

Diocese of Pueblo
Guidelines on Interacting with Children and Young People
Effective July 1, 2020

Whether public and private, the conduct of clergy, staff, and volunteers can inspire the faithful and draw them closer to the Church, or it can scandalize them and undermine their faith. Youth workers should always be mindful of their responsibilities in ministry. Working with children and young people is a special joy, but it also carries special responsibilities. Jesus taught:

*Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.
But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones who have faith in me,
it would be better for him to have a millstone hung round his neck
and be drowned in the depths of the sea. Mt. 18:5-6.*

Interactions with children and young people should be tailored to the particular situation. Consider these guidelines when ministering to these dear ones.

1. **Give a good example.** Actions speak louder than words. Adults should treat others with courtesy, compassion, and respect. Use appropriate language. Avoid sexualized humor or talk. Model Catholic values and honorable relationships.
 - a. Youth workers should not discuss their own sexual activities or desires or solicit such information from minors.
 - b. Humor regarding sexual matters should be avoided.
 - c. Youth workers should never express sexual desires.
 - d. With few exceptions, alcohol should not be present at youth ministry events, and neither alcohol or drugs should be consumed or used with any minor.
 - e. Youth workers should, at no time use illegal drugs, abuse prescribed or legal drugs, or use marijuana whether medically prescribed or not.
 - f. Youth workers should not view pornography in any form at anytime.
2. **Respect physical boundaries of those you serve.** Children see the world through the lens of their prior experiences (some of which is disordered). The laying on of hands and the embrace of fellowship are signs of Christ's love and healing. Thus, the human touch is part of the Catholic life. Human touch can also be disordered or sinful. Most understand the difference between touching that signifies fellowship, forgiveness, compassion, or the love of Christ, and touching that is sexual or capable of being perceived as such. Youth ministers should carefully consider the character of their physical contact with those they serve.
 - a. Hugs or handshakes should generally be brief. However, if an adult is providing grief counseling or other deeply emotional support, longer contact might be appropriate. Adults should be aware that if a young person pulls away, then the adult may have "hung on" too long. Be attentive to cues from the child or young person you serve. It is a good practice to ask the young person, "Would you like a hug?" and then act accordingly.
 - b. Other forms of touching, while rare, might be necessary in limited situations. Touching is appropriate when carrying a child who is injured, assisting a child who is ill, and bandaging a wound.
 - c. Youth workers should dress modestly. A low-cut top for women or a muscle shirt for men is not generally appropriate. Except for swimming parties and other water activities, those who work with children should be fully clothed.

3. **Respect bodily privacy.**
 - a. While there are exceptions, children and young people should generally be given total privacy when disrobing, showering, changing clothes, and visiting the bathroom.
 - b. If assistance with any form of bodily issue is required, this assistance should usually be given by an adult of the same gender. A second adult should ordinarily be nearby.
4. **Exercise extraordinary care in one-to-one ministry.** Good ministry is about relationship. There are times when a child needs individual attention, such as counseling or receiving physical assistance. Sometimes ministry commends two-person dialogues. Carefully weigh the signals and risks before getting involved in such. Might it be confusing to the young person? Where is the least confusing site for such a meeting? Is an office with the door open a better site than a restaurant? Is a car ever an appropriate site? Is significant travel alone with a child ever appropriate? Does a pattern of gifting a child suggest favoritism or constitute grooming? Does a one-to-one meeting put the youth worker at risk for a false accusation? Interactions with young people should be appropriate and appear appropriate.
 - a. Giving rides to, or gifting one young person consistently can be viewed as favoritism by both that young person and also other young people. It can also provide a gateway to immoral conduct.
 - b. A young person who asks for a one-to-one consultation should receive that support in a manner that allows him or her to feel supported but also to exit at any time.
 - c. Except in emergencies, it is never appropriate to allow children or young people to stay overnight in the residence of a member of clergy, a staff member, or a volunteer, and is never appropriate to allow them to share a bed with an adult.
5. **Avoid frequent one-on-one social media communications.**
 - a. Frequent texting, emailing, or "Facebooking" with a young person is highly discouraged. It can confuse a young person and, if twisted, can become a gateway to immoral conduct or even constitute immoral conduct. Sexting or sexy communications are never appropriate. Adults who find themselves in one-to-one communication with a young person should immediately seek instruction and approval from their supervisor.
 - b. A good practice is to overtly copy your supervisor on electronic communications with young people. Activity on Parish Facebook sites should be accessible to more than one member of Diocesan or Parish staff.
6. **Understand that minors can have difficulty articulating their discomfort.** Adults must be alert to a young person's physical and verbal cues because young persons are often unskilled in identifying and protecting their boundaries.
 - a. Give young people a safe way to opt out of working with a staff member they seem hesitant about. Allowing young people a choice gives them the opportunity to get to know the staff member at a more gradual pace and on their own terms.
 - b. Indirect cues may warrant further inquiry.

Youth workers should refer to their supervisor, the Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator, the Diocesan Sexual Misconduct Policy, and the Diocesan Harassment Policy for additional guidance regarding these issues.