



Dix Hills Youth Ministry Guidelines

The following are policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure the safety of all students and their leaders as well as define appropriate relationships among students and their ministry leaders. Students are defined as anyone attending the youth group from grades 7-12.

Underlying Philosophy

Our youth ministry's goal is to help the youth and families that we come into contact with *Live Intentionally For Eternity* by **Loving Christ**, **Serving Others**, and **Making Disciples**. However, because we live in a fallen world where temptation is prevalent and actions can be misinterpreted, it is critical to create boundaries to protect both our leaders and students from falling into sin or being falsely accused. At the end of the day no policy can truly stop sin, and it is only through the power of Jesus that we can find true freedom. While these policies are helpful, the willingness of volunteers, parents, and students to have open communication and creating an atmosphere where it is normal to take a person aside and confront them according to Jesus' own words in Matthew 18:15-20, is far more crucial for the healthiness of the ministry.

Background Checks and Interview Process

It is mandatory that everyone who works with students must submit to a New York Background Check, as well as, go through the interview and training process overseen by the youth pastor and approved by the elders before becoming a youth leader.

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.

- Some appropriate forms of affection with youth are: side hugs, 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, and any form of unwanted affection – physical or verbal.

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.

- **General Guidelines:**

1. At least 2 screened adults are needed to run a small group or Sunday school class. In a Sunday school class, the leaders can be one adult and one teen helper instead of 2 adults.
2. A youth group leader cannot date a youth group student.
3. A youth group student can continue to attend youth group for a maximum of up to one year after high school graduation and then they are no longer eligible to attend youth group as a student.
4. 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.
5. Leaders cannot promise to keep secrets and need to let the student know that if he or she is being hurt or someone else is being hurt or the concern is so great, then they will need to break the confidence.

- **One-on-one Mentoring:**

1. Youth leaders may meet with a student of the same sex for one-on-one mentoring with the written permission of a parent or guardian (*see attached waiver*).
 - a. Youth leaders must confirm all one-on-one meetings with parents before having them, so that the parent is aware of when/where the meeting is happening, as well as, the frequency of meetings.
 - b. Youth leaders must also communicate with the youth pastor after one-on-one meetings, so that the youth pastor is able to mentor the youth leader through the process and be aware of when/how often meetings are happening.
2. One-on-one mentoring must be done in a public place (i.e. a restaurant or café) where the student and youth leader are clearly visible.
3. Youth leaders may pick up students for one-on-one mentoring or drive them back afterwards when given permission by the parent/guardian.

- **Texting/Calling/Emailing boundaries:**

1. Youth leaders may text students of the same sex with the written permission of a parent or guardian (*See attached waiver*).
 - a. Youth leaders may only text students of the opposite gender in group messaging to send out information about things like worship team, student leadership, and etc.
2. Youth leaders must have the number of the parent of the student that they are texting. This will allow the youth leader to contact the parent in case of an emergency or inform the parent of what they have texted about.
3. After 10:00pm the youth leader will not initiate any conversations with students, and may only text students after this time if a student initiates the conversation and it is an emergency. This is to protect both parties from temptation, false accusations, and potential burnout.

4. Youth leaders will save all messages with students in order to keep a record of what is said, and must be willing to show said messages to the youth pastor immediately upon request. The youth pastor must also save messages with students and be willing to show said messages to the senior pastor immediately upon request.
 5. If it is clear in the process of texting the student, communication would be easier via a phone call or in case of an emergency, a youth leader may call a student if they have written permission from a parent.
 - a. If a phone call is made because of an emergency, the youth leader will immediately call the parent to make sure they are aware of the situation. Following this, the youth leader will reach out to the youth pastor to make him aware as well, so that he can provide support to the youth leader, student, and/or family.
 - b. Following any phone call with a student, the youth leader will inform the youth pastor, so that the youth pastor is able to mentor the youth leader and be aware of when/how often phone calls are happening
 - c. Phone calls have the same restrictions as text messages and are only allowed between a youth leader and student of the same sex.
 6. There is no one-on-one facetime/video chat allowed between youth leaders and students.
 7. Emailing should be used to communicate information about activities only and not general conversations.
- **Social Media boundaries:**
 1. Youth leaders may follow students of the same sex on both Facebook and Instagram. This will allow youth leaders to meet students in their world, as they often express themselves via social media.
 - a. Youth leaders and students may not follow each other on Snapchat as it is simply a messaging app and messages are too easily lost on this platform.
 - b. Youth leaders may not message students via social media unless they have received permission to text students (*Messaging via social media or on Discord follow the same guidelines as texting*).
 2. Unless the parent or student informs the youth pastor that they or their child do not want to be followed by youth leaders, youth leaders are allowed to follow any student of the same sex in the youth group on Facebook and Instagram.
 - **Videogames:**
 1. Youth leaders may play videogames with students of the same sex with written permission from a parent (*See attached waiver*). If there is a mix of genders playing videogames online together, there must be two leaders present.
 2. Videogames also have a 10:00pm cut off time. Leaders should inform the youth pastor about a video game session the following day

Trips and Transportation of Students

As much as possible, the youth group will attempt to meet at one place and avoid the need to transport students. However, 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.
- As a general rule, there is never only one student of a different sex 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.
- If a parent or guardian is unable to pick up student after an event, leaders are allowed to drop off students at their house after communicating this with the parent or guardian (*This should not be the norm*).

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 the Youth Pastor 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. A failure to report the above items is both a poor spiritual witness, as well as, illegal according to state law.



Dix Hills Youth Ministry Permission Waiver

I, _____, am the parent or guardian of _____, who is a student in the youth group at Dix Hills. I am giving permission for my student to be contacted by the following ways in accordance with the policies established in the Youth Guidelines.
(Please initial next to each permitted form of communication):

_____ My student may be texted/called by a youth leader of the same sex as dictated per the guidelines.

_____ My student may play videogames with a youth leader of the same sex as dictated per the guidelines.

_____ My student may meet one-on-one with a youth leader of the same sex as dictated per the guidelines.

Parent's Cell Phone Number: _____

Parent's Email Address: _____

I recognize that as a parent or guardian, I have a responsibility to protect my student(s) and raise them in a God-honoring way. Part of this is knowing who my student is being mentored and disciplined by. As a parent, I understand that these policies are meaningless if there is not a culture of communication and confrontation based on Jesus' command in Matthew 18:15-20. While the youth leaders are seeking to hold one another accountable, I also have a responsibility to build up the body of Christ, specifically when it involves holding the leaders discipling my child accountable, as well as, encouraging them in their own walk with God.

(Signature)

(Date)