

Youth Safety

Policy

The Church pledges to conduct ministries in a manner that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth, as well as anyone who works with or supervises them. As a church body, we will strive to protect all youth from harm. The youth and family leaders will administer this policy and ensure compliance. Failure to comply with the Youth Safety Policy will result in the cancellation of the event or program.

Definition

The terms children and youth may be used interchangeably in this policy, but refer to all persons under the age of eighteen or are still in high school.

Purpose

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for staff and volunteers when participating in church sanctioned functions that involve youth.

Policy Statements

The Church will

- Establish screening guidelines for the selection and recruitment of workers, including employees and volunteers, especially for positions that require regular contact with youth.
- Establish supervisory guidelines, and implemented prudent operational procedures for all programs and events.
- Provide educational programs and volunteer training for all persons who work with children.
- Clearly define procedures for reporting suspected incidents.
- Carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage for the safety of those participating in, receiving, and providing the ministries of the Church.

Procedures

Selection and Recruitment of Workers and Volunteers

- All employees and volunteers will be screened using the appropriate application form and criminal background check prior to accepting youth-related responsibilities. Criminal background checks will include registered sex offender screening. Appropriate documentation of the Adult Volunteer Applications will be maintained by the Director of Youth and Family Ministry. Documentation of the criminal background check will be maintained by the pastor.
- All information received is confidential and will not be shared with others in the congregation or synod. A volunteer needs to submit these forms only once, as long as their membership remains in the congregation.
- Any person who has been convicted of a crime against a child, or has been convicted of any other misdemeanor or felony offense, will not be permitted to volunteer or work with children or youth. Some misdemeanor offenses may warrant a review that may allow the volunteer to work within this policy. An inquiry will be conducted by the Personnel Committee or the Executive Committee, the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and the pastor; their decision will be binding.
- If an individual is accused of any of the above charges, they will not be permitted to continue working with youth until an investigation is complete.

- All new adult volunteers involved with children or youth must work under the supervision of a trained volunteer for at least six months.

Educational Programs and Training

- All volunteer workers will be required to attend an orientation session pertinent to their responsibilities, including appropriate policies, guidelines and procedures. The youth and family leaders will coordinate training opportunities at least once per year. Appropriate documentation will be maintained by the Director of Youth and Family Ministry.
- All professional staff and rostered leaders are expected to complete a children's safety certification program.
- The Adult Volunteer Applications will be reviewed by the Director of Youth and Family Ministry or the Chairperson of the Youth and Family Ministries Team annually for all existing volunteers, as well the documentation of training for all appropriate staff positions.

Supervisory Guidelines

- Every effort will be made to have an adult trained in CPR for all events.
- There should be no one-on-one interaction between a youth and adult except in view of other adults and youth. If confidential conversation needs to occur, it should be done in proximity to the rest of the group with doors open and lights on.
- The possession or use of illicit drugs, alcohol or tobacco by youth at a church event is strictly prohibited. Adults are prohibited from using illicit drugs and alcohol at a church youth event. Tobacco products are not to be used in front of youth and/or during activities of an event.
- Adults must maintain proper supervision of youth at all times.
- There are to be no weapons, firearms, fireworks, or paintball guns at any youth event.
- Youth participants are to have access to their cell phones at appropriate times during an event. Adults who feel they must have access to their cell phones are asked to keep the instruments on silent or vibrate setting and only check messages at appropriate times during a youth and/or family event.
- Physical discipline is never an option. No one is to strike or hit anyone at any time. Verbal harassment or threats are also not to be tolerated.
- A minimum ratio of one adult per seven senior high youth (one adult per five junior high/middle school youth or younger) must be maintained for all overnight events. For example, fifteen youth registering for an event requires that three adults attend. If a separation of sexes for sleeping is needed, the ratio must hold true for each sex, as well. Every church sanctioned youth and family function will have a minimum of two supervising adults.
- If an adequate number of adult leaders are not available, participation should be limited to the maximum number of youths that will allow for the required leader to youth ratio. When adequate coverage is not available, the event or activity will be canceled.
- All sessions will implement an open-door guideline; the door of the room must remain open and unlocked unless the door has a viewing window, which is unobstructed.
- At no time should one adult and one youth be left alone for any activity. An exception would be when the youth is the child of the staff person or volunteer.

Permission

- Parents of youths attending a church-sanctioned activity are to complete and return the "Medical Release and General Permission Form" provided by the church. The form will be required for all youth and their guests for an event that is an overnight/lock-in, or that is an outing that will require transportation of the youth from the church to another location or

function. Once said form has been signed, it shall be kept on file by the church for one (1) year. Those who do not comply with the signing of said form, when required, will not be allowed to participate in said event.

- On occasion, release and general permission forms may be provided by the body supervising an event. These permission forms may be used instead of the “Medical Release and General Permission Form” stipulated in the first bullet.
- All forms, as listed in the two preceding bullets, will be available to all youth and family leaders at all events.
- Photographs and electronic images of youth and accompanying descriptions will not reveal the youth’s address or telephone number or e-mail without express consent.

Housing

- It is preferred that youth and adults are not housed together. If they must be, there must be at least two adults and at least two youth in each housing area, and at least one of the adults must be of the same sex and the parent or legal guardian, directly related to one of the youth.
- There will be no housing of mixed genders, excluding married couples. In large room accommodations male and female areas are to be clearly defined.

Transportation

- Only drivers age 21 or over are permitted to transport youth during any church related youth event.
- All drivers for church events should have and provide a photocopy of a valid driver’s license and qualify for the vehicle being operated.
- Drivers must provide proof of vehicle insurance for the vehicle being driven.
- Copies of this information must be provided to the Church at the beginning of the activity and prior to youth being transported.
- It is the duty and responsibility of each vehicle operator to ensure that the vehicle is mechanically safe to operate.
- All passengers in vehicles, which are equipped with seat belts, must wear seat belts.
- These transportation policies are in effect for drivers from the time they arrive at the event to the time they leave the event.

Medical

- A First Aid kit must be made available and maintained at all functions.
- The “Medical Release and General Permission Form” must be provided and fully completed for each participant of a church youth event.
- Information on dietary concerns and allergies must be indicated on form.
- If a youth is injured or becomes ill and requires professional medical attention during the course of a church activity or function, it is the duty and responsibility of the adult leader(s) to seek immediate medical attention for the youth. The parents should be contacted immediately and the pastor should be apprised as soon as the situation is under control.

Reporting Guidelines in the Event of Suspected Abuse

- In the event of an allegation, or when there is evidence or suspicion of improper conduct, the incident will be reported to the rostered leader using the Youth and Family Ministry Incident Report, and will be reported to the local police department and/or child protection agency.

- In the event that the rostered leader is the accused or suspected party, the incident will be reported to the Executive Committee of the Congregation Council and will be reported to the local police department or child protection agency.
- Confidentiality is guaranteed by State Law.
- An attorney will be consulted regarding compliance with State Law.
- If an indent is reported, it is the responsibility of the rostered leader or other individual in the authority chain to see that proper notification is made to the following: parents/guardian, legal and social welfare authorities as may be mandated by state law, and insurance company, in accordance with the insurance contract.
- No registered sex offender will be allowed to attend any youth-related event or program

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