

# Guidelines for Behavior with Minors

## Dominicans, Province of St. Albert the Great

1. In our ministries and our conduct, we are guided by our commitment to celibate chastity so that “we do nothing that people might object to, so as not to bring discredit on our work as God’s servants” (2 Corinthians 6:3). As Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Albert the Great, we are bound to respect the human dignity of those to whom we minister, aided by the virtues of charity and prudence. Prudence requires special measures in our ministries and conduct with minors because of their state of dependency. We accept responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries in all ministries and pastoral relationships, particularly with minors.
2. **Prohibited Interactions and Behaviors:** In order to maintain a safe environment for minors, the following behaviors are categorically prohibited:
  - 2.1. Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
  - 2.2. Kissing on the mouth.
  - 2.3. Engaging in any sexual contact.
  - 2.4. Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas, sacristies, stairwells or other private areas.
  - 2.5. Being in bed with a minor.
  - 2.6. Tickling or wrestling with a minor.
  - 2.7. Holding a minor over the age of four on the lap.
  - 2.8. Piggyback rides.
  - 2.9. Any type of massage given by a minor to an adult.
  - 2.10. Any type of massage given by an adult to a minor.
  - 2.11. Any form of unwanted affection.
  - 2.12. Compliments or comments that relate to physique or body development.
  - 2.13. Taking an overnight trip alone with one or more minors.
  - 2.14. Driving alone in a vehicle with one or more minors.

- 2.15. Meeting privately with a minor in an area without windows, or where doors cannot remain open.
  - 2.16. Introducing sexually explicit or pornographic topics, vocabulary or media.<sup>1</sup>
  - 2.17. Encouraging a minor to possess, use, or distribute pornographic materials.
  - 2.18. Photographing a minor in a state of undress or in a provocative position or situation.
  - 2.19. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to a minor.
  - 2.20. Being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs when supervising or ministering to a minor.
  - 2.21. Providing money or inappropriate or expensive gifts to a minor.
  - 2.22. Engaging in physical or verbal discipline that frightens or degrades a minor.
  - 2.23. Being the only adult present in a locker room or other dressing area when minors are using such facilities.
3. **Exceptional Situations:** The prohibited behaviors enumerated above are intended to apply both to ministerial and non-ministerial settings where minors are present. However, friars may encounter exceptional situations (notably, with members of their own families) where a friar's prudent judgment, with the express or implied consent of a minor's parent or guardian, may derogate from strict observance from a few of these norms (e.g., #14)
4. **Guidelines for Positive Behaviors:** Appropriate affection between a friar and a minor can constitute a positive dimension of pastoral care. Nonetheless, touching a minor can be misunderstood and must be considered with great discretion. Depending on circumstances, it might be appropriate for a friar to engage in the following positive behaviors with minors:
- 4.1. Verbal praise.
  - 4.2. Handshakes.
  - 4.3. Pats on the shoulder or back.
  - 4.4. "High-fives" and "fist bumps."

---

<sup>1</sup> This restriction is not intended to preclude providing sound moral instruction concerning sexuality or the topic of pornography as part of an appropriate curricular or catechetical program.

- 4.5. Holding hands when walking with a small child.
- 4.6. Hugging in the presence of a minor's parents or another adult.
- 4.7. Holding hands during prayer.
- 4.8. Placing arms around a minor's shoulders.
- 4.9. Sitting beside small children.

**5. Guidelines for Individual Meetings with Minors:** Friars who meet with minors individually must follow the guidelines of the diocese or organization where they minister. Where such policies are lacking, the following guidelines should be adopted:

- 5.1. Meeting takes place in the public portion of a Dominican community or ministry site, and never in an isolated area or in a friar's cell. If done virtually, a friar's cell should never be visible in the background.
- 5.2. The office door has a window or can be left open during counseling.
- 5.3. Parents / guardians have consented to the meeting when done outside the ministry site and times.
- 5.4. The friar remains professional, witnesses to his religious vows and authority, and maintains careful boundaries around physical contact at all time.
- 5.5. The relationship between a friar and a counselee remains professional, all information is kept confidential, and counseling is kept to a reasonable timeframe.
- 5.6. Whenever possible, another adult is in close proximity whenever a friar meets individually with a minor.
- 5.7. The sacrament of penance is ordinarily celebrated in the church (or at a place and time designated for this purpose).

**6. Guidelines for Electronic Communications and Social Media:** Friars who are engaged in ministry to minors that involves social media and/or electronic communication (including videoconferencing) must follow the guidelines of the diocese or organization where they minister. Where such policies are lacking, unclear, or deficient, the following guidelines should be adopted:

- 6.1. Parents must be notified of the methods of communication which are used in each ministry and must be granted access to such communications.

- 6.2. There should be at least two adults with administrative rights for each email or social media account used in ministry communication. Personal accounts should not be used for ministry communication.
- 6.3. Social Media or other electronic communication may not be used to communicate with children who have not reached the 9th grade. Such communications should instead be directed to their parents.
- 6.4. Acceptable hours for electronic communication with minors shall be between 8:00am and 9:00pm. Communication shall occur outside these hours only in emergency situations or when necessary to communicate time-sensitive information related to ministry or a ministry-related event.
- 6.5. Friars must never join social media groups that are created and maintained by minors.
- 6.6. Neither personal nor ministerial social media accounts shall be used to contact individual minors. If a minor contacts a particular friar engaged in ministry by social media, a polite reply is permitted, but the friar should not engage in sustained communication in this manner.
- 6.7. A minor's personal identifiable information, including photos and video, may never be posted or distributed without the consent of a parent/guardian.
7. **Other Guidelines for Ministry Planning:** When planning or participating in ministry events, Dominican friars shall comply with all policies of the dioceses and organizations where they minister. At a minimum, friars are to anticipate and comply with the following:
  - 7.1. Ensuring all activities (e.g. extracurricular, catechetical, youth ministry, scouting, athletics) have been approved in advance by parents and an appropriate administrator.
  - 7.2. Having an adequate number of adults (two or more) present at all activities and events involving minors.<sup>2</sup>
  - 7.3. Releasing minors only to parents/guardians, unless otherwise authorized by their written permission.
  - 7.4. Obtaining written parental permission, including signed medical release forms, before taking minors from a parish or school, or to an event of any kind. Permission

---

<sup>2</sup> A recognized exception exists for ministry in schools when the teacher is the only adult habitually present in the classroom, assuming that there are other adults in proximity in the building.

slips must describe the activity or event, including its location and date, and include emergency contact information.

7.5. Dominican communities must never provide overnight accommodations for minors in community houses.

7.6. Dominican communities must never employ minors without non-Dominican adult supervision of the minor while the minor is on the premises.

7.7. Friars must report any suspected abuse (sexual, physical, or by neglect) of any person who is currently a minor to the appropriate civil authorities.

## **8. Guidelines on Residences of the Friars and Physical Space for Ministry**

8.1. The Constitutions of the Order (LCO 41) require each community to establish and maintain clearly defined cloistered areas.

8.2. Cloister space is strictly reserved to the use of the brethren. Others are not to be permitted into these spaces without the permission of the local superior. Such permission is not to be assumed. Cleaning, maintenance, and health care staff may be given permission to enter the cloister at designated times for the performance of their duties.

8.3. No one under the age of 18 is permitted in the cloister space of the brethren, unless accompanied by his or her parent or legal guardian and with the expressed permission of the local superior. Minors not accompanied by a parent or legal guardian are not permitted to stay overnight anywhere in our houses, even outside the cloistered areas.

8.4. Space within a house shall be set aside to allow friars to meet with their families, parishioners, and others whom they serve.

8.5. Physical space for ministry must be arranged as follows:

8.5.1. All rooms and offices designated for meeting visitors, counseling, and advising must be located outside the private and common areas of the Dominican community.

8.5.2. Notice of planned meetings and/or pastoral counseling with outside visitors in designated rooms should be posted.

8.5.3. The furniture in public meeting rooms must be arranged to afford physical barriers between friars and visitors.

8.5.4. The doors of designated offices, meeting rooms, common rooms and stairwells must have transparent window panels, which shall not be obstructed.