



An excerpt of the guidelines
for contact between priests, children and adolescents
within the Church.

2017



In 2011 The Catholic Church in Denmark published a contingency plan to anticipate and prevent sexual abuse against children and adolescents in the diocese and to ensure a safe environment.

This text is an excerpt of the guidelines for social contact between priests and children and adolescents within the Church.

This excerpt **does not replace** the contingency plan as such.

Priests are required to familiarize themselves with all details of the total contingency plan.

General

The Church must ensure that the environment for children and adolescents is healthy, safe and secure.

In general no rules as such can prevent abuse, but guidelines can protect and guard the relationship between priests and youth.

General rules for contact between the priest and children and adolescents.

Essentially the adult – and in this case the priest – always has the full responsibility for administering social relations in every situation where children and adolescents are involved.

The simple rules:

- Children must not sleep overnight and do not stay in the rectory – unless it is a close relative and unless other adults are present and assume the full responsibility for the child/the children.
- Children must not sleep in the same tent – or room – as the priest when away on trips or at camp.
- When at camp the priest must have his own room and bathroom – or he must stay at the local rectory.
- On trips, camps and retreats with children and adolescents the priest will only enter their rooms if his duties as main priest at the camp or retreat require him to do so.
- In one-on-one talks and in confessions the priest must take care that circumstances are completely clear and unambiguous and with physical surroundings where participants can be sure, that both discretion and necessary distance are maintained.
Although circumstances must ensure that the situation cannot be misinterpreted, both children and adolescents at camps must have the possibility of talking to the priest, including going to confession, without other participants at camp being involved.



- Children and adolescents never go on a tour or an excursion with the priest on their own. If the priest takes them along in his own car parents must grant their permission.
- The priest will never give expensive gifts to individual children or adolescents, nor will he accept any gifts from them. The priest will adapt any gifts to the social and economic circumstances of the family and under no circumstances will he give gifts that are above the economic means of the child's parents.
- The vestry is open and accessible to all when minors are alter-boys/alter-girls.

Giving consolation: - language, chat, photography, about "forbidden actions" and about using your own experience.

It is especially important when the priest gives consolation to a child. The most important thing is to be present for the child, but physical proximity could result in a muddled situation.

There are other areas where the priest must be particularly careful:

- *Language:* It goes without saying that the priest does not utter any belittling or discriminating remarks, just as he doesn't comment on individual children or adolescents, and particularly not on their looks or development – but he must also be careful with the content of his jokes or how to react if someone is telling an ambiguous joke in his presence, or how to react to sexually oriented language and behavior.
- As far as *music, pictures, films, the internet and social media* are concerned the priest must be aware of his choices when listening and watching in the company of children and adolescents – why and where. And whether he is visiting chatrooms.
- *Taking photographs of individual children.* The parents' permission is required and the priest must take care that the situation is completely transparent. If a picture is taken of the priest how is he dressed? In general or at camp does the priest show that he is the priest, also when wearing leisure clothing? Does his appearances show that he is in control – without appearing unapproachable.
- *As for parental authority,* it is mandatory that the priest must never do anything together with the child that parents do not permit or which society in general does not permit for minors – i.e. tobacco, alcohol – or of course drugs of any kind.
- The priest must not seek favours from a child by offering what is otherwise forbidden –for instance by letting a minor drive his car.
- And last, but not least: The priest must be able to assume responsibility for his own actions. *He must never share sexual experiences or problems with children or adolescents – whatever his motive for doing so may be.*



Formal rules

- Priests will sign an affidavit that they have received the contingency plan. The signatures are kept in the archives of the diocese.
- Statements of previous convictions in respect of children must be retrieved for all priests and all staff of more than 14 years, who work directly with adolescents and minors. Similar statements must be retrieved for foreign priests and issued by the authorities in their country of origin.
- The diocese will collect the statements of previous convictions in respect of children for all priests, deacons and lay clergy.
- The diocese is in charge of renewing the statements of previous convictions in respect of children every three years.