

Safeguarding Children and Youth: Guidelines for Vacation Bible School

Four High Risk Situations at Vacation Bible School:

1. Large group activities

- These require extra supervision because children can easily go unnoticed or separate from their peers and leaders/teachers.
- Don't allow yourself to get distracted talking to other teachers/leaders.
- Do not allow a child to go back to the classroom or the bathroom unaccompanied by an adult
- Have a restroom protocol in place (see III on next page)

2. High Risk Kids

- Kids who bully or threaten other kids
- Sexualized talking or gestures
- Verbally or physically aggressive kids
 - ☐ Targets: Kids who are lonely, shy, clingy, emotionally needy. Kids who have a disability. These children should always be in an observable location.
 - ☐ Everyone should know that they are not allowed to threaten, scare or harm another student and if they are the victim of such behavior or observe it in other kids, they should tell their teacher or another adult immediately.

3. Isolated Areas

- Inappropriate sexual behavior between kids or between an adult and a child occurs in isolated or private areas.
- Eliminate privacy.
- Know your facility or campus. E.g. offices, closets, empty rooms, bathrooms.
- If a child is headed for an isolated area, head them off or if you see an adult taking a child to an isolated area, remind them of the rules.

4. Mixed Age Group

- Keep your eye on interactions between younger and older children to make sure no one is getting teased or is being picked on.
- If you have preteens or youth helping out with VBS, remember that they should never be left in charge of other kids. They do not have the maturity to be relied upon to use good judgment. And, it is not fair or appropriate to give them that much responsibility when they are not equipped to handle it. They are there to assist you and learn about leadership.

The Role of the VBS Adult Teacher/Leader:

1. **Be a positive role model.** Use appropriate language, dress appropriately, and interact appropriately with other teachers and children.
2. **Set Clear Standards.** The children and teen helpers will look to you to see what's acceptable behavior and language. If you are roughhousing, being inappropriately demonstrative or using inappropriate sexualized language they will see that as the standard.
3. **Keep the Boundaries Clear.** Young children will want your affection, elementary age children will want to know all about you and the teens may want to impress you, be your friend or be more interested in other teen helpers than with being your assistant. Remember that you are the adult in charge. And, avoid being alone with a child. Use the evening news test: would I be ok with seeing myself behaving in this way on the evening news?

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4. **Listen to What Kids Say.** Sometimes they may say it in oblique, non-straight forward ways. You may have to read between the lines. *Who is teasing whom; Who is in and who is out; Who is threatening others.* This goes for kids as well as teen helpers and adults.
5. **Inform Other Teachers or the VBS Director or Supervisor of your program of your Concerns or Observations.** It is your responsibility to report problem kids (the bully), situations (those who sneak off) and adults (those who see themselves as exceptions to the rules and exhibit inappropriate language or behavior). Remember that it is not your job to investigate or determine if there is actual abuse going on. It is your job to report to the VBS director, Supervisor of your program or Rector when you suspect actual abuse. This person should then report to the authorities within 24 hours.

Behaviors that have led to False Allegations:

- Meeting alone in isolated places.
- Showing favoritism.
- Engaging in physical contact that is misinterpreted.
- Wearing provocative or revealing clothing.
- Giving special gifts or secret gifts.
- Discussing sexual activities or encouraging others to do so.
- Commenting on children's bodies
- Shaming or belittling a child or any individual.
- Failing to adhere to accepted standards of affection. (below)

DIOCESAN POLICIES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN & YOUTH FROM ABUSE

A copy of *The Diocese of Atlanta Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse* should be accessible during VBS. The policies can be [downloaded here](#).

The three appendices mentioned below should be reviewed, as well as the section on Reporting Suspected Abuse, beginning on page 18. The Compliance Agreement Form (p. 27) should be duplicated and signed by each adult VBS worker and kept on file by the VBS director or the person in charge of Children's Education and Formation.

- **Appendix A: Guidelines for Social Media and Digital Communications**
- **Appendix B: Guidelines for Appropriate Displays of Affection**
- **Appendix C: Confidential Notice of Concern** (to use for Reporting Concerns/Suspected Abuse)
- **Appendix D: Compliance Agreement Form** (to give to the VBS Director, your rector or the person in charge of the children's education program.)
- **Report Suspected Abuse** or Policy Violations begins on page 18.
- **Sex Offender Registry:** <https://gbi.georgia.gov/georgia-sex-offender-registry>

