

Recommended Additions to Your Standards of Behavior for Ministry with Vulnerable Adults

From the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh: Policy for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (2024)

All persons who work with vulnerable adults are expected to model the patterns of healthy relationships that all God's children deserve. Interactions must meet all the requirements outlined above as well as those that follow, and laypersons and ordained ministers working with vulnerable adults shall take particular care (1) not to influence unduly any person to whom they minister, and (2) to accept only token gifts from those to whom they minister. Ministers who receive gifts shall report those gifts in writing to the Bishop, Clergy in Charge, Senior Warden, Supervisor, or Responsible Person (as appropriate) at the earliest possible time.

DO's — All who minister to vulnerable adults shall:

- decline to accept loans or gifts of any kind from those to whom they minister.
- decline to be named as a beneficiary or to act as an administrator or executor in a will executed by anyone to whom they minister.
- inform the Pastor, Clerk of Session, Presbytery Leader, Stated Clerk, Supervisor, or Responsible Person (as appropriate) of anything that causes them concern for the safety or wellbeing of a person to whom they minister.

All who minister to vulnerable adults are encouraged to:

- engage in ongoing spiritual practices, which may include daily prayer, regular participation in corporate worship, and Bible study.
- spend time with, and listen carefully to, vulnerable adults, and advocate for their ministry within the Body of Christ.
- maintain healthy boundaries when sharing personal information about themselves or others.

All who minister to vulnerable adults may also offer appropriate physical expressions of care and affection, such as handshakes, pats on the forearm or shoulder, or hand-holding during prayer. However, it is best practice always to assess the willingness of the vulnerable adult before initiating physical contact of any kind and to be sensitive to any indication on their part that the contact causes discomfort or embarrassment either before or after the fact.

DON'Ts — Adults shall not under any circumstances:

- provide vulnerable adults with non-sacramental alcohol, marijuana, illegal drugs, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vapes, or pornography;
- arrive under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or misused legal drugs when they are responsible for, or ministering to, a vulnerable adult;
- consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs while they are responsible for, or ministering to, a vulnerable adult;
- engage in illegal behavior or permit others to engage in illegal behavior; or
- engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit, or secretive relationship or conduct with any vulnerable adult