

## **Healthy Play and Recreation**

The way we play should compliment and reflect the goals, objectives, and values of the rest of our programming. In other words, if our programming is attempting to unify the group, our play needs to be unifying. So, if our play creates winners and losers, or embarrasses people who aren't very bright or very athletic, or is funny only at the expense of a small group, then the result will not be a unified group, but a divided group. Sometimes, at retreats and programs, we're asked to do something that seems simple and harmless, but once we do it, we are laughed at because of the real "punch line" or meaning of what we've just said or done.

Sometimes on "trust walks," people "forget" to tell us about a tree branch or a puddle — or people "tell us" about the one that isn't really there!

These experiences do not create a unified, trusting community. They divide the group and cause suspicion and anxiety – even if the "team" is preaching trust and unity.

In fact, a team that preaches trust and unity, yet practices deceit and division creates an emotional conflict in the participants who feel pressured to "trust" an untrustworthy group.

It is exactly this situation we wish to avoid. I do not believe we have programs that seek to embarrass or harm our youth and young adults. However, I do think it helps us to stay true to the Gospel if we have some concrete guidelines to help us evaluate our activities.

### **Questions to Consider when Evaluating an Activity**

- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | 1) Does it belittle or embarrass any person or persons?   |
| Yes | No | 2) Does it give an undue advantage to the very bright, the very athletic, or very highly skilled, so that the group might be divided? |
| Yes | No | 3) Is it, or can it be, sexually suggestive?  |
| Yes | No | 4) Is there sexually stimulating body contact?  |
| Yes | No | 5) Are many people "left out" for too long of a time?   |
| Yes | No | 6) Is it degrading to some person or a group of people?   |
| Yes | No | 7) Can someone easily or possibly get hurt?   |
| Yes | No | 8) Does it seem to create an "inner circle" of "elite" folks who are "in the know" or who "win"?                                      |
| Yes | No | 9) Does it ask the group to trust in a situation that is untrustworthy?   |
| Yes | No | 10) Does it waste food or show lack of respect for the environment?   |

## **Dangerous games and situations**

Everyone wants to have fun but follow these safety principles for safe fun:

- Avoid games that might result in headfirst collisions with other people or natural objects. The risk of a broken neck and paralysis is enormous.
- Avoid games that incite reckless or overaggressive behavior.
- Avoid games that are hard to supervise. If you can't stop an activity quickly, you don't have enough control.
- Avoid pile on games.

## **Sport games and physical challenge activities**

Minimize risk by using the following guidelines:

- Don't play on an athletic field or in an area without first inspecting it for hazards and dangerous debris.
- Don't mix big and small, weak and strong kids in contact sports. Smaller kids usually get crushed.
- Don't make everyone in your group play the game. The reluctant participant is often the first one hurt.
- Don't incite or encourage aggressive or rough play.
- Don't let the athletic or challenge equipment be used without supervision.
- Don't hesitate to step in and stop a situation that is getting too rowdy, rough or uncontrolled.

# Youth in Crisis

**Recognize signs or symptoms of trouble or problems—  
teens don't always say, "I am in trouble!"**

Some signs might include:

- Sudden mood changes
- Acting out, hostile, aggressive behavior
- Passive lethargic behavior
- Changes in eating, sleeping, dressing habits
- Sudden lack of interest in school or other activities
- Drug or alcohol use
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Expressed desire or intent to end it all

Also watch for changes in relationships

- Loss of / lack of friends
- Family breakdowns / changes
- Death of family members or close friends
- School disruptions, changes in grades, performances

**Keep in mind that "normal" behavior during adolescence may include any of the above signs or symptoms. It is often the appearance of several ("clustered") or pronounced behaviors to which we need to be attentive and respond.**

## Suggestions

- Design programs which provide concerned and knowledgeable adults opportunities to interact with, support, and be attentive to teens – provide situations in which adults might detect problems in the early stages of development.
- Know your own limitations – know when to refer youth and families to professionals.
- Be knowledgeable of and familiar with the local community professionals, agencies, and resources, *especially school counselors*, who address crisis and intervention needs.
- Be sensitive to the grapevine that often develops around crises – do not add to it.
- Take care of yourself as you work with teens in crisis – have someone you can talk to.

***For more helpful information and resources:***  
YouthWorks, Section 13, "Pastoral Care"

# Warning Signs and Signals To Be Aware Of

## **Suicide**

1. *A previous suicide attempt:* A significant number of young people who commit suicide have attempted suicide before.
2. *Verbal threats:* statements such as, “You’d be better off without me,” or “I wish I were dead” should always be taken seriously.
3. *Changes in behavior:* normally active people may become withdrawn; cautious individuals may start taking unusual risks.
4. *Substance abuse:* alcohol and other drug abuse appear to be significantly linked to suicide attempts among youth people.
5. *Unusual purchases:* if the person buys a weapon, rope or any item that arouses your suspicion, talk openly with the person about it.
6. *Giving away possessions:* someone who has decided to commit suicide may give away personal possessions...CD’s/tapes, favorite articles of clothing, etc.
7. *Signs of depression:* may include changes in eating and sleeping habits, anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, feelings of hopelessness and guilt, and loss of interest in usual activities.
8. *Problems in school:* a dramatic drop in grades, falling asleep in classes, emotional outbursts or any other behavior that’s uncharacteristic of a particular student may be a cause for concern.
9. *Themes of death:* a desire to end one’s life may show up in the person’s artwork, poetry, essays, etc.
10. *Sudden, unexpected happiness:* sudden happiness following prolonged depression may indicate that the person is profoundly relieved because he or she has finally made a decision...a decision to commit suicide.
11. *Other signs* may include physical complaints, frequent accidents, hyperactivity, aggressiveness, sexual promiscuity, attention-getting behavior, or prolonged grief after a loss.

## **Alcohol and other drug problems**

1. Changes in mood or behavior
2. Loss of interest in regular activities, such as hobbies and sports
3. Lower grades and general lack of interest in school
4. Withdrawal from family life
5. Secretiveness
6. Decreased energy and motivation
7. Overreaction to criticism
8. Sudden weight loss or changes in eating habits.
9. Changing friendships and avoiding talking those changes.
10. Slurred speech, “glassy” eyes, unclear thinking, poor short-term memory.

## **How to tell if someone is an alcoholic**

1. Frequent use of alcohol to cope with everyday stress – more and more drinking of larger amounts.
1. Fears, anxiety...more often and more of them. Poor self-image, negative emotions.
2. Ignoring or avoiding responsibilities...family, job, school, finances. Lack of interest in non-drinking activities.
3. Arguments over drinking and drunk behavior. Accusations and denials about drinking habits.
4. Promises to “drink less,” “switch types of liquor,” “behave better” and requests to “stop nagging”
5. “Blackouts” – first rare, then more often. Drinker can’t remember what happened during drinking period.

Occasional drunkenness doesn’t mean a person is or isn’t an alcoholic or possible alcoholic. Also, some alcoholics never “ACT” as if they were drunk.

## **Depression**

A mood disturbance...feelings of sadness, disappointment or loneliness that can lead to withdrawal from people and activities, loss of pleasure and enjoyment of life, and physical discomfort, aches, pains, fatigue, poor digestion, sleep disturbance, etc.

Everyone experiences some of these symptoms at some time, but when symptoms are severe and lasting, so that pain and problems outweigh pleasure much of the time, then it’s time to get help.

Signs:

1. *Changes in behavior and attitude:* general slowing down, neglect of responsibilities and appearance, loss of appetite, agitation, pointless overactivity, poor memory, inability to concentrate, irritability, complaints about matters that used to be taken in stride.
2. *Different feelings, perceptions:* emotional flatness or emptiness, inability to find pleasure in anything, hopelessness, loss of sexual desire, of warm feelings for family and friends, exaggerated self-blame, guilt or loss of self-esteem, sometimes leading to suicidal thoughts or actions.
3. *Physical complaints with no organic cause:* sleeping disturbances, such as early-morning wakefulness, sleeping too much, insomnia, chronic fatigue, lack of energy, unexplained headaches, backaches, digestive upsets, stomach pain, nausea, indigestion, changes in bowel habits.

## **Bullying**

In the United States, bullying among children and teenagers has often been dismissed as a normal part of growing up. Little attention has been paid to the devastating effects of bullying, or to the connection between bullying and other forms of violence. In recent years, however, students and adults around the country have begun to make a commitment to stop bullying in their schools and communities.(continued)

Bullying includes a wide variety of behaviors, but all involve a person or a group repeatedly trying to harm someone who is weaker or more vulnerable. It can involve direct attacks (such as hitting, threatening or intimidating, maliciously teasing and taunting, name-calling, making sexual remarks, and stealing or damaging belongings) or more subtle, indirect attacks (such as spreading rumors or encouraging others to reject or exclude someone). This information is from the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center.

The following are some helpful links regarding teens and bullying:

<http://www.netsmartz.org/news/sep03-01.htm>

[Teen Matter – Bullying](#)

## **Child Abuse**

People who spend time around children need to be alert for signs such as these:

*Physical signs:* Note any unusual pattern or locations (sometimes hidden by clothing) of injuries, such as:

- Bruises, welts or broken bones
- Cuts or scrapes
- Burns
- Missing hair
- Injuries or redness around the genitals
- Injuries at different stages of healing
- Injury or medical condition that hasn't been properly treated

*Child's Behavior:* Abuse can lead to dramatic changes in behavior, such as:

- Aggressive or withdrawn behavior
- Unusual fears (of certain people, going home, etc.)
- Craving for attention
- Fatigue
- Lack of concentration
- Hunger, begging for food, stealing
- Frequent tardiness or absence from school
- Unusual knowledge of sex

*Adult's Behavior:* An adult who is abusing a child may:

- Harshly punish the child in public
- Refer to the child as "difficult," "different" or "bad"
- Single out a child for favors or attention
- Seem unconcerned about the child
- Give conflicting stories about injuries
- Become defensive when asked about the child's health

*Child's appearance:* A neglected or abused child may be very dirty and poorly groomed. Clothing may be in poor condition or not suited to the weather.

Children may talk of being abused: Take what they say, and any suspicions you have, seriously .

**For information on reporting child abuse please refer to the [Diocese of Dallas Safe Environment Program](#)**

# Leadership with Volunteers

Adapted from “Working with Volunteers” by Mary Lee Becker in Developing Youth Ministry binder from CYMS

When assessing your approach to volunteer leadership, consider the following six elements:

## 1. Motivation

The most effective volunteers will be those who are involved because they want to be, not out of a sense of obligation, habit, or unhealthy need to be needed. Ask volunteers why they wish to be involved to assure their motivation is appropriate.

## 2. Expectations

*Be Clear* – identify responsibilities, expectations, and accountability clearly. Develop position descriptions which outline exactly what is expected of a volunteer including any training, preparation, planning, implementation, and follow-up.

*Consider Commitments* – consider the outside time commitments of volunteers when developing positions. Identify the type of commitment needed for each position—one time, periodic or ongoing.

*Specify Direct Ministry of Support Ministry* – list tasks that involve working directly with young people (direct ministry) and those that do not involve direct interaction with young people (support ministry). Distinguishing between the two types of ministry enables you to involve more people at their comfort and ability levels.

*Anticipate Questions* – this enables you to provide information addressing their concerns before expecting a commitment.

## 3. Recruitment and Placement

Recruitment and placement of volunteers in ministry means matching the program needs with the volunteer’s interests, skills, and time. This involves both clearly defining the needs, and identifying the volunteers who can meet the needs. Once this has been done, the process of placement including a screening and training process begins. Adequate screening and training will help avoid the uncomfortable situation of having to “fire” a volunteer. If there is a concern about a particular individual’s readiness, suggest a probationary period followed by an assessment.

## 4. Training

When recruiting, assure volunteers that training will be provided when necessary. It is helpful to make a distinction between orientation, training, and team formation.

*Orientation* provides an overview of the entire program and how individual roles function in relation to the larger organization. Develop a volunteer manual which outlines the mission and goals of the ministry, the leadership structure, and general policy and procedures. The manual may include names and phone numbers for key contact people..

*Training* focuses on knowledge or skills needed for specific tasks. Develop a training program by first identifying the understanding and skills necessary to fulfill the duties of each position. Then consider different training formats to meet the diverse needs and schedules of volunteers such as gathered format for group training, individualized learning options, and an “apprenticeship” model partnering veteran volunteers with new volunteers.

*Formation* involves the spiritual and relational aspect of leadership development with time for faith sharing, community building, and sharing experiences with the youth. The focus is on deepening one's identity as a person of faith in ministry, developing positive working relationships, and creating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the ministry. It may also provide ongoing reflection on the mission and goals of the program.

## **5. Support**

Supporting volunteers involves the two elements of affirmation and assistance. Affirming volunteers includes acknowledging their commitment and appreciating their efforts. Assistance involves providing resources and tools that will enable volunteers to effectively meet their responsibilities.

## **6. Evaluation**

Volunteers need feedback regarding their performance including both informal feedback and structured evaluation. Formal evaluation involves clarifying criteria for assessment (based on job description), gathering information regarding performance, and providing feedback based on the assessment. When providing feedback to a volunteer, identify personal accomplishments, areas of strength, and areas needing further development. The intention is for feedback to be specific and positive. Outline specifically what was done well, and any suggestions for the future.

The evaluation process is two-fold. Volunteers should provide feedback regarding their involvement in the leadership system. This should include their experience of recruitment, training, and support, as well as their feelings regarding the expectations involved and resources provided. Ask them to identify what was helpful, and make recommendations for improvement.

The purpose of evaluations is to develop and benefit both individuals and the program. An evaluation process should be approached and experienced as an opportunity to learn, celebrate and grow as leaders.

## **Conclusion**

Developing an effective leadership system involves planning, recruiting, training, supporting, and evaluating. It is based on the belief that youth ministry is most effective when created and coordinated by adult and youth leaders within the community. Volunteers will be invested in what they help create, and involved when they are needed, valued, and appreciated.

## Training Your Youth Ministry Team

When an accident or an act of misconduct puts the spotlight on your ministry, investigators will check the appropriateness of the staff you have chosen to employ and team members who assist you. They will also check the training you provided to your staff/team members to prepare them to do their jobs. With regard to the safety aspect of your training program, you should consider providing at least the following training.

**Orientation session.** Volunteers need a two- to ten-hour basic training and orientation to the ministry. They need to know how the organization works and their role in it.

**First aid training.** A certain number of the staff need to complete a certified first aid training course. The remaining staff can take a simplified version of the first aid course to learn the basics. Enough staff should complete first aid training that every event can have a trained, certified staff person in attendance.

**Identifying child and sexual abuse.** All staff members need a training class to teach them how to recognize the signs of abuse and how to report it within your organization so that a mandated reporter can inform the proper authorities. All staff and volunteers must complete the *Family of Faith* training as stated by the Diocese of Dallas Safe Environment Program.

**Suicide prevention training.** Teenage suicide is on the rise, so find a social worker who can help train you and your staff to respond to suicide threats made by teenagers.

**Crisis intervention training.** If staff members build relationships with kids, they will witness crisis. The crucial part of this training is helping staff members learn how to recognize when they are in a situation in which they are over their heads and how to get professional help.

**Pregnancy, drug abuse, and AIDS training.** These conditions touch more and more young people every year, so staff members need to be aware of what to do when they encounter them. Some volunteers can pursue additional training to specialize in these social problems.

**Activity training.** Training also covers the specific activities and events, such as canoeing, biking, or backpacking, sponsored by your youth ministry.

Maintain records of all your staff meetings and training sessions. Keep a file for each staff/team member, including his or her application, references, any notes from supervision meetings, and a record of the training the staff member has completed.

## Staff Behavior Guidelines

If we ask our staff members to follow a high standard of behavior, we are responsible to provide them with clear and specific guidelines by which they will be judged. They should read and sign this document before they start working in the ministry. All staff members should resign this sheet every year to remind them of their commitment.

**Use the following sample to create a form that fits your situation:**

Staff Behavior Guidelines

Name of staff/volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

This staff behavior guidelines document is to be read and signed by all staff annually.

1. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior with any student is inappropriate
2. Dating or going out with any high school student is forbidden.
3. Discretion must be used in dealing with all students, especially regarding physical contact. Innocent behavior can be misinterpreted. A hug around the shoulders is not sexual abuse, but a full body hug, stroking, massaging, or an affectionate kiss raises questions. No over display of affection should be made.
4. Sexual gestures or overtures a student makes to a staff member should be reported to the youth leader so that discussion can be held with the student.
5. “Buddy systems” should be used by staff whenever possible, but especially when working with students of the opposite sex.
6. One-to-one counseling with a student should always occur in a public place—visible to others.
7. Driving alone with a student of the opposite sex should be avoided at all times, especially when working with troubled teens.
8. If it is necessary to ride or drive alone with a teen, special care should be taken with a student or the opposite sex.
  - Don’t sit close to one another in the car.
  - Do not come into physical contact with each other.
  - Do not stop the car to talk.
  - If you must stop, turn on the inside light of the car.
  - Avoid physical contact (hugs and kisses) when saying goodbye.
  - Be aware of the time you depart and arrive. Mark those times in your diary or record.
9. Romantic or sexual attraction for a student by an adult leader should be brought up and discussed with the ministry team leader.
10. Any knowledge of suspicion of any youth ministry staff having an inappropriate relationship with a student must be reported promptly to the youth ministry leader. If the person in question is the leader, the report should be made to the supervisor of that person.

I certify that I have read and agree to abide by the standards and that the statements above have been answered truthfully.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_