

## Tools for Maintaining a Safe Environment

By Deacon Marques Silva, Director, OPCYP

Maintaining a safe-environment and recruiting youth workers that will assist in the evangelizing, catechizing and training of our youth is essential. To that end, and in cooperation with the Diocesan Youth Office, the Office for Child Protection and Safety has developed a few tools and best practices to assist those responsible for developing and supervising youth activities and the recruitment of youth worker volunteers.

The first two tools include checklists, which ideally could be used to assist in the organization of every event. They include:

- *Best Practices Checklist on Creating a Safe Environment for On-Site Activities*
- *Best Practices Checklist on Creating a Safe Environment for Off-Site Activities*

The second set includes a format that may be used in interviewing a potential youth worker and a set of characteristics to help in identifying potential offenders. Together, they will assist in providing the information need to make a prudent decision on whether a volunteer should be working with the youth. They include:

- *Warning Signs of Suspicious Adult Behaviors: A Closer Look at Potential Offender Characteristics*
- *Youth Ministry Volunteer Interview Format*

Lastly, it would not be an exaggeration to say that pornography is America's unspoken epidemic. Our youth have an immediate and easy access through any electronic portal with internet capability to be influenced by this blight without notice. Consequently, the diocese has created a website with resources for men, women, and specifically for parents (<http://arlingtondiocese.org/purity/index.php>). Also our office has compiled a set of statistics on this subject matter to not only make you aware but also to add to you youth ministry toolkit. The statistics may be found in:

- *Understanding the Threats in Cyberspace: A Summary on the Impact of Pornography\*\**

We hope these tools will assist you in your ministry.

***(\*\*The full set of statistics is available online at [www.arlingtondiocese.org/purity/index.php](http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/purity/index.php) or may be obtained by contact the Office of Child Protection and Safety. A brief summary is included later in this chapter\*\*)***

## **Best Practices Checklist on Creating a Safe Environment for On-Site Diocesan Youth Activities**

The following checklist is designed to assist all diocesan personnel (to include volunteers with substantial contact with children and employees) in creating a safe environment for on-site events that is in accordance with the diocesan Code of Conduct and safe-environment policies.

- ☐ Confirm that all youth participants have submitted emergency contact/medical release forms. Keep originals on file at the parish.
- ☐ Be aware of the medical needs of participants (medication may not be administered to any youth without written parental approval).
- ☐ Print and distribute a detailed schedule to parents, chaperones and youth participants if the event is not a regular activity. This schedule should list all activities which will take place during an event.
- ☐ Take attendance at the beginning of the event. This does not have to be a roll-call but a way to substantiate who is present at the beginning of the activity. Update the list when necessary.
- ☐ Monitor the premises (every individual at the location should have a specific reason for being at the event). Communicate with the appropriate authorities if necessary.
- ☐ Take attendance at the conclusion of the event. Any discrepancies should be investigated and resolved before youth participants or chaperones may leave (remember that no one may leave at any time prior to dismissal for any reason without notifying at least one person in authority).

## **Best Practices Checklist on Creating a Safe Environment for Off-Site Diocesan Youth Activities**

This checklist is designed to assist all diocesan personnel (to include volunteers with substantial contact with children and employees) in creating a safe environment for off-site events that is in accordance with the diocesan Code of Conduct and safe-environment policies.

- ☐ **Confirm that all youth have submitted permission forms. Take originals to the event and keep copies on file at the parish.**
- ☐ Be aware of the medical needs of participants (medication may not be administered to any youth without written parental approval).
- ☐ Confirm that youth/chaperone ratios are in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Ensure that chaperones know which specific groups of youth are assigned to them.
- ☐ Assign “buddies” (2 children/youth) or place youth participants in “buddy teams” (3-4 children/youth).
- ☐ Make a list of sleeping arrangements (chaperones/youth) and designate night-watch personnel if it is an overnight trip.
- ☐ Make a transportation schedule (know which chaperones are assigned to specific students).
- ☐ Provide parents, chaperones and youth participants with two phone numbers to use in case of an emergency.
- ☐ Print and distribute a detailed schedule to parents, chaperones and youth participants. This schedule should list all activities which will take place during an event, including but not limited to: transportation (how students will arrive at destination), previously agreed upon meeting place/times, sleeping arrangements, etc.
- ☐ Take attendance prior to departure to the off-site location.
- ☐ Inform participants of any additional rules of the off-site location.
- ☐ Take attendance prior to departure from the off-site location (any unexplained absences should be resolved immediately)

## **Warning Signs of Suspicious Adult Behaviors: A Closer Look at Potential Offender Characteristics**

In order to protect children in youth ministry, it is important that caring adults have a healthy suspicion of any individuals that may interact with youth. This page is designed to provide you with information that may indicate behaviors of adults which are not well-suited to working or volunteering with youth. While there is no single, all-encompassing profile of a child sexual offender, numerous studies have revealed certain common characteristics shared by sexual offenders (see the list below this paragraph). It is important to know that **possessing one or more of these behaviors does not indicate that an adult is a sexual offender**; rather, a concerned adult should make note of these signs. Some concerning behaviors may include individuals that:

- Seek positions of trust.
- Behave as if the rules do not apply to them.
- Lack empathy, but feign interest to gain power or control.
- Are characterized by low self-esteem, but exhibit high levels of confidence.
- Refuse to take responsibility for actions and blame others or circumstances for failures.
- Fear adult world; surround themselves with children.
- Act like children or engage often in childish behaviors.
- Display inappropriate dependence on a spouse, parents or institutions.
- Have an absence of any meaningful peer relationships.
- Have a shallow or dependent relationship (a marriage of “convenience”).
- Have unstable employment and/or residence history.
- Have been sexually abused as children (although most victims of child abuse do not become abusers).
- Have experienced poor social adjustment in childhood/adolescence and/or poor adjustment to home life in childhood/adolescence.
- Exhibit a lack of respect towards the personal boundaries of others.
- Engage in frequent touching of children (i.e., wrestling, tickling, etc.)
- Use sexuality and aggression in behavior and language in front of children (i.e., “dirty” jokes, bad words, etc.).
- Display deviant sexual behavior and attitudes.
- Allow children to engage in questionable/illegal behaviors (i.e., smoking, drugs, etc.), which parents would prohibit.
- Possess a criminal record which includes crimes against children or other crimes (including misdemeanors).
- Encourage children to keep secrets, particularly from parents.
- Prefer to interact with vulnerable or emotionally/physically dependent children.
- Offer items/gifts to specific children (typically without parental permission).

If any member of diocesan personnel believes that any form of child abuse is occurring, that person is obligated to report any and all concerns to Child Protective Services (CPS). Local contact information for Child Protective Services is located on the diocesan website (<http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/childprotection/reporting.php>).

### Sources:

- Baker, Leigh M. “10 Most Common Characteristics of a Predator.” *Protecting Your Children from Sexual Predators*. New York, New York: Macmillan, 2002.
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. “Red Flags for Children and Youth Workers.” *Staff Screening Tool Kit*. Third Ed. <<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/files/r3300-staff-screening-tool-kit.pdf>> (accessed on 7 Jun. 2012).
- Lanning, Kenneth V. *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis* (electronic version). Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 1992.
- The Polly Klaas Foundation. “Dangerous Adult Behaviors.” <[www.pollyklaas.org](http://www.pollyklaas.org)> (accessed on 7 Jun. 2012).

## Youth Ministry Volunteer Interview Format

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why are you interested in volunteering in this ministry?
2. How did you learn about this ministry?
3. What do you hope to gain from this volunteer experience?
4. How would you describe your personality?
5. What do you like to do for fun?
6. Do you work well with others? Do you prefer to work alone or as a member of a team?
7. How do you relate with your peers?
8. Do you possess any prior work or volunteer experience which would facilitate your interaction with the youth?
9. Do you enjoy working with young people? What are some differences about working with children versus working with adults?
10. How do you prefer to supervise?
11. Describe an experience where you were in a position to supervise or discipline a child.
12. What is your full-time career?
13. Relate one work experience which had a positive effect on your overall career.
14. Relate one work experience which had a negative effect on your overall career.
15. Relate one experience in which you had to work with someone who was very different from you.
16. Did any of your childhood experiences inspire you to work with the youth?
17. Do you use language which may be construed as offensive towards any particular person or group of persons?
18. Do you ever engage in behaviors which may have a detrimental effect on children or young populations (i.e., smoking, drugs, etc.)? If yes, please explain.
19. Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense? If yes, please explain.
20. What questions/concerns do you have about being a volunteer?
21. Is there any other information you would like to share about yourself?

(See reverse side for additional comments and feel free to use additional pages for comments)

## Youth Ministry Volunteer Interview Format

### General Impressions

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### Concerns

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- ☐ Compliance Packet Provided to Individual
- ☐ Compliance Packet Completed/Submitted to OPCYP
- ☐ Reference Letters Mailed
- ☐ Scheduled for Training

### Interviewers

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**Name**

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**Name**

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**Signature**

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**Signature**

## **Understanding the Threats in Cyberspace: A Summary on the Impact of Pornography**

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It would not be an exaggeration to say that pornography is America's unspoken epidemic. Unfortunately, the easy access through any portal with internet access allows this blight to spread quickly without notice. The following statistics have been organized by demographic for your use in ministry as you see fit. All source material has been provided. This is a brief sampling of current statistics regarding pornography in America. A full copy of the summary can be obtained by contacting the OPCYP.

### **CHILDREN & YOUTH**

- More than 20,000 images of child pornography are posted online every week.
- 1 in 7 children who use the Internet have been sexually solicited.
- Average age of first Internet exposure to pornography: 11 years old.
- Largest consumer of Internet pornography is 12 - 17 year-olds.
- 80 percent of 15-17 year-olds have had multiple hard-core exposures.
- According to an anonymous survey published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* in August 2009 55.4 percent reported that they had visited a sexually explicit website.
- In a survey (2008) of teens and young adults done by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com 20 percent of teens overall have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures and/or videos of themselves.
- According to research done by the Crimes Against Children Research Center between 2004 to 2008:
  - 1 in 25 youth in one year received an online sexual solicitation where the solicitor tried to make offline contact.
  - Most victims go voluntarily to meet and have sex with Internet offenders.
  - Offenders typically manipulate young people into criminal sexual relationships by appealing to young people's desire to be appreciated, understood, take risks, and find out about sex.

### **YOUNG ADULTS**

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- 87% of young men and 31% of young women report that using pornography is acceptable.
- 70 percent of 18-24 year-old men visit pornographic sites monthly.

### **ADULTS**

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- 10 percent of adults surveyed admit to Internet sexual addiction; 28 percent of those are women.
  - 1 in 3 porn viewers is a woman.
- 72 percent of men visit pornographic site