

General Points for SOPs

The rules for mitigating risk should be clear and relevant to the particular ministry. However, there are some elements that constitute prudent behavior and should be found in any SOP. These include the following.

- Persons with a history of sexual misconduct with a minor can not be employed or engaged in service or ministry as a volunteer.
- An employee or volunteer should not be alone with minors other than his or her own children. If the situation is unavoidable due to emergency or unavoidable conditions, the employee or volunteer should call another person on the team to seek assistance and/or to document the occurrence at the time it is happening.
- Any outing with youth should include an adequate number of adult chaperones. This rule is especially important when an overnight stay is included.
- Minors in volunteer service are not immune from the need to follow rules of prudent behavior. Minors can offend with other minors and are also vulnerable to false allegations.
- Minors being served should be given clear rules for behavior during any class or group, especially if this includes an outing of any type.
- An employee or volunteer should avoid meeting with anyone he or she is serving in isolated circumstances or at odd hours. Visits to the home of a person being served or visits by the person being served to the home of the employee or volunteer are high risk events and should never be done without the company of another employee or volunteer.
- Behavior that singles out any one person among those served may signal increased risk and certainly invites misinterpretation.
- The more responsible the role of the employee or volunteer, the more risk is associated with the role. Such an employee or volunteer must learn to carry himself or herself as a public figure within the parish community.
- Dress appropriate to the role is an important aspect of carrying one's self as a public figure.
- Appropriate speech is equally important in maintaining one's self as a person who is in service to others.
- Touch must be done with discretion and with respect for the comfort of the person being touched. Touch that might reasonably be construed as romantic or sexual is never appropriate.
- Prudent behavior includes interpersonal boundaries. Maintaining healthy interpersonal boundaries requires sensitivity to the reactions of others and awareness of one's self. Ongoing education to enhance interpersonal sensitivity is critical for any employee or volunteer in a role of high responsibility and risk.
- Accountability is not the enemy of privacy, but of secrecy. Secrecy is the breeding ground for abuse. Accountability includes being "visible" with respect to what, when, where and how a ministry or service is being provided. Any employee or volunteer is expected to be accountable regarding his or her activities.