

# **DIX HILLS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY AND GUIDELINES**

**The following are policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure the safety of all youth/students and their leaders as well as define appropriate relationships amongst youth/students and their ministry leaders/workers. Youth/Students are defined as anyone from Nursery age-17 years of age. The terms Youth, Student, and Minor are used interchangeably.**

**Physical Contact between Leaders and Youth:** Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between youth leaders and students. The guidelines below are intended to avoid physical contact that may be misinterpreted or may appear threatening or inappropriate. All youth leaders and volunteers should avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

- With same sex—side hug is all that is needed.
- With opposite sex—high five or pat on the back.
- Some other appropriate forms of affection with youth are: pats on the shoulder or back, handshakes, high-fives, fist bumps, verbal praise, holding hands during group prayer.
- Inappropriate forms of affection include but are not limited to: inappropriate or lengthy embraces, kisses, sitting on laps, showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, or other private rooms, occupying a bed with a youth, wrestling or tickling, any type of massage given by a youth to an adult or adult to a youth, any form of unwanted affection, inappropriate comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples: “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans”, snapping bras or giving wedgies.
- There will be no diaper changing, unless parents sign a waiver with permission for attendants to do so. If the youth leader is working with children in diapers, they should have the phone number of the parents and text them in the event a diaper needs to be changed.

**Communication between Leaders and Youth:** The guiding principle for communication between leaders and youth is transparency. We want to foster healthy boundaries between leaders and students and to avoid any misinterpretation or inappropriate communication.

- Confidences
  1. If a student needs to talk to a leader privately during an activity, it must be a leader of the same sex and they must be visible to others.
  2. Leaders cannot promise to keep secrets and need to let the student know that if they are being hurt or someone else is being hurt or the concern is so great, then they will need to break the confidence.
  3. ***For now***, there will be no one on one mentoring with a student outside of scheduled programs. ***We will revisit this once we have a person in place who has sufficient time and training to monitor and supervise off site one-on-one mentoring (follow up, submit reports, be informed of regarding time and length of contact, location of contact, and content of the communications).***
    - > Possible exceptions would require written parental consent, and consent from the respective Ministry head, and the meeting would not be where the mentor and student would be isolated. This is current and effective ***for now***, as ministry leaders, Senior Pastor, and the Elders will be working on creative means to healthy trusting relationships between students and leaders.
  
- Calling/Texting/Emailing boundaries
  1. ***For now*** calling/texting/emailing should be used to communicate information about activities only and not general conversations. ***Per note above, we will revisit this policy in days to come.***
  2. Male leaders should not be calling/texting/emailing female students and vice versa unless it is a general text/email to the entire group.
  
- Social Media boundaries
  1. ***For now***, youth leaders should not be on social media with students. ***Per note above, we will revisit this policy.***
  2. Reasons: to prevent misinterpretation or inappropriate communication especially in regard to opposite sex, and also to guard leaders from being responsible in dealing with sensitive

information posted on social media that would require either an immediate response, and/or a 'reporting' level response; to guard leaders from 'information overload' leading to conflicting feelings of how to handle sensitive information shared on social media; as well as to avoid students using social media as their primary way of communicating difficult topics with the leaders as this should be done in person.

- Information about confidences and our communication boundaries will be shared with Minors and with their parents to assist them in understanding the changes being made and how interaction with leaders is managed.

**Trips and Transportation of Students:** Transporting youth to and from church activities/events is permitted under the following conditions:

- The driver is 21 years or older and has had a valid driving license for a minimum of 3 years.
- The driver has written permission/waiver from the parent.
- There is never only one child in the vehicle with one adult (unless it is their own child).
- The above applies only to short trips—roughly 30 minutes or so.
- For trips more than 30 minutes away, two adults must be in the vehicle.
- Married couples may transport minors together.

### **Reporting Concerns or Possible Abuse, Maltreatment or Neglect**

All youth leaders and volunteers are mandated to report any and all signs of behaviors of suspected or disclosed abuse to Beth Del Giudice, Steve Rise or the Senior Pastor as they are the designated persons who will decide how to proceed and respond. Concerns about suspected or actual child abuse should be shared only with the persons mentioned above and those directly involved in the reporting process (e.g., Child Protective Services) and not with anyone else.