

Protecting Yourself from Allegations

Allegations of abuse are a cause for concern for everyone. An allegation of child abuse against an adult has profound and long-reaching effects. Adults who are employed or volunteer in ministries with minors are kind, loving, generous individuals. And it is just those qualities that could lead adults to placing themselves in situations where an allegation of abuse could arise. The Diocese of Superior wants to protect all its faithful - children, youth, and adults. Steps to protect minors from abuse also protect adults from allegations of abuse. Employees and volunteers are asked to understand and always be alert to situations from which an allegation might arise.

Perceptions of Others

Our nation says that the accused is “innocent until proven guilty.” Human nature, unfortunately, doesn’t always buy into that. How you are perceived by others is a very strong factor in how your behavior is interpreted. To protect yourself against allegations of abuse, always be aware of what your behavior and appearance is communicating to others.

- Be professional and maintain the highest standards of behavior at all times.
- Know the **Diocesan Code of Conduct for Working with Minors**.
- Dress appropriately for your ministry.
- Communicate in a professional manner both verbally and in writing.
- Maintain discipline in an appropriate and respectful manner.
- Do not appear to favor one child over another.

Safety in Numbers

The safest situation for adults and minors is when there are extra people involved. But it is not always possible to avoid being alone with a minor who is not your own child. If you find that you must be alone with a child, make sure you tell another adult what is happening, where you will be, and what you are doing.

- If you cannot avoid traveling alone with a minor, have the child sit in the back seat.
- Insist that there are sufficient numbers of adults – both genders – when chaperoning minors away from parish property.
- If you discover yourself alone with a child or youth on parish premises, keep yourself separated from the child in a manner that assures safety for both of you. For example, keep the child busy in a room or space separated from you where you can keep a watchful eye on the child.
- If you must interact privately with a minor:
 - Let another adult know that you will be having a this conversation and where;
 - Do so in a room with the doors open so you can be seen but far enough away to maintain confidentiality;
 - Be sure that all window coverings are open so that your behavior may be witnessed by others;
 - Be seated just out of reach of the child. Maybe on opposite sides of a table.

Physical Contact with Minors

As a general principle, adults are advised to refrain from unnecessary physical contact with minors, especially that which might be misconstrued by the child, parents, or other observers. Remember that each person has a different tolerance level for touch. Be attentive to the variety of ways in which children respond to touch.

There may be occasions when a distressed child needs comfort and reassurance which may include physical comforting much like a parent or grandparent. Share the incident with your parish supervisor while it is fresh in your memory.

Occasionally a child who hugs indiscriminately becomes part of a group. The school staff or religious education team needs to help this child understand the rules for physical contact as well. A conference with parents about this behavior would be wise so that the child receives a consistent message about touch. Adults should be especially vigilant regarding this child’s safety.