

The OLMC Working with Minors Protocol Guidelines

Ministry to Minors

1. Relationships formed between minors and parish ministers (employed or volunteer) through parish programs are bound to the rules spelled out in these protocols in all church-sponsored activities. It is also highly recommended by OLMC priests and staff that such protocols be observed even outside of church-sponsored activities.
2. Priests, teachers, catechists, coaches, youth ministers, baby-sitters, and any other individual active in ministry to minors within Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish must participate in the "Working with Minors Protocol Seminar" before engaging in such ministry. The protocol seminar must be repeated every three years in order for ministers to remain certified.
3. Minors should always be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as "restricted individuals." They are, that is, not independent. Wherever they are and whatever they should be doing, should always be with the explicit knowledge and approval of their parents or guardian. Also, they are subject to specific civil laws in their own proper state and city, which may prohibit certain activities. They are not adults and are not permitted unfettered decisions. Any and all involvement should be approached from this premise.
4. Caution and professional attitudes are to be observed in all interaction with minors.
5. Another adult should be present in every situation involving a minor, excluding Sacramental Confession.
6. When transporting minors in a vehicle, the following safeguards must be followed:
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 - If the activity is an OLMC-sponsored event, and transportation is the responsibility of OLMC staff, ministers, volunteers or coaches, two adults must be present in each vehicle.
 - If responsibility for transportation to/from an OLMC-sponsored event is left to the parents/guardians of the minor, parents assume responsibility for the safety of the minors.
7. A minor should not be allowed in the personal living quarters of any of the church's ministers, most especially, when only one adult is present.
8. Clergy, coaches, catechists, youth ministers, and teachers should not be left alone with a minor in any building or closed room. There is always more safety in public places.
9. While in any building or room in use for the church's ministry with minors, the following safeguards must be followed:

- During office hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m.; 7 p.m.-9 p.m.): interior door of meeting space must have a window with open window shades and curtains; meeting must be observable and interruptible
 - Outside of office hours: Meeting with a minor outside of office hours, or when other adults are not present in the building, is strongly discouraged. If extraordinary circumstances warrant meeting with a minor outside of office hours, or when other adults are not present in the building, meeting must take place in a public area (i.e., Lower Level or Parish Hall); exterior and interior doors must be unlocked; meeting must be observable and interruptible; when possible, the presence of the parent of the minor should be requested.
10. Minors should be permitted to work in the rectory, parish offices or any other place in the service of the Church only when there is at least one other adult present at all times.
 11. Games or sport activities should be engaged in, with minors, only with the presence of another adult.
 12. While working in the capacity of an adult ministering to minors one must use restroom facilities designated for adult use only. If no such facility is available be sure 2 adults are present in restroom whenever possible.
 13. The church's ministers and agents should never be present as the only adult in a locker room or other dressing areas when minors are using such facilities.
 14. Youth group trips should have a sufficient number of adult chaperones, so that none of the church's ministers should ever be alone with minors.
 15. While on youth group trips, the church's ministers should maintain a professional stature and socialize along with the adult chaperones.
 16. There should never be an overnight trip with a minor alone.
 17. None of the church's ministers should ever stay overnight in the same room with a minor, even if there are two beds.
 18. Attraction to, or from, minors should be recognized and admitted, and greater caution and care taken in all interactions.
 19. The church's ministers should all be aware of the "power" of their role/position. This can be a very seductive force.
 20. Concerning physical contact, careful boundaries must be observed at all times. With the exception of a handshake, or a pat of praise on the back/shoulder, physical contact should not be initiated by the church's minister. Caution should be used when the physical contact is initiated by minors.

21. Comments of a sexual nature should be made only in response to a specific question, never introduced, and should be professionally worded.
22. Topics or vocabulary, which could not comfortably be used in the presence of parents or another adult, should not be employed with minors.
23. The church's ministers may never supply or serve alcohol or any controlled substance to minors.
24. Alcohol should never be consumed in the presence of minors, nor should it be used if activities with them are scheduled.
25. Recommended ratios for baby-sitting children:
 - Infants under 1 year: 1 Adult/4 infants
 - Children 1 through 6: 1 Adult/6 children
 - Minimum of 2 adult baby-sitters required at all times
26. Diocesan recommended ratios for ministry to minors:
 - High School Events: 1 Adult/8 youth
 - High School Overnight: 1 Adult/6 youth
 - Junior High Events: 1 Adult/6youth
 - Elementary/Preschool: 1 Adult/3-5 youth
27. Above all, reflection on the words of Christ regarding children are a healthy meditation before any involvement, and a salutary reflection and examination after each (Mt 18:6. Mlc 9:42. Lk 172. Mk 10:13-16.)

Cautions

1. If there is strong attraction or one seeks the companionship of a particular minor child, or there is a frequent visiting or calling of minors, the attraction and motive should be carefully and objectively examined by the individual and preferably by a "sponsor", mentor, spiritual director, or a mental health professional.
2. If a parish minister (employed or volunteer) observes a questionable special relationship, flirtation or crush between a minor and an adult, contact the director of the ministry to report your observations. If the adult involved is an employed minister, report the observation to their superior or the parish priest.
3. If a parish minister (employed or volunteer) observes a questionable special relationship, flirtation or crush between two adults, it is the responsibility of that minister to alert the adult parties involved. If the problem persists, the lay minister should alert a Director of Religious Education, Youth Minister or parish priest.
4. If greater satisfaction is found in the presence of children rather than adults, motive and attraction should be objectively and professionally examined.
5. Support and social activity should be found with other adults and with

other church's ministers, and every effort should be made to secure such bonds.

6. Sexual orientation is not the primary concern in these matters, but rather, the dysfunctional misdirection of the drive and its force.
7. Neglect of the spiritual/interior life is one of the first telltale signs of impending difficulties. Lacking this directional support, dysfunctional attractions are too easily confused and misconstrued.

Counseling Minors

1. Pastoral counseling of a minor must take place only in an area that is for common use and open to the public, never in personal residences or private living quarters.
2. The office door should have a window or be left open during counseling.
3. If possible, another adult should be in close proximity during the counseling session.
4. Unless the subject matter precludes their presence, parents or guardians should be present, or at least made aware of any pre-arranged session. If a minor shows up for an impromptu or crisis session, all protocols must be followed, and parents or guardians should be subsequently informed of the meeting. (Exception is granted when subject matter involves parental abuse, in which case the proper authorities must be contacted.)
5. The relationship must always remain professional during the sessions.
6. Personal/ physical attraction to or from an individual should be recognized, acknowledged and the minor should be referred to another minister.
7. If the counseling entails more than two sessions, evaluation of the situation should be made with the parents or guardians, an advisor, or a licensed professional.
8. The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated in the place in church so designated for this purpose. Only extreme inconvenience or impossibility would be an acceptable excuse.

Violations of Protocol

If an allegation of a protocol violation on the part of any minister (employed or volunteer) is brought to the attention of a Priest, Director of Religious Education, Youth Minister, or other parish staff member the following action must be taken:

1. If the allegation involves sexual misconduct, contact a parish priest or staff employee immediately. The Lafayette Diocesan "Protocol for Responding to Allegations of Sexual Misconduct" will be followed.
2. If the allegation is of lesser significance, the offending person should be given a copy of the protocols and should be alerted to the violation/inappropriate behavior. The confrontation should also include a

warning that further violation will result in the removal of the volunteer/employee from ministry.

E-Mail Usage Guidelines

1. Parish staff must use only school/parish e-mail account. Never use your home or personal e-mail account. Using a personal account can give an appearance of secrecy.
2. Parish volunteers who use personal email accounts to communicate information to minors regarding parish programs/school/athletics must follow all E-Mail Usage Guidelines.
3. Whenever possible, information to be communicated to a minor regarding parish programs/school/athletics via e-mail should be sent only to the e-mail address of the parent(s) or legal guardian of the minor.
4. E-mailing a minor directly should be done on a very limited basis, and only when all E-Mail Usage Guidelines are followed.
5. When e-mailing a minor directly, a copy of the e-mail must also be sent to the e-mail address of the parent(s) or legal guardian of the minor. If the e-mail address of the parent(s) or legal guardian is unavailable, then the minor may not be contacted via e-mail. Communicate by telephone or in person.
6. Issues of a personal nature should never be discussed with a minor over e-mail (see items #8 & 10).
7. If a minor contacts you via e-mail regarding parish programs/school/athletics, you must copy the parent(s) or legal guardian of the minor when replying. When copying the parent(s) or legal guardian on a reply e-mail to a minor, you must include the original e-mail with the reply. If the e-mail address of the parent(s) or legal guardian is unavailable, do not reply to the e-mail from the minor. Communicate by telephone or in person.
8. If a minor contacts you via e-mail regarding issues of personal concern, do not reply to the email. Communicate by telephone or in person.
9. Always remember you are a professional rendering a service to minors. You are not the minor's friend or buddy.
10. Communicate only about school/parish matters or matters that are appropriate to be discussed in school or the parish. Most especially avoid any communication that might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such e-mail you receive from minors; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify the principal or DRE.
11. Write as though you are certain that others will read what you write.

Remember that a minor can share your message with minors and others by a simple push of a button.

12. Remember there is no such thing as a private e-mail.
13. Do not use instant messaging. Do not put minors on your "buddy list." If you find that a minor has added you to his or her list, ask that your name be removed and keep a written record of your request. Remember - people can make copies of instant messages and they can come back to haunt you. If you are involved in an academic chat room, use it appropriately.
14. Ask yourself, "If my pastor, principal or DRE asked to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I have written? If the answer is "yes," don't send the e-mail.
15. Remember - the minor you are e-mailing is someone's child. How would you feel if your child received the e-mail you are about to send? If you think your e-mail might somehow be misunderstood, don't send it.
16. Remember - boundaries must be respected in written correspondence as well as in oral communication. Don't push the boundaries of teacher/catechist/adult/minor relationships.

Finally, e-mail can be misinterpreted. Before sending an e-mail, ask yourself if someone reading it might "read something into it" that you didn't intend or if your message might be misinterpreted. Communicate in person whenever possible.