



YOUTH &  
YOUNG ADULT  
MINISTRIES

# YOUTH WORKER BEST PRACTICES FOR “THE RELATIONSHIP PROJECT”

## APPROVED YOUTH WORKERS

Whether clergy, paid staff, parents, or volunteers, all Youth Workers participating in this ministry must be registered, trained, and screened as an official “Youth Worker” under the Policies for the Safety of Children and Youth as adopted by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

## NUMBER OF YOUTH WORKERS

All online youth ministry meetings and events should have a minimum of at least 2 official Youth Workers present at all times. It is best to designate one Youth Worker to moderate the meeting, and the other Youth Worker to keep an eye out for questions and monitoring for inappropriate behavior such as verbal language, gestures, and potential bullying. If you use the breakout rooms, you must have one Youth Worker per room to facilitate appropriate conversations and behavior.

## YOUTH WORKERS ARE ROLE MODELS

Youth Workers must continue to be mindful that their words and the words of the youth participants on these types of church sponsored meetings are important and can positively or negatively change lives. As a Youth Worker one must represent the teachings and values of Orthodox Church at all times, and enforce the policy against name-calling, off-color or sexual jokes, shaming, cursing or any other inappropriate verbal interaction by either adults and/or youth participants.

## CHAT FEATURE

Disable participants from sending private messages to each other or to everyone in the group. This will help to prevent any bullying or inappropriate side conversations from happening. If you would like the participants to type in their responses to a question for everyone to see at a particular time, the host can turn on and off the option to chat with everyone.

## LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK (80/20 RULE)

Remember that the discussion is not about you, as the facilitator. After asking a question to the group, learn to be comfortable with silence while the participants are processing the question. Facilitate discussion by giving participants space to speak and be heard, and develop the discussion further with open-ended questions. You can encourage the participants to virtually raise their hand with the button located under the “participants” tab at the bottom, and call on them so that only one person is speaking at a time.

## HAVE EMPATHY

Treat participants with compassion and respect. Remember that as a youth, sharing thoughts, struggles, fears, and triumphs takes a lot of courage. Create a safe space to understand the world from the view of your participants, validate their comments, and don't judge them.

## SAFE AND QUIET SPACE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Communicate in advance with all participants and their families that they will need an internet device with Zoom pre-installed, and a safe and quiet space to participate in the online youth ministry program. We recommend each participant have earbuds or headphones.

## **REMINDERS**

### **DO**

- Have participants register for the zoom meeting in advance
- Have a minimum of 2 approved Youth Workers present at all times
- Have one Youth Worker lead the discussion, and one youth worker monitor behavior
- Disable private chat between participants
- Encourage participants to verbally or physically raise their hand to respond to discussions
- Have empathy
- Be an active listener
- Be mindful of the words you use
- Represent the teachings and values of Orthodox Church at all times
- Create a safe space for participants to share openly
- Encourage participants to use earbuds or headphones to keep the discussions within the group confidential

### **DON'T**

- Don't judge
- Don't give advice
- Don't record the meeting
- Don't allow any non-approved Youth Workers to participate
- Don't share your own personal views on politics or social issues
- Don't share the Zoom link to your ministry meeting on your website.

## **CODES OF CONDUCT**

It is Best Practice to include: 1) a 'Code of Conduct' for the Youth Workers; and 2) a 'Code of Conduct' for the participant and their parent or guardian. 'Code of Conduct' statements signed in advance by Youth Workers and also by both parents and youth participants provides proper communication of expectations, especially in the event that it becomes necessary to exclude a participant due to inappropriate behavior.

## **REPORTING POLICIES**

Reporting of inappropriate conduct, be it verbal, gestures, or facial reactions during the virtual meeting, is mandatory. This reporting of inappropriate behavior includes the behavior of the youth participant and the youth worker. All policy statements regarding bullying, swearing, inappropriate gestures and other inappropriate behavior is to be enforced, regardless if the meeting is in-person or virtual. Inappropriate language, inappropriate behavior or bullying must be reported within the Church structure to maintain an emotionally safe event for the children and youth.

Incident Reports/Notices of Concern can be fillable PDF's, hand-written, or emailed; but should be immediately sent to the supervisor of the meeting or ministry. Additionally, it is important to ensure that parents, who are not in the virtual meeting, are notified if their child breaks the code of conduct.