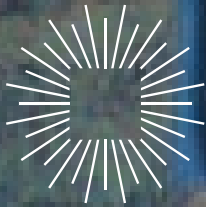


*Transforming lives
behind & beyond
prison walls*



Thrive For Life

Spiritual Mentor Handbook



This handbook is designed as a resource and support for those spiritual mentors who are ministering or those who are interested in ministering to our brothers and sisters behind prison walls. The guidelines of this handbook are crucial to provide an environment that is both prayerful and safe.

While the Catholic Church does not deny a government's right to ensure public safety, our faith affirms the common dignity of all men and women as children of God, thus justice must lead to reconciliation, rehabilitation and restitution. We know that faith has a transforming effect on all our lives. Therefore, rehabilitation and restoration must include the spiritual dimension of healing and hope. The Church must stand-ready to help offenders discover the good news of the Gospel and how it can transform their lives. There should be no prisons, jails, or detention centers that do not have a regular and ongoing Catholic ministry and presence. (Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, USCCB, 2000).

This handbook contains six sections. The first four provide information as well as behavioral and safety guidelines that every spiritual mentor must follow before, during and after visiting any correctional facility. Sections five and six contain the "Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy" and the "Confidentiality Policy." Both policies must be signed and sent to the Coordinator of Spiritual Care.

Thrive For Life thanks you for your interest in our mission and your generosity.

spiritual mentor name

Contact Information

(212) 337-7544
info@thriveforlife.org
www.thriveforlife.org



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Christ's Peace!

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, defines spiritual exercises as “every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities.”

In your hands you have the updated Handbook for Spiritual Mentors. This handbook contains the prayerful reflection of our experiences in many correctional facilities, our relationships with inmates, correctional officers, and other spiritual mentors, as well as the innovation and creativity needed to adapt to the rapidly changing times after the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be a spiritual mentor is to be a companion along the journey of faith. We come together as people from behind and beyond the prison walls to pray, reflect, meditate, and discern the presence of God in our lives. We do not journey alone. The Spirit of God animates all we do in community. I thank all our spiritual mentors for their response to the calling to join the Thrive for Life community in this capacity. Their docility to this calling is especially important in a society where the incarcerated are too often forgotten. Following this vocation translates into the building of the Kingdom of God through shaping a more just society where all men and women can thrive for life together as children of God.

I invite you, through the resources of this handbook, to cultivate your calling to spiritual mentorship. In this capacity, professionalism and a sound spiritual discernment come together. I pray that the Thrive for Life community inspires and encourages you in this ministry. Please be assured of my gratitude for the gift you are to us.

In gratitude,



Fr. Zachariah F. Presutti, SJ
Founder





Prepare for Your Ministry

spiritual mentor handbook

In order to assure the success of our work and mission, it is fundamental to be well prepared. This preparation is not limited to the specific activities and materials for a retreat. There are spiritual, administrative and legal steps to take before joining a prison ministry.

All spiritual mentors need to provide the documentation requested by the Department of Corrections (DOC) and update it when necessary. First, fill in the application form that corresponds to the facility/facilities where you will work, and a copy of a government issued non-expired photo identification. The following is a list of acceptable forms of identification:

- DMV driver's license or non-driver's identification card,
- Resident alien or permanent resident card issued by USCIS,
- Passport (of any country),
- US Armed Services identification,
- Consulate-issued or diplomatic identification.

After submitting your application, you will be scheduled for a volunteer **orientation** session where the DOC will take your biometrics (fingerprints and photograph) for a DOC Volunteer ID, and you will learn about the Department's safety and security guidelines. You must always bring this ID when you visit a correctional facility and must be always visible.

Additionally, spiritual mentors must take **two online training courses**. One is Virtus, provided by the National Catholic Risk Retention Group. VIRTUS is the brand name that identifies best practices programs designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults. The second one is the **Sexual Harassment Prevention** training by the NYC Commission on Human Rights. Both trainings are free and can be taken online. Certificates of completion should be submitted to the Coordinator of Spiritual Care.

- Virtus: <https://www.virtusonline.org/virtus/>
- Sexual Harassment Prevention: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/sexual-harassment-training.page>

As well, all spiritual mentors are required to attend the enrichment activities provided by Thrive For Life. These activities will introduce you to the Ignatian spirituality and will help you identify how to apply it to the prison ministry. Please, reach out to the Coordinator of Spiritual Care for more information about the enrichment activities.





While Visiting a Correctional Facility

spiritual mentor handbook

Although operational procedures and safety regulations vary from prison to prison, this section provides some of the most important guidelines for prison ministry volunteers.

Prison Entry

- Your vehicle is always subject to search. Do not bring alcohol, illegal drugs, guns, or weapons onto prison property.
- All volunteers must show a valid driver's license or picture ID and be cleared at the front desk or window before entering the prison.
- Bring as little as possible into the prison.
- Wallets, purses, briefcases, etc. are not allowed. Most prisons allow volunteers to carry their things in a clear plastic tote bag or zip-lock bag.
- Paper money is not allowed. It is best not to bring money inside the prison unless absolutely necessary.
- Cell phones are never allowed under any circumstances.
- Never bring tobacco products, lighters, matches, or any type of medication into the prison.

Searches

- All volunteers go through a security check when they enter the prison. In most cases, it is the same type of security check that you would see at an airport.
- When going through security, volunteers are often asked to remove all jewelry, eyewear, belts, headgear, jackets, outerwear, and shoes.
- Avoid problems by emptying your pockets, removing excess jewelry, and removing headgear before leaving your vehicle. Wear shoes that are easy to get off/on.
- Do not take anything into or out of the prison without permission. Every person is subject to search at any time while on prison property.
- If a volunteer is found with contraband, he/she may be disallowed from entering the prison ever again. (Contraband is defined as any item not permitted into the prison or not on the clearance list.)



Dress Code

- Every prison has a strict dress code. Before you go to the prison be sure you are dressed appropriately; otherwise, you will not be allowed to enter.
- All Thrive For Life spiritual mentors must wear a Thrive For Life t-shirt and plain, one-color pants. The Coordinator of Spiritual Care will provide you with a t-shirt.
- Wear comfortable shoes that are securely fitted to the foot: no flip flops or sandals without a heel strap.
- Avoid excessive makeup, heavy perfumes, or any type of clothing that draws undue attention. As volunteers, we are there to lift up Jesus Christ and we don't ever want to distract from that goal.

Attitude and Poise

- Be natural, be yourself. Take time to get to know the prisoners by listening and asking good questions. Prayerfully listen for opportunities to demonstrate God's grace and hope. Your attitude of humility and your genuine desire to serve are highly important.
- Remember it is God's harvest. Learn to walk alongside prisoners as they search for the truth in God's Word.
- Treat prisoners and staff with respect. Act as if you have just entered someone else's house. Remember that prison officers and staff spend a considerable amount of time at the facility, and prisoners live there, so it is their residence.
- Even if you disagree with prison personnel, always submit to their authority. By doing this, you set a good example for prisoners who are watching.
- Keep language free of vulgarities and do not use inmate slang.

Personal Security

- Do not share your last name or any personal contact information with any of the inmates.
- All correspondence with the retreat attendees must be done through Thrive For Life. Direct correspondence is not allowed under any circumstances.
- Never accept any letter or package from an inmate or agree to give a letter or package to anyone. Never accept or provide any sort of favor or service outside of the Thrive For Life program.



Sharing after the Retreat

spiritual mentor handbook



After each retreat, spiritual mentors should take the time to share their experience with one another. This is an opportunity to share the joys and obstacles, the graces and consolations experienced during the retreat. Silence is a fundamental component, just as in the retreat.

Although this time may be a good opportunity to provide feedback, always begin sharing your own experience and listening with an open heart. Think about the things you saw and heard, how you felt about them, your thoughts, and how you responded to them. Observe the moments when you were present and open to God's gift, and kindly accept when you might have been distracted and closed. Be thankful for both realities.

Once you have pondered your team's unique experience and perspective, be thankful for what has been shared and the lessons drawn from it. Together, all spiritual mentors are invited to identify best practices and coordinate how to better minister to one person or an entire group. Sharing important insights with the Coordinator of Spiritual Care can help other retreat teams as well.

A team's sharing after a retreat is a form of communal prayer in which each one brings the fruit of his/her work for the benefit of all. This form of prayer makes even more evident the abundance of God's love and the need that we have for one another in our spiritual journey.

Additional Tools

spiritual mentor handbook



Never Assume and Stay Open

The Holy Spirit guides all men and women. Very often, such guidance comes through other people, and inmates are not the exception. Remain open to learn from the incarcerated and your ministry to them. Prison ministry is a transformative experience where God's grace and mercy is particularly powerful.

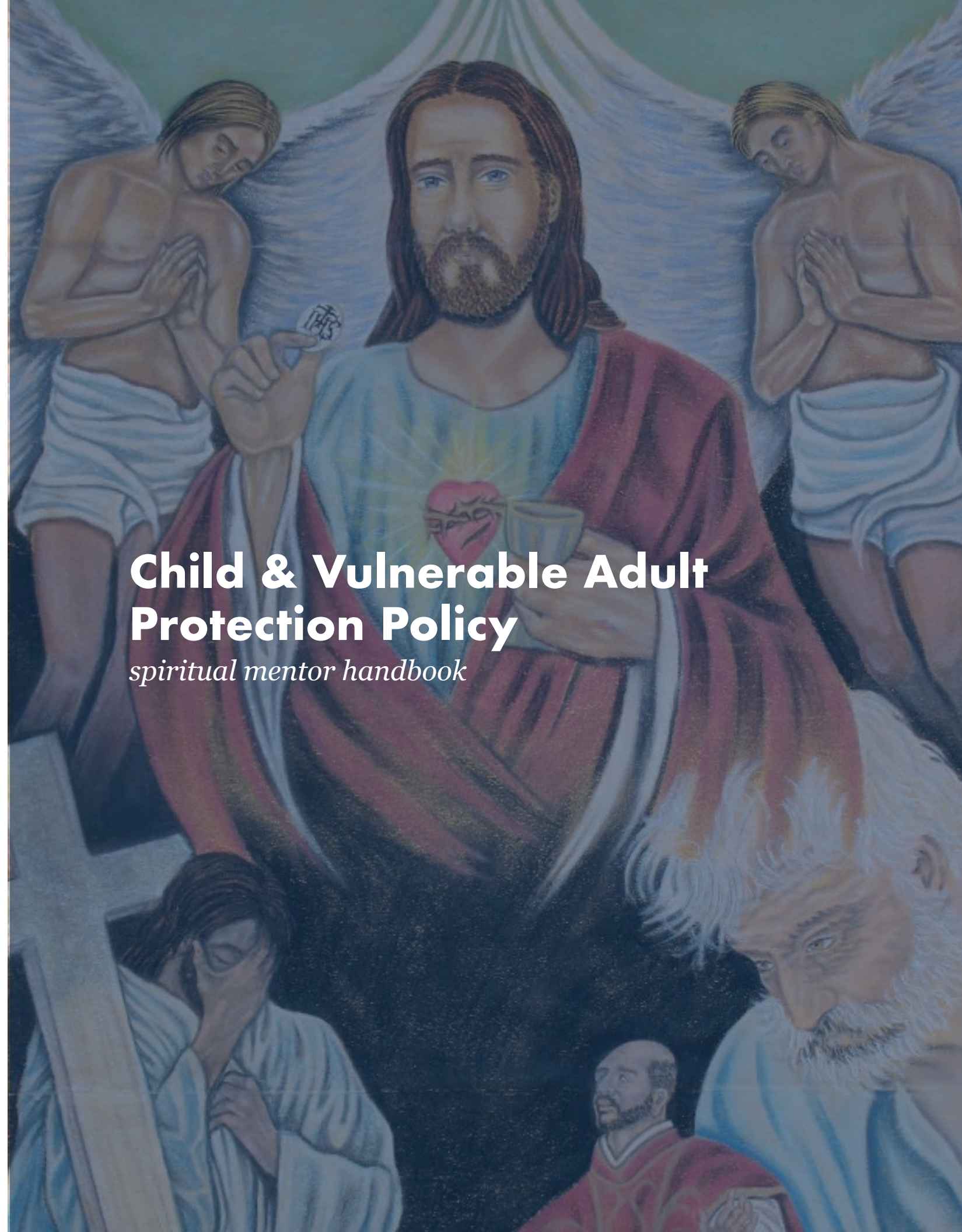
Meditate on Your Role and Responsibilities

Your prayer and sacramental life will inform your ministry. Take time for personal reflection on prison ministry. Consider the following questions carefully:

- How well do I really understand prison systems and culture? Have I already made assumptions and judgments that I may need to question?
- Do I understand how important it is to be covered appropriately in prayer before entering a prison?
- How willing am I to ask for help and power from the Holy Spirit to avoid the pitfalls of flaunting my own agenda?
- How well do I let go and let God in most situations?
- Can I truly listen to and love all inmates unconditionally?
- Can I look a prisoner in the eye and truly smile at him or her?
- When speaking one-on-one with an inmate, can I listen to him or her as if she/he is the most important one in the room?
- Am I truly ready to love the prisoner through God's love in me?
- In what ways am I unprepared for this ministry, and how will I get ready?

Focus on the Bigger Picture

Sometimes you may become frustrated, feel inadequate, or even get a false sense that your work is unwanted or ineffective because you don't see the results you imagined or expected. At this point, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. Remember that we are called to serve because it is pleasing to God and it is Him who makes our ministry fruitful at the right time and in the perfect manner.



Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy *spiritual mentor handbook*



General Purpose Statement

Thrive for Life seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and vulnerable adults who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children and vulnerable adults of Thrive for Life from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers).

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of twenty-one (21) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children and vulnerable adults.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a. Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Thrive for Life for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b. Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the office of Thrive for Life.

c. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicant’s references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Thrive For Life.

e. Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees and workers (regardless of position). Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing Thrive for Life to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, she/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the board of trustees of Thrive for Life on a case-by-case basis considering all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Thrive for Life.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- Physical abuse - any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse - emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse - any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect - depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

If an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

[All spiritual mentors will receive a printed copy of this policy for their signature.]



Confidentiality Policy

spiritual mentor handbook



All information concerning clients, former clients, our staff, volunteers, and financial data, and business records of Thrive For Life is confidential. “Confidential” means that you are free to talk about Thrive For Life and about your program and your position, but you are not permitted to disclose clients’ names or talk about them in ways that will make their identity known. No information may be released without appropriate authorization. This is a basic component of client care and business ethics. The board of directors, staff and our clients rely on paid and volunteer staff to conform to this rule of confidentiality.

Thrive For Life expects you to respect the privacy of clients and to maintain their personal and financial information as confidential. All records dealing with specific clients must be treated as confidential. General information, policy statements or statistical material that is not identified with any individual or family is not classified as confidential. Staff members are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of information relating to other staff members and volunteers, in addition to clients.

Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in termination of your employment, or other corrective action. This policy is intended to protect you as well as Thrive For Life because in extreme cases, violations of this policy also may result in personal liability.

Rationale

Confidentiality is the preservation of privileged information. By necessity personal and private information is disclosed in a professional working relationship. Part of what you learn is necessary to provide services to the applicant or client; other information is shared within the development of a helping, trusting relationship. Therefore, most information gained about individual clients through an assignment is confidential in terms of the law, and disclosure could make you legally liable. Disclosure could also damage your relationship with the client and make it difficult to help the person.

Before you begin your assignment as a staff member/volunteer, you should be aware of the laws and penalties for breaching confidentiality. Although the agency is liable for your acts within the scope of your duty, giving information to an unauthorized person could result in the agency’s refusal to support you in the event of legal action. Violation of the state statutes regarding confidentiality of records is punishable upon conviction by fines or by imprisonment or by both.

Certification

I have read Thrive For Life’s policy on confidentiality and the Statement of Confidentiality presented above. I agree to abide by the requirements of the policy and inform my supervisor immediately if I believe any violation (unintentional or otherwise) of the policy has occurred. I understand that violation of this policy will lead to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of my service with Thrive For Life.

[All spiritual mentors will receive a printed copy of this policy for their signature.]

