

16 Remote or Virtual Activities

16.1 Principle

Many activities involving youth are being conducted in a virtual or remote environment. It is imperative that sound child protection principles be translated into this environment. It is the responsibility of the administrators of the programs in which these activities take place to ensure that the Safe Environment policies and requirements are being followed.

16.2 Definition

"Remote or virtual activities" shall mean any program or activity that involves contact with minors that do not involve physical presence, but instead are conducted through the use of technology. This includes but is not limited to remote learning classes, virtual meetings, online or livestreamed events, and conference calls.

"Virtual platform" shall mean any form of electronic communication that permits interaction between participants, including, but not limited to conference calls and online applications such as Zoom, Skype, Google Classroom, Facebook, Microsoft Teams, etc.

16.3 General Application of Safe Environment Policies

All Safe Environment policies and all codes of conduct must be followed during any remote or virtual activity. Specific reference is made to Chapters 6 (Archdiocesan Policy on Sexual Misconduct and the Code of Conduct), 12 (Electronic Communications, Internet and Computer Use), and 13 (Maintaining Proper Professional Boundaries) of these Safe Environment Policies.

16.4 Specific Policies

- a. All remote or virtual activities must be conducted through an official account of an Archdiocesan institution. No personal accounts shall be used.
- b. Access to remote or virtual activities must be controlled by the adult who is conducting them or the responsible administrator
- c. Remote or virtual activities must only be open to persons who are specifically invited and approved by the adult conducting them (e.g., by using a "waiting room" to screen and admit participants).
- d. Minors who are participating in the remote or virtual activity should be given a secure password to access the activity. If the activity is recurring, the password should be periodically changed.
- e. The responsible administrator of the institution must have administrator and log-in rights to the virtual platform being used.
- f. The responsible administrator of the institution must be notified of and be able to access any remote or virtual activity that is being conducted.
- g. There shall be no private one-on-one communication between an adult and a minor during a remote or virtual activity, except as provided below.
- h. The adult conducting the remote or virtual activity shall disable any function that

- permits minors to directly communicate with each other, if possible.
- i. The adult conducting the remote or virtual activity shall ensure that any comments or chat are visible to all participants in the activity.
 - j. The adult conducting the remote or virtual activity shall ensure that they are the only person permitted to share their screen with the other participants. The adult should ensure that nothing private or inappropriate will be shared from their screen (e.g., other open tabs, icons or images on the desktop, etc.).
 - k. Parents must give permission for minors to participate in remote or virtual activities and must be able to supervise the minor's participation in the activity.
 - l. Remote or virtual activities should be recorded. Recordings may not be saved on a personal computer and may never be shared with anyone without the permission of the responsible administrator. Participants and their parents must be informed that the session will be recorded.
 - m. The adult conducting the activity and the responsible administrator have the authority to exclude any person from a remote or virtual activity at their unlimited discretion.
 - n. Rules of behavior should be established for the minors participating in the activity. Specific attention should be paid to how the minor is dressed, the location and background where the minor is participating, and the conduct of other persons who are at that location. The adult conducting the remote or virtual activity should also be attentive to these matters.

16.5 Exception for Professional Counseling

One-on-one communication between an adult and a minor by means of a virtual platform is permitted only:

- a. When the adult is a professional counselor;
- b. The communication involves providing professional counseling to the minor;
- c. The counselor's supervisor approves of the communication and provides regular supervision and review;
- d. The communication takes place through an official account or virtual platform of the Archdiocesan institution or agency; and
- e. The counselor follows all protocols required by their agency and any relevant governmental body (e.g., regarding notice to or consent by the minor's parent).

16.6 Response to Signs of Abuse or Neglect

Adults conducting any remote or virtual activity must be vigilant for any signs of abuse or neglect. If any Archdiocesan personnel have reasonable cause to believe that a minor is the victim of abuse or neglect, they shall immediately:

- a. Call 911 if the child is in imminent danger;
- b. Notify their supervisor;
- c. Report the matter to the New York State Child Abuse Hotline and to the appropriate police agency;
- d. Notify the Safe Environment Office or the Office of Legal Affairs.