

## **Diocesan Guidelines on Personal Interactions with Children and Young People**

The Diocese of Cheyenne takes the words of Jesus very seriously in identifying guidelines for interactions with children and young people. Specifically, Jesus instructed:

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones who have faith in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung round his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Matthew 18:5-6

Nothing should be done to obstruct a young person's view of the beauty and holiness of the teachings of the Church. Because each child is an individual, the interaction with each child will be unique and based upon an evaluation of the child's needs with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, some overall guidelines may be helpful in remembering the challenges children face.

Children and young people look to adults for examples of appropriate behavior. The Christian task is to help children grow in faith. Adults should model prayerfulness, spiritual growth, commitment to vocation and concern for others. Adults should always treat others with respect and courtesy, using appropriate language and modeling honorable behavior. Sexualized language or jokes is inappropriate in the presence of young people.

Some children have had unhealthy experiences with relationships in the past. Children and young people will interpret the actions of adults through a "lens" clouded by previous experiences or an incomplete understanding of events. The laying on of hands and the embrace of fellowship are sacramentals and signs of Christ's love and healing. Thus, the human touch is part of the life of the Church and part of ministry itself. Yet, the human touch plays other roles as well. Most understand the distinction between appropriate and gracious touching which signifies Christian fellowship, forgiveness, compassion, or the love of Christ, and a touching which is sexual or capable of being perceived as sexual. Everyone involved in ministry with children and youth should consider the character of their physical contacts with the young people they serve.

Solo or one-to-one ministry can be misinterpreted in many ways. Good ministry is about relationship. While church relationships often occur in groups, they sometimes occur in one-to-one encounters. Careful consideration should be given before getting involved in any one-to-one encounters. Might such an encounter be confusing to the young person? Where is the least confusing site for such an encounter? Is an office with the door open a better site than a restaurant or a car? Does a one-to-one meeting place the minister at risk of being falsely accused? Adults should ensure that all interactions with young people both are appropriate and appear appropriate. Significant time alone with one child or providing significant gifts to one child can be perceived as favoritism by others and is not generally advisable.

Children and young people find it difficult to state discomfort or objections. Adults must bring added sensitivity to physical and verbal cues that children and young people may provide.

Children and young people sometimes either exaggerate or trivialize incidents. Adults must take every complaint seriously, but also carefully verify facts before jumping to an unsupported conclusion.

Children and young people deserve personal privacy. Although most Church activities will be in groups, there will be times when a child needs individual attention. Such times may involve counseling an individual child, or it might involve times when a child needs physical care or assistance. In these situations, adults should provide such care with the needs of the child remaining paramount and with due consideration to the appearances of propriety.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AFFIRMATION

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that I have

(Please print name)

received and reviewed the Diocese Guidelines on Personal Interactions with Children and Young People.

I understand that this policy applies not only to diocesan employees but also to employees of diocesan parishes, schools and affiliated organizations, as well as other Church workers. I affirm that I will comply with all obligations described by these Guidelines and any subsequent revisions of these Guidelines.

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Signature

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Date

(Maintain this form at the parish.)