



Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia

Safety Standards for Youth Ministry

These are the youth ministry safety standards recommended by the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. They are intended for youth ministry (with 6th-12th grades) in both congregational and diocesan event settings. Their purpose is to protect youth, adults who work with them, and the church, by properly screening and monitoring volunteers and creating a safe space for young people.

- Above all, the physical and emotional safety of each person should be honored and upheld.
- There should be at least two adults (21 or older) or more at any church youth gathering. The adult to youth ratio should be between 1:5 and 1:8. Where possible, there should be a mix of male and female adults, with the gender of adult leaders matching that of youth participants. A married couple should not be the only adults with a group of youth.
- Although some youth drive themselves to church, licensed adults (21 or older) should be the only drivers on youth trips and during youth meetings. All riders should wear seat belts at all times.
- Adults who work with youth on a regular basis (employees and volunteers) must take the Safeguarding God's Children training offered by the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. This workshop must be renewed every three years.
- The church should conduct a criminal background check on each adult who regularly works with youth.
- No adult should be alone in private with a young person at or away from the church or event facility. If it is necessary for a young person and adult to have a private conversation, it should be done in a public and visible place. A parent with his or her own child is an exception to this rule.
- On trips, adults should either have separate shower facilities or shower at other times than the youth.
- In order to protect the community and to avoid situations that blur appropriate adult/youth boundaries, it is not appropriate for adults to:
 - *Have youth sit in their laps (or to sit in a young person's lap)
 - *Give piggyback rides
 - *Give or receive massages with youth
 - *Engage in snuggling or prolonged hugging with youth
 - *Engage in wrestling or physical horseplay with youth
- On trips and at overnights, every young person and adult should have these basic needs met:
 - *Three substantial meals each full day
 - *Access to restrooms (and showers, when possible)
 - *At least eight hours for sleep each 24-hour period
 - *Some space each full day for rest or free time
 - *Separate sleeping areas and restrooms for males and females
- A functioning set of standards of behavior (or Community Covenant) should be honored by all participants (youth and adult) at all youth meetings and trips. These standards of behavior should prohibit the use and possession of alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco products, and weapons. They should also prohibit acts of violence, bullying, sexual activity, theft, and vandalism.
- Each trip or overnight event should require a permission (with a parent/guardian's signed permission for their child to participate) **and** medical release form (listing food/drug allergies, health insurance information, emergency contact information, and a parent/guardian's signed permission for their child to be treated for emergencies). Have your church's Chancellor/Attorney review these documents to be sure they serve the church and families effectively.
- Keep a stocked first aid kit nearby whenever you meet or travel as a group.
- On trips, it is recommended that a doctor, nurse, EMT, or a child's own parent/guardian be in charge of keeping and administering prescribed medication to participating youth when possible.
- Be sure to document any medical or physical accident or incident in writing.
- Any suspicion or allegation of abuse or neglect of a youth **must** be reported to Youth and Family Services immediately.
- All youth meetings and trips should be open to parents, clergy, and other appropriate visitors at all times.