

Considerations for Reviewing your Protection Policy/Safe Sanctuaries Policy for On-line Ministry

May 2020

- Form or convene a team to review your protection policy
- Review your policy
 - Consider three areas – Access, Privacy, Control
 - What needs to be emphasized, kept?
 - What changes need to be made?
 - What specific best practices need to be provided for on-line ministry
 - Contact your insurance company for specifics during this time
 - Contact your local school district for their guidelines for social interaction as they may have helpful guidelines
 - Communicate with administrative council/board if required for approval
 - Communicate updates with staff, volunteers, parents, and youth
- Screening and Training Volunteers
 - Follow normal protocols as much as possible
 - Increase supervision when needed for new volunteers
 - Consider on-line training for new and existing volunteers with changes to the policy
- Guidelines for Online Ministry
 - Establish uniform guidelines (to be used for online ministry across all ages)
 - Questions to consider:
 - Will you use audio only?
 - Will you use audio and visual?
 - What platforms will you use? (i.e. Zoom, Facebook, Google Meet, Skype, WebEx, Remind, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)
 - Are there any platforms that are not allowed?
 - Do you have safeguards in place in all platforms? (i.e. Jackbox Games – family friendly setting, Snapchat Groups – parents included in all conversations, see below for additional safeguard practices, etc.)
 - What are the appropriate timeframes for when online ministry may happen in your church? Are the same for all ages or are there different timeframes for different age groups?
 - Best Practices
 - Always have at least two unrelated adults in the on-line group meeting
 - Use “ministry based” accounts instead of personal accounts
 - The host should be a ministry leader or trusted background checked adult and should understand the platform they are using, including, but not limited to, knowing when and how to mute both audio and video
 - Keep a log of online meetings
 - Maintain the five-year rule (adults are five years older than the people they are working with)
 - Use group pages – supervisors and parents included (Facebook, Whatsapp)
 - Transparency is important
 - Create a regular schedule so parents, youth, and children so they know when a ministry-based account is being used.

- Have staff and volunteers use their real names when possible and have a log of usernames. It is important for people to know who they are talking with. Encourage youth to use their name as well.
- Have “Virtual Meeting Expectations” that everyone is informed of
- Dress appropriately
- Be mindful of surroundings (you may need to use a backdrop or background)
- Consider recording the group time (transparency and accountability), if you have written permission from minors and parents
- Take attendance, just like in person
- Keep a log of any 1-1 sessions with specifics of time, length, conversation. Make sure to share these with supervisor (as confidentially appropriate) for transparency. Do not make these the norm or commonplace, just for this time while physical distancing is appropriate.
- Follow rules about what can and cannot be shared
- If you don’t have picture/video sharing permissions release forms for children and youth in your ministry, get those created and returned as soon as possible.
- Have a plan for what to do if a child says or does something inappropriate or if there is something inappropriate happening in the background. Ask the adult with the child to assist quickly.
- Ensure that the host is willing to mute video and/or audio (and knows how to do it) to keep the group and family safe.
- Be mindful of wording
- Be mindful of boundaries
- Sample “Virtual Meeting Expectations” (check with your local schools for their guidance to provide consistency for your ministry)
 - Dress Appropriately
 - Our Shared Space – same expectations of in-person appropriate on-line
 - Use Your Name
 - Other ministry expectations for your setting (may be specific for different age groups)
 - Be prepared to put boundaries around the use of virtual backgrounds on meeting platforms. Students may need to get approval before the use of any personal backgrounds (not original to the platform), and/or you may need to limit the number of times backgrounds are changed during the meeting.
- Remember your systems for red flags and how to report suspected neglect or abuse

Resources:

- **** Safe Sanctuaries: Supporting a Shift to Online Youth Ministry Meetings:**
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/safe-sanctuaries-supporting-a-shift-to-online-youth-ministry-meetings>
- **** Maintaining Youth Protection Practices During Modified Operations,** Christy Schiller, Praesidium, Inc
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQkwMq4ksjs&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=IwAR3x-ECm57S-QoCMC-uz-6bkEyznENjBHIWVyzhvXLMfHD0UfDSwRa5GzAw
- **Additional Resources from webinar above:** <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wbLjU-3ZGeYGiCKubReoPgyBEDzq4LM3?fbclid=IwAR0Vklia8L6sX1tCw9x-41iVrL8qec-hHqy21dlpDDAYEj5XRpjZpC6YOhcU>
- www.protectyoungeyes.com

** Information from this resource was used in developing these considerations