



FAQ - Safe Environment Social Communication Policy for the Diocese of Green Bay

Why is there a need for a *Safe Environment Social Communications Policy* in the first place?

The *Policy* is there to protect you as a diocesan, parish and school employee. It also protects all the adult volunteers and chaperones that are ministering with minors and individuals at risk. *The Safe Environment Social Communications Policy* gives you permission to be in communication with minors and individuals at risk, but lays the parameters for healthy boundaries in communications with these populations.

Who created and approved this *Policy*?

Personnel from the offices of Education, Communications, and Safe Environment collaborated to create the *Policy*. The draft was approved by the major diocesan department heads and administration in March, 2015. The draft was approved by the diocesan Independent Review Board (which oversees policies and actions regarding sexual abuse) in May, 2015. The diocesan attorney reviewed and approved the *Policy* in July, 2015. The *Policy* was then approved by the Presbyteral Council and Diocesan Pastoral Council for use in all diocesan, parish and school entities.

Why are you trying to limit our ability to evangelize? I thought evangelization is supposed to promote the use of social media and not stifle it.

The *Safe Environment Social Communications Policy* aims not to stifle our ardor, methods, or expression when it comes to spreading the Gospel, but instead hopes to support and enrich it. Adults who are able to communicate freely, without the anxiety of crossing boundaries, (and the ability for parents to be involved in the communication) allows for a greater evangelization and transparency with the great things you are doing in the diocese, school and parish!

Can I still communicate with students or individuals at risk on social media?

Absolutely – following the parameters of the *Policy*.

Can I still text, Facebook message, or email minors or individuals at risk?

Yes. However:

First, the minor or individual at risk must have their parent/guardian sign a **consent form** so that they know what type of communication is happening between their son/daughter and the ministry representative. This form will last the entire year (or longer unless it is revoked by the parent/guardian) so it is recommended that this be given out at registration time for school or a religious education/youth ministry program, or the start of the program new year.

Second, It is *strongly* recommended (as it always has been) that another adult be added to the text, Facebook message, or email. This way, there is no questioning about content or motives.

Who could I use as the other adult included on messages?

Use someone else in your parish or school - maybe another employee, adult core team member, or designated trusted adult who has been Virtus trained and has a diocesan approved background check. Talk with your pastor, pastoral leader or administrator as to who the best person would be to be included on the correspondence. Some parents might actually want to be included on the message, so do not rule them out as the second adult!

What if the conversation is private and deals with appropriate, personal matters between a student or individual at risk and adult (example: struggles with an eating disorder, divorce in the family, cutting, etc.)? The person might now want another adult in the conversation seeing that it might bring on more shame or embarrassment.

It is recommended that another adult be included on the conversation. However, if a conversation is initiated and another adult is not included on the conversation, it is in the best interest of the adult to:

1. Ask the student or individual at risk if another adult can be added to the conversation.
2. Save the messages so that the conversation is transparent, share the message with another adult after conversation has concluded, and invite another adult into the next conversation, if possible.
3. Of course, if the content of the message requires immediate action or outside assistance, it is not to be kept between the adults and the student or individual at risk alone. It needs to be appropriately reported.

What about being on platforms where our conversations or pictures are not saved?

In a parish and school setting, it is not permissible to be on platforms where information cannot be saved.

How long is communication to be saved or archived?

This is decided upon by the parish leader or school administrator. This length of time that conversations will be kept needs be communicated to parents upon the release of the consent form, so parents can have access to that information. Communications do not need to necessarily be printed, but they need to be saved and accessible in case a parent, diocesan, parish or school leader would like to access a conversation.

Can I tweet a minor or individual at risk, post on their Facebook wall, or follow them on Instagram?

Yes, as long as these are for the public to see. The consent forms are mainly targeting the more private communications, but the forms also apply to these public postings as well. Adults are to use discretion, prudence, and care when posting their own pictures, comments, or opinions. Views and lifestyles of adults (even volunteers) portrayed on social media are to be in union with those of the Catholic Church if they are visible in any way to students on social media.

Why is a diocesan parish or school employee required to communicate with minors or individuals at risk using an official email account connected to the parish or school?

An email from a parish or school account establishes that particular communication as official business of that organization. It also provides accountability for access to all communications by that organization.

When are we expected to use this form?

The school year of 2016-2017 is the preliminary year for implementation. It is the year to introduce and educate those in your parish or school.

It will be required for all parishes and schools starting fall 2017.

Who keeps this form?

Your parish or school keeps the forms on file on site.

How can this Policy help to make my job easier when it comes to adult volunteers?

Currently, adult volunteers have little parameters or accountability when it comes to social media other than Safe Environment protocol. Now, this assures you, the diocesan, school and parish employee, that each volunteer understands the *Safe Environment Social Communications Policy* and will abide by it. For example, if there is something personal being posted for others to see that is inappropriate or questionable by a volunteer, you have the support to charitably talk with that volunteer. This is meant to help you as the employee to communicate to volunteers the expectations and opportunities to witness on social media.