

# Safe Sanctuaries: Virtual Best Practices

COVID-19 has shifted the local church to the virtual world in communication and connection for everything, including age level ministries. It is crucial to be transparent and intentional in the ways that children and youth are engaging using different platforms and to have layers of protection in place to protect them from online predators. The internet makes it easy for a predator to hide behind another profile to interact with and gain access to those who are vulnerable.

The following are some best practices to provide due diligence and layers of protection when ministering to our children and youth virtually:

- **Parental/Guardian Permission:**
  - Communicating and partnering with the parents of your children and youth is key! Communicate clearly, help parents feel comfortable moving programming online, and invite them to participate and feel part of ministry in this new way. (Sample parent letter below)
- **Access:** Be extremely protective of invitation links and monitor carefully who is joining and participating in the social media platforms.
  - Don't push out an invitation and link to join a group or chat room on a public platform. Links should be sent directly to parents and youth.
  - Take advantage of features to "approve" entry into a platform/room. Ex: Zoom has a "waiting room" feature upon set-up so you can control who is allowed into the chat room.
- **2 Adult Rule - "Online":** Two adults allow for transparency and accountability in content and conversations online. It's a good layer of protection for participants, volunteers, and staff. Consider this as well in texting - always include two leaders or other adults when texting youth.
- **Participation Covenants:** Covenants are useful for youth, volunteers and parents to provide information and outline expectations and have all participants on the same page.

It is also important during this time to be mindful of children and youth who do not have access to online platforms. How can we be in ministry and keep them connected and still feel part of the "group" during this time?

Safe Sanctuaries Resources: <https://www.sgaumc.org/safesanctuaries>

Questions? Contact:

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# **Sample Communication with Parents**

(Thank you to Drew Childers, The Chapel Brunswick)

Hey Everyone,

I hope this finds you well in the midst of some pretty crazy times! I just wanted to let you know that even though we are facing a lot of uncertainties in the present moment, our God is immovable and always steadfast! Our youth ministry is resting in that truth during this season and because of that we want to still communicate that truth to our students.

So, here is what Youth will look like in this current season that we're walking in..

Every Sunday Night at 5 PM - We will be doing our Youth Programming on YouTube Live @TheChapelStudents Channel. Here is a link to that page: (insert link)

I will be co-hosting that experience with Tim Smith, our EHAM campus student director.

After our Sunday night experience, we will still promote small groups, especially in this time where it's easier and easier for people to isolate themselves. Our leaders will be reaching out to you soon to ask for your permission for them to have a video conversation with your student - here will be other students and leaders present in this conversation as well - via Zoom. Zoom is a Video conference calling app that can be reached via phone or laptop. Leaders will have to communicate their meeting ID and password so that students can enter into that specific meeting. Here is a link if you want to check it out further

<https://zoom.us/>

This will be a 40 minute conversation revolving around everyone's well-being during this isolated time and it will also revolve around the virtual programming that we do.

Please make sure to go like our FB page, "The Chapel Ministries Students", for all of our future posts! (insert link)

Thanks for being understanding during this time and I wish you nothing but the greatest of health,

**Drew Childers**