

Youth Trips! Where Are The Rules?

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Safeguards to Protect the Youth and You

Did you travel with a church or school group when you were a young person? Have you been the sponsor or chaperone on a youth trip? Some of the best memories are made during these types of trips! It is important that we provide strong leadership through guidelines and discipline so that our young people are safe and secure. Doing this effectively can protect you and your organization's reputation as well.

As a youth group leader or teacher, if you are planning an overnight trip, what are some of the safety measures you need to have in place? In addition to the other travel safeguards, such as medical permissions, proper insurances, safe vehicle guidelines, safe driver guidelines, etc., overnight travel involves special precautions. As a group or youth leader you have been entrusted with a very "precious cargo," which requires extraordinary attention. Please consider the following guidelines:

Appropriate Conduct Guidelines and Discipline

All youth (and their parents/guardians) must clearly understand and acknowledge behavior guidelines, rules, and the resulting discipline if the rules are broken. Each organization will have their basic policy of conduct, but the following rules should always be included with strict enforcement:

- No mixed company ever in a hotel, motel, or bedroom, unless there is an adult sponsor present.
- No one should leave their hotel/motel room after curfew without permission from their sponsor.
- Absolutely no accessing of adult sites, or pornography on PDAs, cell phones, tablets or computers.

Supervision

- Proper supervision is without a doubt the most important of all categories of overnight safety. Many organizations, such as 4-H and Boy/Girl Scouts of America have a very low ratio (2/1) of children to adults. The ratio will vary, depending on the activity and lodging arrangements
- The adult supervisor must understand his/her role in supervising. S/he must understand and support the organization's guidelines for proper and improper conduct, the organization's discipline guidelines and be willing to enforce these guidelines, and support discipline when necessary. Additionally, s/he must be trained in appropriate contact with youth and children.
- Adult sponsors should never be alone with a youth, even in private counseling moments. Private conversations can be held in locations in which another adult is present, but out of earshot. This important safeguard is as much for the safety of the sponsor as it is for the young person.

Hotel/Motel Stays

- Hotels/motels provide special supervisory problems for youth during overnight stays. When booking rooms it is always a good idea to request that rooms be located on the same floor if you are using an all-night monitor. If not, several floors should separate boys and girls rooms.
- It is generally not practical to have a chaperone in each room; however strategically placing chaperones in rooms that contain a boy or girl from a known couple is sometimes a good idea. When there are rooms which contain no chaperones, there are varying methods of oversight. Some groups have used the tape method, i.e. placing a piece of tape from the door to the door jam. If the tape is broken at any time in the night, the students face the prescribed discipline. There are other methods used by group leaders, but none can replace the live, "awake-all-night" watch person. Many organizations require such a person, stationed strategically when rooms can be booked adjacently.
- Arrangements with the hotel/motel should always be made to block pay-per-view movies from each room.

Home Stays

- Home stays can be both easier and, at the same time, more difficult. During a home stay you relinquish both authority and control to the host. While grateful for the accommodation it will be important to let the host know the guidelines your organization has for proper conduct.
- While certainly true with both hotel and motel stays, the topic of respect for other people's property is vitally important to impart to the young people. It is not enough for them to treat someone's home as their own; they must respect and treat it better than their own.
- If at all possible, chaperones should accompany students in home stays and boys and girls should always be separated.

Nothing spoils a trip or tour more than a serious discipline problem. Our goal is to keep our children safe, both from external threats and in many cases from themselves. A successful trip will usually be one in which proper preparation and execution was accompanied by “a few rules, well enforced.”

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