

MINISTRYSAFE SAFETY SYSTEM

MINISTRYSAFE SAFETY SYSTEM FOR ALL CONFERENCE AND DISTRICT EVENTS NORTH TEXAS ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Introduction to Annual Conference Policy

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE A SAFE HAVEN FOR ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary. Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5).

As Christians, we are called to create a protective environment in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the communal responsibility of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons at all local churches, and at all District or Annual Conference sponsored events. The North Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable persons, (2) to help provide safeguards for workers from false accusations and/or suspicions and (3) to hold accountable all those who minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable persons, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

Scope of Annual Conference Policy

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid persons, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by the North Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and/or its Districts. This Annual Conference policy is effective as of July 1, 2012 for all Conference and District Events. The North Texas Annual Conference policy shall be applicable at all Conference and District activities. The local congregation's policy may expand the Conference policy, but may not/should not alter the minimum standards established by the Conference or those standards mandated by the State of Texas' licensures.

Supervision

An adult is defined as anyone 18 years of age or older.

A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18 years. Youth assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with children and youth. Background checks on youth under the age of 18 are inaccessible, so choose youth with great care. If using youth assistants, ensure the

following is completed: 1) Application, 2) six-month volunteer history and 3) verify references. Also note, with using youth assistants, MinistrySafe training will need to be adapted for age appropriateness.

To achieve compliance with the MinistrySafe policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Observation of activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

All volunteers seeking to work with children, youth and vulnerable persons, shall have at least 6 months involvement in a local church or provide a written recommendation by a senior pastor or appropriate designee.

For the sake of outreach, evangelism, and family involvement in our ministries, Parents, Grandparents, and Legal Guardians who have not met these criteria may volunteer as a guest, so long as 2 or more properly MinistrySafe trained staff or volunteers are on site and in charge. Any such individuals who intend to be a guest on an ongoing basis shall be subject to all MinistrySafe guidelines and screenings.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare at Conference and District events:

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.
- The State of Texas Childcare Minimum Standards (http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care) must be followed for all Texas State Licensed Day Cares or Schools.

Supervision of children and youth at Conference and District events:

- Conference and District events shall observe the —“2 Adult Rule” (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight). -OR-
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult. -OR-
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6th -12th grades) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

Overnight Accommodations

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- At least (2) adults are present in every room/cabin. - OR –
- When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in an adjoining room with the same gender of the children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.

Definitions of Abuse

Verbal Abuse- Any verbal act that humiliates degrades or threatens any child or youth.

Physical Abuse- Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.

Sexual Abuse- Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in sponsored activities of this church, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/ or content.

Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's BODY, touching another person's BODY, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse.

Emotional Abuse- Exposing a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the youth or child that she or he is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Emotional abuse may include being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs.

Neglect- Endangering a child or teen's health, welfare, and/or safety through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection to destroy the child or teen's sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Ritual Abuse- Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a child or youth, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Typically the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuse. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the youth or child victim or to people related to the victim.

Screening for Adults

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth and vulnerable persons. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment. All screening shall be done in accordance with guidelines established by the Conference Ministry Safe Awareness and

Training Task Force and the Conference's designated Liability Insurance Agency's screening process

Screening Process

Volunteers and staff members are to perform and document the following screening process:

- Complete a Safety Application Form
- Complete a face-to-face interview
- Complete a reference check
- Complete a background check
- Complete the MinistrySafe online training

Compliance Renewal requires MinistrySafe online training every two years and background checks every two to three years, unless licensure or legislative requirements are more frequent and/or stringent.

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
- Drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application.
- Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.

If there are questions regarding an individual's background check or screening, due to special circumstances (acquittals, discharges, exonerations, pardons, etc.), please notify the District Superintendent or appropriate Conference Staff before making those decisions.

Training

The North Texas Annual Conference has adopted MinistrySafe Safety System as the training standard for all persons in leadership who work with children, youth and vulnerable populations at the District and Conference level. None of these persons shall, after July 1, 2012, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed the MinistrySafe Safety System screening process. We recommend that at the beginning of each Conference/District event a review of this policy be conducted. As of January 1, 2013, all congregations shall implement this same training standard. The North Texas Annual Conference MinistrySafe Policy must be reviewed and renewed annually.

Reporting of Incidents

1. When an adult leader of an event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The adult leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.
2. Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parent(s) and/or legal guardians(s).
3. The person suspected of abuse (respondent) shall, for the safety and well-being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the adult event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person's supervisor.
4. Following the report of an incident, the adult event leader, or supervisor in charge shall speak with the alleged victim, and document the report, according to Section 5.
5. All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:
 - a. The name of the adult leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
 - b. The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
 - c. Any statement made by the alleged victim.
 - d. Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
 - e. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent.
 - f. Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.
 - g. Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
 - h. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
6. Notify the Conference/District authorities immediately.
7. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.

8. Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file for future screening purposes.

Media Response

The Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from the Office of the Bishop.

Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered through the Office of the Bishop.

OTHER INFORMATION

Appropriate Discipline

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adults should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping MinistrySafe guidelines in mind.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up-to-date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately. Parents and the leaders will help make proper arrangements.

Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than the same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the event leadership should address the issue.

Leader Misconduct

It is a privilege to work with youth. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this

policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth and appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

Spiritual Boundaries for MinistrySafe

As we seek to lead young people in the development of their faith story, it is essential that we guide them and do not manipulate their emotions. This is especially true at longer youth/children's events. The attendees may be exhausted by longer and more active days than they are accustomed to and thereby more susceptible to emotional manipulation. It is therefore necessary that, as we present the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the opportunity to follow Jesus in a life-long journey, we present the invitation with "no strings-attached." We must allow each person involved to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form. As we do this faithfully, we will see more fruitful commitments in the lives of all our participants.

Maintaining Compliance and Best Practices

Local congregations are encouraged to visit the MinistrySafe website for training and other tools: <https://ministrysafe.com>