

Two-way Video and Audio Communications in a Youth Ministry Setting

We are in an unprecedented time in our schools and parishes. Due to COVID-19 our schools are closed and Masses suspended. While we may not be able to be physically present with our young people, technology can provide some vehicles for us to stay in relationship with them. The following document will help all of us direct our energies in safe and effective ways. This is not meant to address the use of social media, email, or text messaging. ([please see the Diocese of Gary Guidelines for a Safe Environment for Our Youth for further information](#)).

In the following document ADULT = An individual who is eighteen years of age or older AND is no longer in high school and has completed safe environment training.

Before Holding a Two-way Video and Audio Conference:

- Youth ministers and adult leaders should review the [Diocesan Safe Environment Plan](#) and the [Diocesan Guidelines for a Safe Environment](#). The following directives are supplemental to these diocesan policies.
- While there are many benefits of two-way video and audio communications, we must ensure that what we do satisfies [Children's Online Privacy and Protection Rule](#) ("COPPA").
- Youth who participate in two way-video and audio communications in a youth ministry setting must be at least 13 years old and in high school.
- Clear communications must be provided to parents regarding two-way video and audio conferences so that they are informed of the dates, times, and reasons for the conferences and have an opportunity to decide that their child not participate. (Email or direct phone call with parents are acceptable).
- Parents must be given the ability and the corresponding links or phone numbers to join the two-way video and audio conferences at any time (Email or text message are acceptable).
- Youth ministers must notify youth and parents that broadcasting a video stream from their end is optional. They must be given the opportunity to join with only an audio connection on the two-way conference.
- Parents and youth must be notified that the two-way video and audio conferences will be recorded for the safety of everyone (Email or text message are acceptable).
- Two adults must be present on each two-way video and audio conference.
- All streaming sessions must be recorded, and great care must accompany the handling of the recording after the conference. Access of the recording involving youth should only be given with a valid reason to the youth recorded in the conference, their parents, or parish and diocesan staff. Two-way video or audio conferences that include minors must not be posted publicly online.

- The use of two-way video and audio conferencing as a tool of youth ministry must be approved in advance in writing (email is acceptable) by the youth minister's supervisor. Two adults should have access to the recording.
- The physical location of the recording or live session should be a professional setting such as a classroom or home-office. It should not be an intimate setting such as a bedroom. Be mindful when choosing to broadcast live that you check the background for any materials that may be distracting, inappropriate, or potentially offensive, both audio and visual.
- Adults are permitted to initiate communication with minors between 8:00 AM and 9:00 PM. Two-way video and audio conferences must be limited to this time frame.
- Adults must remember that they are adult professionals who are engaged in ministry with a minor. Appropriate boundaries must exist between adults and minors so that effective ministry may occur. Adults are not friends or buddies with the minors they serve. All electronic interaction with youth, including two-way video and audio conferencing, must be conducted as if the adult minister would be willing to say or give the same response in the presence of that minor's parents.

During the Two-way Video and Audio Conference:

- Adults and youth must be dressed professionally and modestly.
- Begin with a discussion of rules of conduct for the video conference.
- As an adult leader, be ready to mute or turn off the video of a participant if something distracting or inappropriate comes up.

Code of Conduct for Youth Participants:

- Please dress as if meeting in person, your clothing should be modest and appropriate (no pajamas please).
- Please make sure nothing inappropriate or unseemly is in your surroundings when broadcasting video and audio. Please make sure your setting is tidy.
- Two-way streaming from a restroom is never acceptable.
- Please use care to join from a non-intimate setting such as a home-office or similar room.
- Parents are invited and encouraged to attend if they would like.
- Please know sessions are recorded for the safety of participants and leaders.

Key Points for Adult Leaders

1. Do not advertise your video conference on an open, public platform such as Twitter or Facebook.
2. Invite your participants through a closed vehicle such as a specific list of students in a class or in your youth ministry group. Yes, remember to cc parents.
3. Review the settings of the platform or program that you are using.
 - a. Make the participants ask to “enter” the session. This may be called using a “waiting room function.”
 - b. Set videos and microphones to “off” for all participants, especially when they enter.
 - c. Know how to turn on and off the microphones for participants.
 - d. Know how to kick people out of the meeting.
 - e. Disable file sharing and video sharing. This is to prevent offensive videos or viruses from being shared.
 - f. Disable private chat functions if possible.
 - g. Do not engage in “breakout room” functions unless there can be two adults in each breakout room.
4. Do not post videos or pictures of children especially with identifying information in open places on the internet (eg. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

Supplement: Tips While Leading a Two-Way Video and Audio Conference

- Please start meetings with prayer, but note that it is difficult to have everyone pray in unison with the audio lag time. It often works better to have the leader read or speak the prayer and then have the group respond “amen”.
- Please advise participants to have their computer or phone in a stable position. Moving or jittery video is distracting.
- It is helpful if participants avoid distracting activities such as eating or walking around during a video conference.
- Have one adult leader focus on speaking and guiding the conversation. The other adult leader can monitor the chat feature for questions or comments from the group.
- If a participant wants to talk or comment, especially in a larger group, it is helpful if they signal by raising their hand. The coordinator can call on them.
- When leading a discussion or asking for input, it is helpful if the leader calls on specific people to ask for their comment. Call upon each person to give them an opportunity to contribute.
- Be mindful that some families may have limited or no internet available. Some may have data caps. If you are having video meetings, try to use platforms that allow people to join either via the computer or to call in and join only for sound.