



DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

Secretariat for Catholic Education
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Catholic Schools Office

Office of Catechesis

Office of Youth Ministry

Guidelines for Small Group Meetings in Homes or on Property Not Owned by the Diocese

Preamble:

Some youth programs available in our diocese at the junior and senior high school level entail small group meetings in homes or on property not owned by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. In order to provide an environment that protects children as well as diocesan and parish employees and volunteers, the diocese has implemented the following policies and guidelines.

Safe Environment Guidelines:

1. Teachers, employees, and volunteers must comply with all diocesan "Safe Environment" guidelines including background checks and safe-environment training.
2. Two adults shall be present at all times during meeting or the event must be cancelled
3. No child should be alone with an adult except for a child with his or her parent
4. Supervision ratios must comply with diocesan "Safe Environment" guidelines for outings with children
5. The pastor/principal must be aware of and pre-approve the date, time and location of the meeting or event
6. The DRE or other supervisor must perform regular and unannounced site visits to each home-base program within the parish or school
7. Window coverings shall be fully opened in the house while meeting is being held
8. In a private residence or other locations that have private areas, only public areas may be used for gathering space. Bedrooms or other secluded areas may not be used for break- out sessions, etc.
9. Bathrooms designated for children's use shall be free of medicines, drugs, and chemicals.
10. Any alcohol, cigarettes, fireworks or potentially harmful items must be secured and inaccessible to children during the event

11. All music and videos used during the event must be appropriate for a Church or school event
12. Employees or adults leaders should have an opening meeting where the parents are encouraged to come and meet the group leaders, pick up a schedule, and discuss plans for the year. Parents must be welcome at all events.
13. Changes in location are allowed to be made, but they should be cleared through the parish or school first and then communicated to the students and parents. Parents should be notified of any location changes prior to the change occurring.

Transportation considerations:

1. No student should ride alone in a vehicle with an adult
2. No activity should keep the students out past posted curfews
3. Group leaders and volunteers can transport children to events. However, all drivers must be over 21 years of age and in compliance with diocesan policies (background checks, safe environment training, etc). Under no circumstances should children be transported in an 11-15 passenger van, which are prohibited by diocesan and insurance carrier policies.

Building and Participant Safety:

1. Building and surrounding grounds shall be inspected for hazards
2. Meeting spaces should be well lit
3. Adults and children must be very cautious with candles and fireplaces
4. Smoke detectors should be installed and properly functioning on each floor of the home or location where the class or meeting will be held
5. A serviced and functioning fire extinguisher must be accessible and visible
6. Emergency backup lighting must be provided (eg. battery flashlight)
7. Handrails must be installed and properly secured where there are two or more steps that are to be used by children
8. Swimming pool and spa areas shall be gated, secured, and off-limits to children
9. Snow and ice or any other movable hazard must be removed promptly from the walkways, driveways and steps prior to the arrival of children
10. Any loose rugs or buckled rugs need to be leveled to prevent trip hazards
11. Extension cords shall not cross pathways and the use of extension cords shall be limited
12. Furniture should be placed in such a manner to avoid being an obstacle
13. Adult leaders should be aware of any safety concerns in the neighborhood and take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the children

Approved at Bishop's Cabinet: March 5th, 2015