



# Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

*Office of Child and Youth Protection*

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## ***Use of Technology, Electronic Communication, Texting, Social Media, Video, Gaming, etc.***

*For the purposes of this policy, the term "personnel" shall mean clergy and members of religious orders, any diocesan, parish or school employee, volunteer or contractor.*

**General:** Regardless of the manner or method, all communication with minors must be faithful to the teachings and values of the Catholic Church. As leaders and role models for children our communication with minors must respect the psychological, physical and behavioral boundaries of the young person and be appropriate to the ministerial and professional relationship. Permission of the parent or guardian must be obtained, in writing, in order for an adult leader to communicate with minors via telephone, cell phone, text messaging, e-mail, social networks, or other electronic means. All means of communication (written, text, email, etc.) with minors will be copied to the parent or guardian.

The Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown shall manage the use of its electronic or digital communication devices, computers, email accounts, social media accounts, websites and digital data storage for the protection of youth and others. All personnel or any person who is granted access to diocesan technology devices or technology accounts, shall complete an orientation on the responsible use of technology and sign the 'Standards for the Utilization of Electronic Media Policy' provided by the Director of Information Technologies and Director of Human Resources. The diocese shall maintain a record of all persons who are oriented.

### **Unacceptable Use Restrictions for Diocesan Personnel**

***Personnel shall NOT:***

- a. Use any technology to violate a federal, state or local law
- b. Conduct electronic or digital communications with a non-familial minor without using a diocese-approved device and/or account, and without the approval of the minor's legal caregiver
- c. Encourage a sexual relationship between an adult and a minor
- d. Use, transmit or store pornographic or obscene content
- e. Share a person's personal information without their consent or the consent of their legal caregiver
- f. Use diocese-owned equipment or devices to harm others, for personal profit or for partisan political purposes
- g. Use diocese-owned equipment or devices for pornography purposes
- h. Allow the use of a diocesan email account by an unauthorized user
- i. Allow access to a diocesan digital file to anyone not authorized to view, edit, or copy its contents
- j. Electronic media may not be used to knowingly submit, publish, or display any defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, threatening, racially offensive or otherwise illegal material; nor

- shall the user encourage the use, sale, or distribution of controlled substances. Any use in violation of any local, state or federal law is also prohibited and is a breach of the terms and conditions of this policy
- k. Any messages or information sent by a user to one or more individuals via an electronic network are statements identifiable and attributable to the Diocese, must comply with this and other Diocesan policies, and may not disclose any confidential or proprietary information
  - l. The use of chat rooms is prohibited. An authorized alternative is the use of Project Discussion Groups
  - m. Any employee or client found to be abusing the privilege of Diocesan-facilitated access to electronic media or services will be subject to disciplinary action including risk of having the privilege removed

### Social Network, Media and Text Messaging

While the Diocese respects the right of employees to use social media and networking sites, as well as personal websites and blogs, it is important that employees' personal use of these sites does not damage the reputation of the Diocese, its employees, or its students or their families. Employees should exercise care in setting appropriate boundaries between their personal and public online behavior, understanding that what is private in the digital world often has the possibility of becoming public, even without their knowledge or consent.

### Social media or Text Messaging

- Youth under the age of 18, including students, volunteers, etc., are not to be included as "friends," "followers," or any other similar terminology used by various sites.
- All communication with youth under the age of 18 must include their parent or guardian and be only for reasons related to school, volunteer activities, etc., and never for the purpose of sharing or requesting personal information.
- If the Diocese believes that an employee's activity on any means of social media social violates its policies, the Diocese will request that the employee cease such activity; and dependent upon the severity of the incident, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.
- The use of pornography, sexting or any other inappropriate social media or text exchange with a minor or vulnerable person is prohibited.
- Any form of social media contact with youth will also be copied to the parent(s) or guardian (s) of the youth.
- Except in the case of emergency, personnel are not permitted to communicate with minors using private email accounts, or personal/private social media or telephone accounts.

### Email

- Email services are available for Diocesan employees to conduct and communicate Diocesan business. Incidental personal use of email is allowed with the understanding that the primary use be job-related, and that occasional use does not adversely impact work responsibilities or the performance of the network and should never involve inappropriate or offensive content.
- Email services are provided only while a user is employed by the Diocese and once a user's electronic services are terminated, employees may no longer access the contents of their mailboxes, nor should they export their mailbox to a personal account before departure.
- Email users are advised that electronic data (and communications using the Diocesan network for transmission or storage) may be reviewed and/or accessed by authorized diocesan officials for purposes related to diocesan business. The Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown has the authority to access and inspect the contents of any equipment, files or email on its electronic systems.
- Personal email is not to be used to conduct diocesan business or communications under any circumstances.
- Any form of email contact with youth will also be copied to the parent(s) or guardian (s) of the youth.

**Photograph and Video**

If pictures and videos are taken during youth ministry events and gatherings there must be parental consent. No child or youth under the age of 18 should be photographed in any form without the knowledge of their parent or guardian and a signed consent form. All photographs and videos of minors considered to be used for flyers, parish and diocesan publications, and the ministry website must have the written consent of the parent or guardian. Names will not be posted unless written authorization is given the parent or guardian, and then only first names will be used.

**Ministry Web Pages**

Anyone who establishes a ministry web presence should make a commitment to this vehicle of communication. Web pages, especially the index or main page(s), should be regularly updated. As with any ministry effort, there should be an intentional plan and set of goals regarding establishing and maintaining a web presence. Great care should be used to protect people on a web page that is publicly accessible and use the following guidelines:

- Personal information should never be made available (i.e. home address, home or cell number, home email address, etc.).
- Written authorization must be obtained from parent/guardian before posting photos or videos of young people.
- Pictures or videos should not be captioned with a young person’s name unless the parent/guardian has given you written authorization to do so.
- Never use a picture or video that might be considered embarrassing or unflattering or inconsistent with the mission of the Diocese.
- Care should be taken to protect the reputation of our church membership. If individuals are uncomfortable with a particular photo or video, it should be immediately removed from the website.

**Online Gaming**

Those who minister and work in pastoral settings with young people should take care in their involvement with online gaming. While this may be a recreational alternative, for many it is also an opportunity for social networking. Pastoral ministers should take care of protecting their online game identities so that appropriate boundaries are maintained.

No contact with minors in any form of online gaming, gambling or virtual reality and augmented reality gaming. Minors may not be physically present when personnel are engaged in any form of online gaming, gambling or virtual/augmented reality gaming.

Youth Protection policies extend into cyberspace. There should be no one-on-one online or digital activities (games, social media, etc.) or electronic communications. All users must respect the use of the electronic media. In doing so, we have the means to inform, educate and enlighten a vast number of people. Adults should always include or copy a parent or guardian in all online communications, ensuring no one-on-one contact exists in text, social media or other forms of online or digital communication. We are obligated to use the electronic tools in a manner reflective of the mission of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.

***I HAVE CAREFULLY READ, UNDERSTAND, AND HEREBY COMMIT TO CONDUCTING MYSELF IN ACCORD WITH THE DIOCESE OF ALTOONA-JOHNSTOWN USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND WILL HAVE NO DIGITAL CONTACT WITH A MINOR.***

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(PRINT Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

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(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Position)

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(Name of Parish/School/Diocesan Office)