



# Standards of Ministerial Behavior in Dealing with Children & Young People

*We the clergy, women and men religious, seminarians, staff and volunteers of the Diocese of Grand Rapids who have regular contact with children and young people pledge that we will maintain an open and trustworthy relationship with them free of behavior which is sexual in nature.*

## General Guidelines

- 1.1 Children and young people deserve the Church's highest standard of care. Since adults hold positions of power, we will set appropriate boundaries to assure a safe place for our children and young people in all Church ministries and programs.
- 1.2 We will witness in these and all our relationships the chastity appropriate to our state in life, whether celibate, single or married.
- 1.3 We recognize that needs for affection and intimacy must be addressed outside our work with children and young people.
- 1.4 Recognizing that physical contact with a minor may on occasion be appropriate and in some instances unavoidable, we acknowledge that it can also be misconstrued. It should occur in our work with youth (a) only when completely nonsexual and (b) never in private. In addition, we will not engage in speech, gesture or other behavior which may be construed as seductive or sexually suggestive to a minor.
- 1.5 When working with youth, we know that a team approach is best. We will, to the extent possible, avoid being alone with a minor, including transportation.
- 1.6 We will be accountable to a spiritual director, superior, colleague, spouse or peer to ensure we maintain proper boundaries in our relationships with young persons and openly discuss threats perceived to those boundaries by ourselves, a youth or others.
- 1.7 We will educate ourselves concerning the signs of abuse and neglect of minors and take appropriate and requisite action when such signs are recognized. We acknowledge the State of Michigan's *Child Protection Law* in that regard, as well as the Diocese's *Policy on the Sexual Abuse of Minors*, and pledge our support of them.

1.8 Where other civil laws or codes of ethics govern particular aspects of our relationships with minors, we agree to comply implicitly with them in all respects.

### **Particular Guidelines**

2.1 Priests, unmarried deacons, religious and seminarians will not allow an unrelated minor to stay overnight in their private accommodations or residences unless the minor's parent or guardian is present. Married deacons, staff and volunteers will not share overnight accommodations with an unrelated minor if no other adult is present.

2.2 We will not meet with an unrelated minor in private absent exceptional circumstances. We will not do so, if at all possible, without notifying a superior or colleague in advance. When such a meeting occurs without such notice, we will promptly notify a superior or colleague in writing of the event, the circumstances giving rise to it and what occurred.

2.3 When we meet with an unrelated minor in a public place, but are alone with her or him, we will take the steps necessary to see that the meeting is readily observable to others, both visually and audibly unless confidentiality of the oral communication is necessary in the interest of the minor, in which case we will take additional precautions to assure that the meeting will be within the sight of other adults.

2.4 If a minor is sexually suggestive in speech or behavior, we will inform him or her that such conduct is unacceptable and, when appropriate, take other remedial action to prevent harm to the minor and scandal to others.

2.5 If a minor discloses information about a sexual issue or concern involving a parent, guardian or household member, we will ascertain whether reporting is required (see 1.7, *ante*) or appropriate, putting the minor's health and safety first, and having due regard for a request for confidentiality and/or anonymity by the minor. We will consult with an appropriate professional to determine a proper response.

2.6 Apart from the limited circumstance referenced in 2.5, we encourage parents and guardians to inquire about their children's welfare and our relationship with them. If we become aware of a danger to the health or safety of a young person, we will promptly advise the parent or guardian of our concern.

2.7 We will never provide alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs, pornography or other inappropriate material to a child or young person. We will never use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while in ministry to them.

2.8 We will follow diocesan policies for screening, supervising and evaluating persons who work with children and young people on a regular basis, and make certain such persons sign on to these guidelines and agree to follow them.

2.9 We will not provide pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, psychological or other mental health services to a minor or young person unless we are qualified to do so. If we do, we will maintain a log showing the time and place of each session and include minimal information of the content. We will not audiotape or videotape such sessions, and will use the information obtained from them only in educational, homiletic or other professional settings, and only after taking effective means to safeguard the minor's identity and confidential disclosures.

***These guidelines, both general and particular, do not address or govern the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Under no circumstances shall there be disclosure, directly or indirectly, of information received in the confessional except as provided by Canon Law.***

In implementing these guidelines, we are mindful that they provide a basic structure which seeks to protect children and youth from neglect and sexual abuse, but that no framework can address all the situations which may arise in our work. We believe that human sexuality, our own as well as that of the young people we seek to serve, is a gift inherent in our creation in the image and likeness of our God. We pledge to honor both the spirit and the letter of these standards in light of this belief.

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

**Organization** \_\_\_\_\_

**Pastor/Supervisor** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Clergy, Religious, Seminarian, Staff or Volunteer**

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