



# MINISTRYSAFE

Central Texas Conference

---

## YOUTH MINISTRIES

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Dear Youth Ministries Volunteer or Staff Member,

Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_

At our church, we take our responsibility to care for youth very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which youth can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for our staff members and volunteers. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for youth, protecting youth, you, and the mission of this United Methodist Church. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

# Safety Policies & Procedures for Youth Ministries

## Contents:

• Overview of Safety System .....	4
• Youth Safety Policy .....	5
• Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse.....	6
• Safety Committee.....	8
• Youth Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan .....	9
• Building Safety.....	10
• Staff to Youth Ratio .....	10
• Discipline .....	11
• Intoxicants .....	12
• Nudity.....	12
• One-to-One Interactions with Youth .....	12
• Transportation.....	12
• Parental Contact.....	13
• Parental Involvement .....	13
• Physical Contact.....	13
• Sexually Oriented Conversations .....	14
• Sexually Oriented Materials .....	14
• Sleeping Arrangements.....	14
• Tobacco.....	15
• Verbal Interactions .....	15
• Key Staff/Volunteer List .....	16

## Overview of the Safety System at

Because our church loves youth and desire to protect them, our church requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or youth (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **4 SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placement begins.

### **STEP ONE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training**

Our church's policies and procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of our Safety Committee. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a youth for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a youth, win the youth's trust (and the trust of the youth's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the youth into sexual activity and keep the youth from disclosing the abuse.

To equip our staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, we require all staff members and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse awareness training (live or online at [www.MinistrySafe.com](http://www.MinistrySafe.com)). This training must be renewed every two years.

### **STEP TWO: Screening Process**

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete our Screening Process, which requires a staff member or volunteer to:

- complete an Employment Application (employees only)
  - complete the Safety Application (employees and volunteers)
  - complete a face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
  - provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers)
- \*a volunteer must attend our church for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to children, youth or vulnerable populations.

### **STEP THREE: Policies & Procedures**

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

### **STEP FOUR: Criminal Background Check**

Our church requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or youth activities or programming undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required.

# Youth Safety Policy at

## **ABUSE TOLERANCE**

Our church has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer at this church to act in the best interest of youth in every program.

In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations to their immediate supervisor, the Youth Pastor/Director, or Pastor.

## **REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS**

Our church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for youth and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to our Safety Committee Chair and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of our Safety Committee. Because sexual abusers 'groom' youth for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a youth for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor or a member of our Safety Committee.

## **ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES**

Our staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all our policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Youth Ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Pastor and the Church Council\*.

# Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse at

## **REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY**

In order to maintain a safe environment for youth, our staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the Youth Pastor/Director, or the Pastor.\*

*\*(See page #16 for Key Staff/Volunteer List)*

## **CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION**

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a youth will be prohibited from participation in Youth Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, youth or vulnerable populations at our church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from our church.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, youth or vulnerable populations at our church.

## **REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES**

Staff members and volunteers at our church are required to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or co-worker, to the immediate supervisor of the area, the Youth Pastor/Director, or the Pastor.\*

*\*(See page #16)*

Texas law requires that any person having cause to believe a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency pursuant to Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code. If the staff member or volunteer prefers, the staff member or volunteer may request reporting assistance from an immediate supervisor, Youth Pastor/Director or Pastor; together with the immediate supervisor, Youth Pastor/Director or Executive Pastor, the staff member or volunteer will make a report to the appropriate authorities. If the staff member or volunteer makes a report regarding a suspicion of abuse or neglect without assistance, the staff member or volunteer will immediately notify an immediate supervisor, Youth Pastor/Director or Pastor. In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate Texas authorities.

If appropriate, the Youth Pastor/Director or the Pastor will inform the following:

**Texas Department of Family and Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400**

**Child Protective Services at 817-321-8680 or check for your local listing in your community**

**RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE**

Our Safety Committee will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs.

# Safety Committee

## **SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for youth, our church will appoint and maintain a Safety Committee, which will meet once each quarter.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable our Youth Ministry to carry out appropriate ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

## **COMPOSITION**

The Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members:

1. the Senior Pastor or other clergy staff assigned by the Senior Pastor
2. the Children's Pastor/Director (staff or volunteer)
3. the Youth Ministries Pastor/Director (staff or volunteer)
4. a member from SPRC
5. a member from the Board of Trustees
6. other optional members that may be determined by our church leadership

*(These positions may change depending on the structure or reporting relationships within a church body.)*

## **MEETINGS**

Meetings will be chaired by \_\_\_\_\_.

Meeting of the Safety Committee will be held on a quarterly basis to discuss risk management practices and updates. The Safety Committee will also meet on an emergency basis upon the recommendation of a member or following the report of any incident or allegation.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing policies and procedures related to youth safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all Youth Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to our Church Council regarding safety issues.

## Youth Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff member and volunteer interactions with youth.

1. **Each supervisor** conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each week for programs that occur on a daily basis.
2. **The Youth Pastor/Director** conducts written performance evaluations every six months for individuals in paid staff positions.
3. **The Youth Pastor/Director** conducts periodic verbal performance evaluations that include items that address participation in risk management training and adherence to risk management procedures.
4. **The Pastor** conducts an unscheduled observation of a Youth Ministry program at least once each quarter.
5. **The Pastor** meets with Youth Pastor/Director once monthly to discuss Youth Ministry.
6. **The SPRC/PPRC** meets with Youth Pastor/Director once each year to discuss Youth Ministry, including safety training and procedures.
7. **The Youth Pastor/Director** conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each month for programs that occur weekly.

## BUILDING SAFETY AT

The Youth Pastor/Director will be responsible for ensuring that our Youth Ministry Building/Area is monitored during Sunday Classes or programming. This will include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and youth in youth classrooms.

No youth will ever be left unattended or unsupervised during youth ministry programming or meetings. Youth Ministry staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual youth in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single youth, that staff member or volunteer will take the youth to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: If a youth desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or volunteer after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members are present.)

After every programming event, staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Any two youth together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area.

## STAFF TO YOUTH RATIO AT

Our church is committed to providing adequate staff and volunteer supervision in all Youth Ministry activities and programs. Central Texas Conference recommends that the primary youth leader be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth, and any main helpers be 1 year post high school or equivalent and 3 years age difference from oldest youth participant.

Accordingly, the following ratios will be observed for Youth Ministry activities and programs:

For groups up to and including 30 youth, there will be a minimum of 2 unrelated staff members or volunteers supervising. For groups larger than 30 youth, there will be a minimum of 3 unrelated staff members or volunteers supervising. For every additional 15 youth, 1 staff member or volunteer will be required.

If a worker is out of ratio it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the responsible Youth Ministry Pastor/Director or Youth Ministry Team Leader. This person will make diligent efforts to immediately bring staff member/volunteer to youth ratios into compliance with this policy.

***\*The above ratios are MinistrySafe minimum recommendations. Where supervision is concerned, more is generally better.***

## DISCIPLINE POLICY

It is the policy of our church that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of children or youth. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction or inappropriate behaviors by youth. If a youth is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff/volunteers, that youth will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the youth's parent will be contacted to pick up the youth. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff/volunteer will verbally redirect youth involved and will try to avoid physical intervention. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Youth Pastor/Director.

**Therefore you must have contact information for each youth at all times.**

## **INTOXICANTS**

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any of our church facilities, while traveling with youth, or while working with or supervising youth.

## **NUDITY**

Staff and volunteers in our youth ministry should never be nude in the presence of youth in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), staff member/volunteer will submit a plan for approval to his/her supervisor concerning arrangements for individual and private spaces for showering or changing clothes for all participants.

## **ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH YOUTH**

We recognize that meeting the emotional needs of youth may occasionally require staff member and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff Members and volunteers should observe the following guideline when interacting with youth.

### **Individual Meetings**

Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual youth at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for youth. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of youth:

1. Youth should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Best practices of ministry recommend two adults in every car. **Never will there be a youth alone with an adult in a vehicle.**
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with youth while in vehicles.
3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving church vans, or vehicles owned or rented, unless in an emergency.
4. No drivers under age 25 may drive our owned or rented vehicles.

## **PARENTAL CONTACT**

Parents who leave a youth in the care of our staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their youth becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Youth Ministry programs. Therefore, you must have contact information for each youth at all times.

## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their youth is involved at our church. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their youth is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with Youth Ministry programs will be required to complete our volunteer application and screening process.

## **PHYSICAL CONTACT**

Our church is committed to protecting youth in its care. To this end, our church has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Youth Ministry programs. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in the youth program:

1. Side hugs, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and youth are important for youth's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Youth Pastor/Director or the Pastor.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the youth, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other youth or youth staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted as such when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff or volunteers in the Youth Ministry must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force any physical contact, touch or affection upon a reluctant youth. A youth's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Youth staff and volunteers are responsible for protecting youth under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by staff or volunteers must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the Youth Pastor/Director or the Pastor.

## **SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS**

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with youth and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any youth in the program. However, it is expected that from time to time youth ministry discussions and lessons may address age appropriate issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will convey to the youth the church's views on these topics. It is recommended that parents be notified in advance of these lessons.

## **SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS**

Staff members and volunteers of our Youth Ministry are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented printed materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of youth.

## **SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

It is anticipated that certain Youth Ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for youth and staff/volunteers (i.e. lock-ins, mission trips, ski trips, etc.). In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. The 2-adult nonrelated rule must be followed. The 2 adult leaders present must have previously completed our church's application and screening process.
2. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing to and approved by the Church Pastor prior to the activity, and have signed approval by parents. It is recommended that this information be included in the permission slip for the event and signed by the parent.
3. As long as any youth are awake, one of the leaders must also be awake and monitoring youth to ensure safe behavior.
4. Leaders should check with parents and use good judgment regarding PG or PG-13 movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
5. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn.
6. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both boys and girls, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by youth leaders of the same gender.
7. Staff and volunteers will monitor sleeping youth by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping youth remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff and volunteers should never physically touch a youth.
8. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff, volunteer, and youth will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances a "one-person-to-one bag or blanket" rule will be observed.

## **TOBACCO**

Our church requires staff and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in the facility, and while in the presence of youth or their parents. Our church is a tobacco-free facility.

## **VERBAL INTERACTIONS**

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and youth should be positive and uplifting. Our staff and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and be ever mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of their youth.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to youth in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of youth.

## MinistrySafe Key Staff/Volunteers

Indicated below are the names of person who hold these key areas of leadership (whether staff or volunteer) and their contact information. This list will be updated on an annual basis or when changes occur and provided to all active volunteers. It will be maintained with the official policy document.

Job Title	Name	Phone #	Email
MinistrySafe Lead Pastor			
Children's Pastor/Director			
Youth Pastor/Director			
MinistrySafe Trustee Rep.			
MinistrySafe SPRC Rep.			

*Other Supervisors in Children/Youth Ministries:*

Preschool Director			
Children's Choir Director			
Youth Choir Coordinator			

**Policies and Procedures**  
**Statement of Acknowledgment and Agreement**

I have received and read a copy of the Youth Ministry Policies and Procedures Manual and understand the importance of the matters set forth within the manual. I agree to follow and abide by these guidelines during my service at this church.

Further, I understand that the manual may be modified at any time, and that any guidelines may be amended, revised, or eliminated at any time by this church. Any changes will be made public.

I also acknowledge that I have reviewed and agree to fulfill the duties listed in my ministry position description. While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the full term specified in the position description, I understand that my service is volunteer and that I can choose to end this relationship at any time (if possible, by providing two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between this church and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours that I have worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed as well as manual guidelines that are changed or deleted.

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the volunteer policies and procedures manual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

[This page to remain attached to the Staff/Volunteer Safety Policies]

**Policies and Procedures**  
**Statement of Acknowledgment and Agreement**

I have received and read a copy of the Youth Ministry Policies and Procedures Manual and understand the importance of the matters set forth within the manual. I agree to follow and abide by these guidelines during my service at this church.

Further, I understand that the manual may be modified at any time, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated at any time by this church. Any changes will be made public.

I also acknowledge that I have reviewed and agree to fulfill the duties listed in my ministry position description. While, ideally, I will serve in this ministry for the full term specified in the position description, I understand that my service is volunteer and that I can choose to end this relationship at any time (if possible, by providing two weeks' notice to my supervisor).

I further acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between this church and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours that I have worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed as well as manual guidelines that are changed or deleted.

I hereby acknowledge receipt of the volunteer policies and procedures manual.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

[This page to be signed, detached and delivered to the MinistrySafe Administrator]