth event or activity. Clergy may make special exceptions for off-duty police officers or others required to carry firearms.

All adults attending diocesan youth events or activities are mandatory reporters and are required to report abuse or suspected abuse immediately as outlined in diocesan policy.

Additional Standards for Programs in Congregations

It may be appropriate for a Sunday School class to have only one teacher as long as at least one other adult can maintain visual contact with the teacher.

Any new programs, trips or events that involve children or youth must be given prior approval by the clergy, and the vestry should be notified in advance of the event.

All events for children or youth shall be made public and no event for children or youth shall take place in a private residence without prior approval by the clergy.

Adults who work with children or youth within a congregation are discouraged from having a separate and private relationship with any unrelated child from church away from sanctioned church youth activities, unless that relationship is known to the clergy.

Each congregation is encouraged to have a Safe Church Minister who is current on safe church issues and training and is not otherwise an employee of the congregation. The Safe Church Minister should be consulted by the clergy, vestry members or others on safe church matters, and should report all questionable or non-standard arrangements to the clergy or a Warden. It is recommended that the Safe Church Minister and the Vestry regularly conduct a "safe church audit" to review practices and policies within the congregation.

A congregation's policies should include the names and phone numbers of the clergy, senior warden, parish Safe Church Minister, and contact person in the Bishop's Office.

A congregation's computers should have adequate password protection.

Congregations should have clear guidelines and adequate supervision (by parish staff or authorized persons) of anyone using a computer to access the Internet. Any activity on a congregation's computer *should not be* considered private and may be accessed by authorized persons.

Maintain an "open door policy," that parents or clergy always have the right to visit and observe a class or program at any time unannounced.

Standards for Overnight Activities and Events

Each participant must submit a completed and signed permission form to the event coordinator to attend an event or activity [see sample, Appendix B]. Parents and guardians should be given information about the event and be provided emergency contact information in advance.

Prior to an off-site event, a list of participants with parental contact information should be given to the diocesan office for diocesan events or to the church office for congregational events.

All medications, including prescription and over the counter, must be in the original container with clear instructions and the participant's name. Medications are collected upon arrival and returned at the end of the event. Medications will be locked in a lock box and administered by a designated adult.

Sleeping and Rooming Arrangements for Overnight Activities or Events:

- If sleeping in parish hall, gym floor, or large room: males and females must have separate areas to sleep in.
- In a hotel or conference center or tent/camper setting:
 - Ideally, there should be no fewer than 3 same gender youth per room.
 - Choose hotels that have rooms open to the interior of the building rather than to the outside.
 - If possible make arrangements so that an adult room is between two youth rooms (no sharing adjoining bathrooms).
 - Each youth must have a separate bed, bedding and/or sleeping bag.
 - Adults should sleep in modest attire in order to be able to respond quickly to emergency needs.
 - Schedule hall monitoring periodically throughout the night.
 - Create a rooming list that provides the location where each child, youth, and adult is rooming. Post it in ways that are accessible to everyone at the event, but not to the general public.
 - Males may not enter a room where females are sleeping and females may not enter a room where males are sleeping.

Transportation

Anyone transporting children or youth must complete a “Transporting Children and Youth in a Motor Vehicle” form [Appendix C] and be screened by a Motor Vehicle Records search for Driving While Intoxicated or any reckless citation prior to transporting children or youth. The form and screening records are then filed in the diocesan office.

Parents must give written permission for any transportation of children or youth.

If children or youth are to be picked up by someone other than a parent or guardian, or dropped off somewhere other than their home, the parent or guardian should indicate that person's name and phone number on the permission form.

At the conclusion of an event, two adult leaders should stay with children and youth until every child and youth has been picked-up. Never leave a child or youth alone waiting for a ride home.

Standards for Adult Leaders and Sponsors

Adults model appropriate behaviors to children and youth. Therefore, adults abide by the same covenant as youth [see application form, Appendix A]. Adults are expected to model positive nurturing relationships that include no profane language and no practical jokes that would be physically or emotionally harmful.

Adults will use the "Standards for Appropriate Affection" [below] to talk about touch and boundaries at all events and gatherings, establishing principles of respectful behavior while at the same time teaching appropriate touch and boundaries.

It is inappropriate for a leader or any adult to be alone with a child if out of sight of another adult.

Secret meetings and activities with a child, children or youth are inappropriate.

Physical punishment or discipline, harsh language, degrading punishment, hazing or bullying should never be used or allowed.

Adult leaders and sponsors shall never, under any circumstances:

- provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs pornography,
- consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs at any event at which children or youth are present,
- be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or the misuse of legal drugs at any children's or youth event or activity,
- engage in illegal behavior or allow other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior,
- engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth,
- discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth.

Standards for Interacting with Children and Youth

The following standards of positive and appropriate forms of affection and inappropriate forms of affection are to be carefully followed by all adults working around or with children and youth:

Positive and appropriate forms of interaction include:

Brief hugs

Pats on the shoulder or back

Handshakes

"High-fives"

Verbal praise

Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth

Arms around shoulders

Holding hands while walking with small children

Sitting beside small children

Kneeling or bending down for brief hugs with small children

Holding hands during prayer

Inappropriate forms of interaction include:

Lengthy embraces

Kisses

Holding children other than infants or toddlers on the lap

Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
Occupying a bed with a child or youth
Touching knees or legs of children or youth
Wrestling with children or youth
Tickling children or youth
Piggyback rides
Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
Any form of unwanted affection
Comments or compliments, spoken, written, or electronic, that relate to physique or body development, i.e. "You sure are developing," or "You look hot in those jeans."
Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch, whether or not it is covered by other clothing
Giving gifts or money that show favoritism to individual children or youth
Private meals alone with individual children or youth

Adults should not dress, undress, bathe or shower in the presence of youth and adults should not be in the room where youth dress, undress, bath or shower.

If a child or youth needs to undress (for example, to get into a costume or for first aid) call another adult of the same gender as the child to be nearby. Be intentional about safe church practices for trips to the bathroom for those who need assistance.

Additional Contact Information

Specific details about how to do background checks, norms for various types of youth events and how to supervise compliance with this policy can be obtained at training events offered by the Diocese, your congregation's Safe Church Minister or the diocesan Safe Church Officer.