

**OVERNIGHT TRIPS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN
POLICY AND PROCEDURES
DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH**

INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools, CCD programs and youth ministry programs provide a variety of activities for developing and nurturing young people to become virtuous, faith-filled and participating members of the Church and society. Normally, for elementary school-aged children, these activities occur during the day, or in the early evening hours, on parish and/or school property. On rare and special occasions, it may be necessary or appropriate for the parish and/or school to sponsor an activity that requires an overnight stay. In conducting such activities, the parish and/or school must carefully balance concern for the development of the child with protecting the child from harm and protecting the parish and/or school from unnecessary liability. The following policy and procedures have been implemented to assist parishes and/or schools in responsibly fulfilling their multiple obligations when elementary school-aged children are involved in an overnight trip.

POLICY

1. Overnight trips for all elementary school-aged children are not sponsored by the parish and/or school. (The term “overnight trips” includes but is not limited to “lock-ins” and other such events even if they occur on parish or school property.)
2. There is an exception to this policy for 7th and 8th grade students allowing them to participate in retreats¹ (as defined), academic activities (e.g., PJAS) and diocesan or state approved athletic competitions (e.g., WPIAL) which require an overnight stay.
3. Only the pastor can approve any parish and/or school sponsored trips which require an overnight stay. Parental permission must be obtained in writing.
4. Strict adherence to the diocesan approved procedural regulations governing these trips is required.
5. It is never permissible for any student below the 7th grade to participate in an activity which requires an overnight stay.
6. A trip or event which is not sponsored by the parish or school should not be advertised by the school nor should the school participate in the collection of funds for said project or in any other way act to give the appearance that the trip is sponsored by the parish or school.

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A retreat is defined as a multi-faceted experience held specifically to foster the spiritual life of the participant and to deepen a personal relationship with the Lord. It should include forms of prayer and worship that are engaging and spirit-filled, catechetical formation that enhances understanding, and various age appropriate activities for community building.

PROCEDURES

1. Parents should be strongly encouraged to accompany their child(ren) on any activity which requires an overnight stay.
2. The standard, diocesan approved overnight event registration form (including parental permission, indemnification and medical authorization) must be used for every event. The form should be filled out in its entirety, signed by the parent(s), and be readily available throughout the event. A copy of this form can be found in the Frequently Requested Forms section in this planning calendar. These forms can also be obtained from the Secretariat for Education offices if needed.
3. For every seven students participating on the overnight trip, there must be at least one adult chaperon. (For the purposes of these procedures an adult is defined as someone 21 years of age or older.) The chaperone should be someone who is well-known, respected and trusted by the parish and/or school community. The first choice for chaperones is always the parents of the students who are participating in the activity.
4. Information concerning the dispensing of prescription medicine, particular dietary needs and any other special needs is to be included by the parents on the basic Consent to Treat Form (this form can be found in the Frequently Requested Forms section in this planning calendar). Parents should be advised that no medical personnel will be present on the trip.
5. A chartered bus is the preferred mode of transportation for overnight trips. (The bus company must provide a certificate of insurance which is acceptable to the Insurance Office of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.) When adult chaperones are providing transportation in personal vehicles, then:
 - a. the parents of those participating must be informed of this fact; and
 - b. the driver(s) must be at least 25 years old, must have the proper license and insurance coverage, and possess a good driving record. This information must be verified by the person designated by the pastor as the group leader.
6. Facilities for overnight accommodations must be appropriate for the physical, psychological, moral and spiritual well-being of the children. Factors would include issues of personal safety, adequate gathering space, healthy sleeping arrangements and sufficient areas for prayer and worship as needed.
7. A written code of conduct that states the goals of the overnight experience and the expectations for student behavior during the trip should be prepared. The code of conduct should be provided to the parents prior to the trip. Chaperones must be informed that part of their responsibility is enforcement of the code of conduct. Adults should know the whereabouts, at all times, of the young people assigned to them. Violations of the code of conduct are to be dealt with quickly and fairly by the person designated by the pastor as the group leader. An adult should never be in a private area alone with a young person without another adult present.
8. Good planning is essential for any overnight trip. This planning must include a strategy for handling crises that could occur such as medical problems, emotional outbursts, the need for first aid and parental contact. The handling of all participants in the event of an emergency is also to be addressed. All pertinent information such as directions to the facility, emergency phone numbers, code of conduct, list of chaperones, schedule, etc., are to be shared with the parents prior to the trip.

Approved and Promulgated: April 15, 1996