



**Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama
Child and Youth Safe Environment
(205) 838-8301**

Guide to Safe Ministry

An aid to planning and accountability for events, activities and travel with minors

Consult the Youth Protection Policy and Code of Conduct of the Diocese of Birmingham

This guide is intended to be a “living document.” It will be updated as need arises. The basic principles will not change. Situational advice and instructions may change. When planning an event, activity or program, go on-line and print the latest version of the guide.

Standard of care: Doing what is reasonable and necessary to protect a minor, even if you think his/her parents would not be so careful.

Adequate adult supervision: Consult current diocesan policy. Increase the number of adults (beyond diocesan minimums) if there is more than a five year span of ages. Adult supervisors, especially those put in charge of trips must be carefully selected. Selection criteria should include maturity, good judgment, experience, preparation and willingness to communicate.

Level of supervision commensurate with risk: If there is a possibility of serious personal injury, increase supervision beyond the minimums specified in diocesan policy.

Hope for the best but plan for crisis: Understand that an accident can happen at any time – be prepared.

Clarity of instruction: Assume nothing! Give all expectations and rules as clearly as possible. Rules and expectations should be given in written form (to everyone) before undertaking a field trip or high-risk activity.

Supervising the supervisors: It must be clear to all adults that they are to look out for all the kids, not just their own children. Adults must be supportive of each other. Everybody follows the rules!

We get in trouble with parents when:

1. They think they have not been fully informed
2. They are not kept up-to-date on changes
3. When a child is injured or sick and the parent is not immediately consulted
4. Supervisors and chaperones do not cooperate and communicate with each other
5. They think we are doing things that are too dangerous or for which we and/or our young people are ill-prepared
6. After an incident occurs supervisors are not available to parents. When facts are withheld or hidden from parents
7. A parent sees that supervisors and chaperones seem to be too immature

Preparation for activities: Young people and adults need adequate preparation before they embark on a new activity. High risk activities are best done under active supervision of a licensed, insured guide or commercial interest. *For example:* Whitewater activities require training, helmets, life-jackets, etc. and instruction by someone who is trained to instruct/supervise youth whitewater activities.

Access to information: The adult in charge of any program involving minors needs access to parent names and emergency phone numbers. If traveling, each vehicle should have on-board a properly signed copy of form CH-1 for each minor and CH-2 for each adult.

Avoid traveling in convoy: Every vehicle needs its own set of directions and a phone number to call if needed. Drivers should not deviate from the itinerary.

Traffic laws and safe vehicle operation: The likelihood of accident is increased dramatically when a driver is distracted by electronic gadgets, cell phones, food, map-reading, etc. All drivers should be mature enough to understand that traffic laws, including speed limits, are essential to safe vehicle operation.

... the AAA Foundation's research found four driving behaviors directly associated with an increased crash risk. Speeding was found to nearly triple the odds of being involved in a crash. Driving while drowsy was associated with a similar increase in the odds of being involved in a crash. When a driver's eyes were off the road for more than two seconds, for any reason, the odds of a crash occurring were nearly double those of a driver paying attention to the road. The odds of a crash more than doubled when a driver exhibited aggressive driving behaviors.

(From the American Automobile Association: www.aaa.com)

Curfew and quiet time: Pay attention to how your group might impact other people. Your group's reputation is worth protecting. Overnights with young usually need specific curfew and quiet times. Studies show that young people need more sleep than adults – don't give in. Consider especially the needs of drivers.

Boating and canoeing: Unless you have time to swim-test every participant you must insist that everyone wear a life-jacket. Swim-test: Demonstrated ability to jump feet-first into water and swim non-stop (without treading water or floating) for at least 100 yards.

Swimming*: Swimmers should remain in water suited to their ability and with others of similar ability. Most public pools divide shallow and deep water, this may be sufficient for defining appropriate swimming areas. Although such procedures add a margin of safety, their use may not always be practical when the swim activity is conducted at a facility where others are present. A responsible adult supervisor, who understands his or her responsibility and the elements of safety, must exercise discretion while maintaining safety. Pay attention to lifeguards: If they are not doing their job, take extra measures to protect your group.

Surf swimming environment* — with its wave action, currents, tides, undertow, rip-tides, and sea pests such as stinging jellyfish — requires precautions for safe swimming that aren't necessary in other environments. Swimmer's physical condition is critical and should enable him/her

to recover footing in waves, swim vigorously for at least five minutes without becoming exhausted, and remain calm and in control when faced with unexpected conditions.

Best advice – have young people demonstrate their skills for you. Many kids (of all ages) have an exaggerated sense of their own swimming competence.

**Swimming and Surf swimming environment* have been adapted from the Boy Scouts of America Publication, "Guide to Safe Scouting"

Buddy system: When on or in the water or when the group splits up during a field trip. Buddies should be of similar age

Physical fitness: Individual activity level should be adjusted to fit the physical ability of the young person or adult. Review forms CH-1 and CH-2 when planning

Special Concerns

1. You need a first aid kit and someone who is trained to use it
2. Swimming requires trained lifeguard(s) plus additional adults for observation and supervision
3. Drivers need to be protected from as many distractions as possible
4. Every passenger needs a seatbelt
5. Beach trips are full of risks
6. Having a campfire or bonfire? You need something to put it out and you probably need permission to burn
7. Overnight? Higher than normal level of supervision!
8. Parents need to be fully informed about itineraries, leadership, transportation and possible risks
9. Have a plan in case someone becomes lost or separated from the group. Everyone needs to know what to do
10. Consider the risk of hypothermia, sunburn, frostbite, etc.