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Youth Ministry Guidelines

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to state guidelines to be used by Youth Ministry Staff. *Staff* refers to both paid West Side staff and volunteers who work with youth in middle school and high school.

Background

The Child Security Program is an umbrella policy covering all ministry to children ages birth through high school. These guidelines assume that all youth workers have completed training and screening required by the Child Security policy.

Because youth ministry differs from children's ministry, these guidelines seek to clarify youth ministry staff conduct. Youth ministry encourages one-on-one relationships between students and staff, and these guidelines support those relationships within healthy parameters.

Although students are often physically strong and may not be as prone to physical or sexual abuse, we believe that students are still vulnerable. Abuse can also take the form of spiritual and emotional abuse as well, and our purpose for these guidelines includes all of these forms.

For these reasons, the guidelines for youth are just as important as those for the children.

Guidelines

1. Group Meetings

Group meetings should be lead by teams of adults—preferably male and female. This can protect youth and adults from false accusations and questionable situations; additionally, it decreases the possibility of an adult developing unhealthy dependence on the youth and vice versa.

Meetings should have an open-door policy. Clergy, staff, parents, and church members have a right to observe youth activities. At the end of group meetings, at least two adults should remain until all the students leave.

2. Small Groups

Small groups comprised of students and an adult leader should meet in areas that are accessible by others. The groups should meet in rooms with windows or with the door propped open.

3. One-on-One Relationships

One-on-one meetings should be male-male and female-female. Meetings should take place in public areas, in rooms with windows in the doors, or with the door propped open.

4. Transportation

When a group of students and adults are traveling—to retreats or the airport, for example—two adults should travel in each vehicle whenever possible. In the case of a group of vehicles travelling to an event, it is acceptable that only one adult is in each vehicle. All drivers must be at least 21 years of age. If this is not possible, any transportation given by drivers under 21 must be pre-approved by the Youth Director/Pastor. (Church van use requires a driver to be over 25).

For local travel—a trip to Dairy Queen, for example—individual staff members may drive groups of students. It is the Youth Committee preference that all official drivers be 21 years of age or older. (Church van use requires a driver to be over 25). Any questions should be brought to the youth director or pastor. A student may only transport fellow students from one local event location to another if those students were driven to the original location by the driving student.

Adults who provide individual rides to and from youth events should use common sense. Our adults are not only youth staff, but they are also family friends. The key is clear communication between the staff member and the parents. Staff members should avoid providing individual rides to members of the opposite sex; but once again, clear appointments and parent/staff communication is the key.

5. Overnight Trips

A minimum of two adults shall be present at an overnight activity. If the participants are both male and female, then a minimum of four adults, preferably two male and two female staff members should attend. Variances should be approved by the Youth Committee..

It is never appropriate for an adult youth worker who is not a family member to share a bed with a youth. Males and females—both youth and adult—should sleep in separate rooms at all events. Trained and screened youth workers are to be included with adults that are newcomers to youth ministry.

6. Deputation/Mission Trips

Deputation trips fall under the above guidelines. Leaders will complete the Child Security Program training. Adult leaders of the local mission organization—YWAM leaders, for example—do not fall under this training. The students are under the leadership of West Side youth staff. Common sense should direct the situations outside these guidelines. Any clarification should be directed to the youth director/pastor.

7. Parent Helpers

Parents who have completed Child Security Program training and screening are qualified and expected to fulfill the requirements of the Child Security policy and these guidelines in support of or in place of the Youth Ministry staff. Those helpers who have not completed the training and screening shall support the trained adults and use common sense in their conduct. In all cases, at least one screened and trained adult must be present at all activities and be accompanied by one other adult.

Crisis Intervention/Counseling Issues

In cases of students divulging personal information, the priorities will be safety and trust, with the attempt to find balance between the two. Youth and Family Ministries is a ministry for the whole family, and so it is our priority to not only support youth in difficult situations but to support communication between parent and child as well.

1. If a student divulges abuse, the Child Security Program policy must be followed.
2. If a student divulges behavior that is life-altering—e.g. eating disorders, heavy drug use or pregnancy—the youth director or pastor should be consulted. Trainees and interns should not provide counseling in these areas, but should immediately seek the counsel of others. Depending on the family situation, the youth director or pastor should involve the student's family and/or a professional counselor.
3. If a student divulges other behaviors — e.g. smoking, drinking or sexual activity — discretion may be used in seeking additional counseling. However, trainees and interns must seek the advice of the supervising youth director or pastor in all counseling situations.
4. Depending on the training of the youth director or youth pastor, he or she may seek the advice of the head of staff in counseling. Professional counselors should be consulted any time the behavior is beyond the training and experience of the youth director or pastor and/or head of staff.
5. Many volunteers have counseling wisdom. Common sense suggests, though, that seeking the advice of others is wise counseling behavior.

Revision

1. Any revision to these guidelines will be reviewed by the Oversight Committee
2. Any revision to these guidelines will be approved by the Youth Committee.
3. Any revision of these guidelines will be provided to Session.

Rick Pratt, Elder

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