

# Keeping Kids Safe



## **Frequently Asked Questions:** Policies for the Safety of Children and Youth



Dear friend,

We all know how important ministry is.

If we're going to reach young people and help them connect with Christ, then we need to do the right work shaped by the right vision.

We also need environments that are safe places in which young people can encounter the Lord.

In the pages that follow, you'll find the answers to some important questions about youth safety. Please review them careful.

We look forward to working with you. Together, we can keep our kids safe.

In Christ,

Steven Christoforou  
*Director of Youth &  
Youth Adult Ministries*

Father Earl Cantos  
*Director of Youth Safety Compliance*



---

“THERE CAN BE NO KEENER  
REVELATION OF A SOCIETY'S SOUL  
THAN THE WAY IN WHICH IT TREATS  
ITS CHILDREN.

**Nelson Mandela**

---

## 1) Why Is Youth Safety Important?

Good ministry is centered on Christ and oriented towards His Kingdom. If we are going to facilitate meaningful and transformative encounters with the Lord, then we need to do so in a spiritually and physically safe and healthy environment.



## 2) What Are The New Policies?

The Policies for the Safety of Children and Youth (the “Policies”) apply rigorous youth safety principles to all Youth Ministry Programs and Events across the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (“GOARCH”). The Policies give us clear rules to help ensure that every ministry interaction with the Church is beneficial for the precious young people in our care. We must do everything possible to keep children and youth safe at all times.



You can find the Policies at [goarch.org/safety](https://goarch.org/safety). On this website you can also find additional informational and training videos.

### 3) What Does It Mean To Be A “Youth Worker” Under The New Policies?

The Policies cover all “Youth Ministry Programs and Events” (which are ministries, programs, and events that are primarily for (i) minor children or (ii) those 18 years of age and still in high school).



Under the Policies (located at [goarch.org/safety](http://goarch.org/safety)), you can only be a Youth Worker (and thus eligible to participate in Youth Ministry Programs and Events) if you have been:

- (i) **REGISTERED**,
- (ii) **TRAINED**, and
- (iii) **SCREENED**.

Any and every adult (clergy, laity, or monastic) who wishes to be involved with a Youth Ministry Programs or Event must first become a Youth Worker. This applies both to employees and volunteers who assist in those specific ministries, programs, and events.

---

“ TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO, AND WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.

**PROVERBS 22:6**

---

The definition of Youth Workers is very comprehensive. It includes adults who are involved with JOY, HOPE, GOYA, youth camps, and altar servers.



It also includes educational programs like Sunday School, day schools, and afternoon/Greek schools.

It also includes athletic programs like basketball, volleyball, and dance.

It even includes adults who might occasionally assist or transport children during such events.

#### **4) Am I Being Singled Out For This Youth Worker REGISTRATION, TRAINING, And SCREENING?**

Not at all! ALL Clergy (Metropolitans, Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons) and ALL laity who participate in Youth Ministry Programs and Events (as we covered above in Question 2) must become registered Youth Workers.



## 5) **How Do I REGISTER, TRAIN, And SCREEN To Become A Youth Worker?**

To become a Youth Worker, you must: (1) **REGISTER** with the Youth Safety Parish Administrator at your home parish; (2) successfully complete the required video **TRAINING** and associated quizzes every year; and (3) successfully complete and pass the required criminal background **SCREEN** every two years.



You can find a detailed, easy-to-follow checklist at [goarch.org/safety](https://goarch.org/safety).

## 6) **Am I Required To Give A Lot Of Very Personal Information To My Parish And The Archdiocese?**

NO. Your Parish has designated a Parish Youth Safety Administrator. Your Parish Youth Safety Administrator will only need to send your **legal name**, **personal email**, and **phone number** to Praesidium, which is the company with whom GOARCH and your parish contracted.

---

“ IMPLEMENTING THESE POLICIES  
ACROSS OUR ARCHDIOCESE WILL BE  
A VALUABLE GIFT WE OFFER OUR  
CHILDREN.

**ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS**

---

Praesidium will then email the Youth Worker applicant a link to take the video training and related quiz. Praesidium will also send a second email with a link to input your own personal information for the criminal background screening.

You will be entering your most confidential information yourself, directly into Praesidium's safe and secure youth safety system, and it will NOT be stored at the Parish, Metropolis, or GOARCH.

### **7) Who Will Have Access To The Results Of My Criminal Background Screening?**

Your privacy is important to us. People will only need to review the results of a background screen in cases where red flags need to be viewed. In that case, only the

Background Check Review Boards at the Metropolis Level and the Archdiocesan Level will have access.

Your Parish Youth Safety Administrator will not have access to the results of your background screen, nor will anyone else at your Parish. The confidential treatment of this information is of utmost importance to us. In the event of an investigation, your Parish Priest may be consulted about an issue flagged by the background screen process. However, he will not have access to the screen itself.



**8) We Have Some Older Volunteers And A Retired Priest That Does Not Have An Email Account. How Are They Going To Register?**



While we understand that some people may not already have their own email accounts, this is an important (and free) tool that we need to use to communicate with Youth Worker applicants are part of the process of **REGISTERING**, **TRAINING**, and **SCREENING** them.

In such cases, the Parish Youth Safety Administrator (or the children of those without email accounts) can help them set up a free email account. This is critical because each Youth Worker needs a unique email account so that we can track the compliance of each Youth Worker. No duplicative accounts will be accepted by the system.

**9) Do I Need Any Prior Experience Working With Children or Youth To Be Eligible To Become A Youth Worker?**

Prior experience is not needed. Please make sure you read the Policies (which can be found at [goarch.org/safety](http://goarch.org/safety)) and talk to your Parish Priest about your desire to serve our young people and help form a new generation of faithful Orthodox Christians.

## **10) What If I Have Already Been Trained And Screened By Praesidium?**

In 2019 only, if you were trained or screened by Praesidium for a Metropolis Youth Ministry Program or Event (summer camp, retreat, etc), you may be grandfathered in for the 2019-2020 ministry year. Talk to your Metropolis Youth Safety Administrator regarding this possibility.

This exception will not apply beginning in 2020.

## **11) What If I Have Already Been Screened By Some Other Organization?**

Some Youth Worker applicants are required to be screened by either their jobs or an organization for which they volunteer.

Unfortunately, this does not satisfy the background screen requirement of the Policies.

Youth Safety Administrators need to confirm background screen results as part of the compliance process, and they will not have access to the results of outside screens. Thus, we cannot accept them as part of our internal process of keeping our kids safe.



## **12) What Activities Can I Participate In If I Do Not Go Through The Screening?**

By decision of all the Hierarchs and the Clergy-Laity Congress, who all approved the new Policies, no one may participate in a Youth Ministry Program or Event without first becoming a Youth Worker under the Policies. Because of the high priority we place on youth safety, there can be no exceptions.

## **13) If Our Parish Insurance Company Asks For Confirmation Or A Copy Of Our Parish Sexual Molestation Policy, What Do We Do?**

Since the Policies apply to every Parish in GOARCH, the Policies should satisfy this insurance requirement. Direct your insurance company representative or agent to goarch.org/safety. There, they will find the text of the Policies which should satisfy most, if not all, requirements from your insurance carrier.



If your Parish faces any challenges, please reach out to the GOARCH Youth Safety Compliance Officer at youthsafety@goarch.org.

#### **14) Can Our Parish Children or Youth Engage In Activities With External Organizations Who Have Not Gone Through Our Training ?**

Other organizations (such as the Scouts or after school sports) have their own youth safety guidelines. Our requirements under the Policies would not apply to youth events sponsored by organizations outside GOARCH. However, we strongly recommend that you do not enroll your children in youth events without first confirming that the organizers have a strong youth safety policy in place.



#### **15) Can Our Parish Youth Engage In Activities With Other Greek Orthodox Parishes Or A Different Greek Orthodox Metropolis?**

All adults and advisors participating in Youth Ministry Programs or Events anywhere across GOARCH are required to first become Youth Workers. This includes Youth Ministry Programs or Events at the Parish, Metropolis, and Archdiocesan levels.

At this time, these **REGISTRATION, TRAINING**, and **SCREENING** requirements are unique to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and have not been adopted by other Orthodox Jurisdictions.

## 16) What Happens If My Background Screening Reveals An Issue Unrelated To Youth Safety Such As Bankruptcy?

The background screen we require is a criminal screen only. NO financial information will be reviewed or even requested in this process. NO Credit Score will be reviewed or requested.

While certain past offenses may be flagged by the background screen, not all offenses disqualify a Youth Worker applicant from participating in ministry. In the event of non-disqualifying offenses, these flags will be reviewed by the Background Check Review Boards. If you have any questions, please reach out to your Parish Priest.



## 17) If I Am Unable To Complete The Training In Time, When Is My Next Opportunity?

Currently, a Youth Worker applicant can begin the process of **REGISTERING, TRAINING,** and **SCREENING** at any time. Please see Question 4 for more details.



## 18) Who Pays For The Training And Screening?

GOARCH completely covers the cost of the online video training and quiz. There is no cost to the Parish or Youth Worker applicant for this youth safety training.

The only cost to Parishes or Youth Worker applicants is related to the background screen. Remember that this screen is only required once every two years.



The Policies mandate the “Policy Minimum Package” for all Youth Worker applicants. This is a criminal background screen which currently costs \$17. If the Youth Worker applicant anticipates needing to drive or transport Children or Youth, the Policies mandate the “Policy Minimum Plus MVR Package.” This is a criminal background screen plus a motor vehicle driver’s license review which costs \$22.

Praesidium also offers the “Policy Comprehensive Package.” Parishes are free to select this instead of the Policy Minimum Package. Please note that this is a more expensive screen.

---

“ DON'T TELL ME WHERE YOUR PRIORITIES ARE. SHOW ME WHERE YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT THEY ARE.

James W. Frick

---

Some Parishes have decided to cover the costs of these expenses while other Parishes are asking the Youth Worker applicants to assist. Please consult your Parish Youth Safety Administrator concerning your anticipated screening costs.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: These figures do not include third-party costs, which may vary state by state.**

## **19) What Is Included In The Background Screen?**

The Policy Minimum Package includes:

a. Confidence Multi State Criminal & Sex Offender Database

A proprietary tool that contains millions of court, incarceration, sex offender, terrorist watch list, and fraud database records compiled from across the country that will be searched for your

applicant's name. A SSN Trace is included in this service and all aliases discovered using this tool will also be processed through the database.



b. County Criminal Records Search (1 County)

A search of criminal records, from the previous seven years, housed at the central courthouse in a given jurisdiction. The majority of criminal cases in the U.S. are

tried in county courts and records found here will include both felonies and misdemeanors related to violations of state laws.

The Policy Comprehensive Package includes:

- a. Confidence Multi State Criminal & Sex Offender Database  
A proprietary tool that contains millions of court, incarceration, sex offender, terrorist watch list, and fraud database records compiled from across the country that will be searched for your applicant's name. A SSN Trace is included in this service and all aliases discovered using this tool will also be processed through the database.
- b. County Criminal Records Search (5 Counties)  
A search of criminal records, from the previous seven years, housed at the central courthouse in up to five jurisdictions. The majority of criminal cases in the U.S. are tried in county courts and records found here will include both felonies and misdemeanors related to violations of state laws.

Every background screen is a piece of the much larger youth safety framework which the Policies establish and enforce.

## **20) If I Do NOT Become A Registered Youth Worker Can I Still Help Out In A Pinch If Other Parents Are Unavailable To Help Out Or Drive Our Kids To An Event?**

The short answer is NO. Youth safety is simply too important and we cannot allow exceptions to the Policies. No one can participate in a Youth Ministry Program or Event without first becoming a Youth

Worker. This includes things like chaperoning a retreat, leading a session, or driving other people's kids during an event.

However, there are times when an adult can support a Youth Ministry Program or Event without engaging in direct contact with Children or Youth. The Policies allow for Youth Worker Support Staff to do things like prepare and serve meals, clean a facility, or make repairs without first **REGISTERING**, **TRAINING**, and **SCREENING**.



**IMPORTANT NOTE:** To avoid any future limitations on your service, it is best to become a Youth Worker now if you think you will ever be called upon to help in a pinch during a Youth Ministry Program or Event.

## **2I) How Can I Lose My Youth Worker Status?**

GOARCH has a strict zero tolerance policy regarding Abuse. Failure to complete the required three-step process for becoming a Youth Worker (**REGISTRATION**, **TRAINING**, **SCREENING**) or violating the Policies will lead to disqualification.



## 22) How Should I Report Suspected Abuse?

Abuse and suspected Abuse should immediately be reported to the civil authorities and to your Youth Ministry Program or Event Supervisor.

If you have any questions about what qualifies as Abuse or how to report Abuse to civil authorities, you can contact our partner the Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD or 1-800-422-4453.



## 23) How Do I Deal With Or Report Serious Threats of Suicide?

Suicidal ideations and serious threats of young people (or even adults) who threaten to commit suicide must be taken seriously. If you have any questions, you can contact a local or state crisis line, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.



## **24) How Should I Respond To Inappropriate Behavior?**

Inappropriate behavior (including Policy violations) should promptly be reported to your Youth Safety Program or Event Supervisor. If your Supervisor is somehow involved in this inappropriate behavior, then you should make your report to the next person up the chain of command and include your Priest.

## **25) How Can I Help Create Safe Ministry Spaces At Our Parish Facility?**

Preparation is key. Youth Workers should be prepared for Youth Ministry Programs and Events and know what they need to do and where they need to be at all times. However, all Orthodox Christians (Youth Workers or not) should consider the safety needs of all the young people in their Parishes.



If you have ideas on how to make your Church campus or facility safer for these young people, speak to your Parish Council and your Priest.

## **26) Are Adults The Only People Who Can Be Youth Workers?**

Youth between the ages of 14 and 17 may, under certain circumstances, assist Youth Ministry Programs or Events. Please see the Teen Youth Worker Guidelines (starting on page 23 of the Policies) for more details.

**27) I Am A Youth Worker. Are There Any Best Practices For Communication By Electronic Devices With The Kids: Both During Events And Before Events?**

While Electronic Communications can be helpful, we need to be aware of the risks associated with private communications. Youth Workers should know their limits and make an effort to steer interactions to in-person settings in the context of the Youth Ministry Program or Event.



For more guidance, please review the [Electronic Communications FAQ](#) document, available at [goarch.org/safety](https://goarch.org/safety).

**If you have any questions, please email Father Earl at [youthsafety@goarch.org](mailto:youthsafety@goarch.org).**

*Last updated on October 1, 2019*