

Safe Sanctuary Policy for WORDSERVE United Methodist Church

Texas Annual Conference Effective June 2010

Introduction

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE SAFE SANCTUARY FOR 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 safe sanctuary 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 safety of our children and youth at events sponsored by this church. This 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 and youth and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, servants 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 Policy

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid adults, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by this church.

Supervision

An adult is 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 one adult 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.

In all such circumstances, there must be at least a two-year difference between the age of the Youth Worker and the Protected Persons with whom they work.

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

For all persons seeking to work with children and/or youth must be in active participation in the church for at least 6 months.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.
- Whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

In addition, at events where the Protected Persons are being supervised only by paid nursery staff, a Youth Worker nursery staff member may be paired with an adult Worker nursery staff member, subject to the following criteria:

- The Youth Worker nursery staff member has been pre-qualified and approved by a Director
- A member of the children's Ministry staff of the level of Nursery Supervisor or higher shall be on site during the entirety of said event

Supervision of children and youth

- The "2 Adult Rule" shall be observed (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight.)
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional servants; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the "buddy system." It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Overnight Accommodations

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- We strongly recommend that at least (2) adults be present in every room.
- When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from 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.
- Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one-child/youth.

Additional Policies for Youth Ministry

The two (2) Worker rule shall be followed, except as noted below:

- Planned one-on-one Worker/youth lunches: provided they are held in public places and shall only occur if (1) permission has been given by the parent, (2) the Youth Minister has been notified, and (3) separate transportation is used.
- Youth/Director conferences: provided (1) the conference is for a relatively brief time, (2) the Director informs another Worker at the beginning and end of the meeting, and (3) the on-campus policies are followed.
- A Worker may "pick up" or "drop off" a youth at their home (or other agreed-upon location as permitted by the youth's parent) provided permission has been given by the parent.

Additional Policies Concerning Driving

Driving Rules

When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-adult rule applies. When multiple vehicles are used for an event, a single Worker may drive if all the vehicles travel together. All reasonable efforts must be made for all vehicles traveling together in this circumstance to stay within sight of one another.

Occupants of vehicles shall wear seatbelts. Buses not equipped with seatbelts are exempt.

Protected Persons, twelve (12) years and younger, shall not sit in the front seat of vehicles with air bags

Definitions of Abuse

1. Verbal Abuse- Any verbal act that humiliates degrades or threatens any child or youth.
2. 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.
3. 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. (#6 taken from Resolution #30 *Book of Resolutions 2000*).

Screening for Adults

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. 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.

1. Prior to employment or acceptance as a paid or unpaid adult worker/servant, the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to this church to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
2. This church is responsible for screening and may conduct at least two references. This screening shall be done through the company with which the conference has contracted. All persons shall be screened annually.
3. If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, this church will disapprove the application. This church reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
4. If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.
5. Results of screens shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in this church giving a negative recommendation shall be made by this church in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which this church may determine to be serious, these are guidelines:

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
- 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.
- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

Training

This church shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons (including youth assistants) who work with children and youth. Training shall include this policy, and appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and leader misconduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after this policy becomes effective, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each servant period a review of this policy be conducted.

The guidelines of these policies and procedures create a status of Safe Sanctuary Certification with this church. Adults thus certified are entrusted with the title “Certified Local Church Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth”.

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 area leader.
4. Following the report of an incident, the adult event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.
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 Senior Pastor.
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.

Reporting Procedure

In cases where any Worker has cause to believe that a Protected Person may have been abused or neglected, the Worker is required by state law to make a report to the State of Texas Child Protective Service "CPS". Pertinent portions of the law relating to timing and substantive requirements of such reports to CPS are set forth on Appendix A attached hereto. Since such law may be changed from time to time, the reporting person shall follow the law covering such reporting procedures which is in effect at the time the report is made.

Contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of the church's insurance company and attorney.

Allegations shall be taken seriously and no pre-judgments shall be made. Situations shall be handled confidentially with due respect for the privacy of the alleged victim and others involved in the incident.

The person making a report shall provide the facts known with respect to the incident.

The Director, together with the person making the notification shall complete an Accident/Incident Report form (Appendix D).

Responding to the Report

The Director receiving a report of policy violation shall:

- Document the alleged violation
- Counsel the alleged wrongdoer
- Determine the necessary corrective actions that may include dismissal

The Director receiving a report of an Incident of Abuse shall:

- Immediately contact parents or guardian of the alleged victim and inform them of the alleged incident. If one parent or guardian is the alleged wrongdoer, the person receiving the report shall not contact either parent or guardian until after Child Protective Services has conducted their initial investigation.
- Immediately contact WordServe Senior Pastor, who shall within seventy-two (72) hours of the report conduct an investigation (with the assistance the applicable Director) and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
- Take reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending the investigation.

Media Response

The Senior Pastor, District Superintendent and 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 a designated church spokesperson or a spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office

or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquires to the spokesperson. **Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.**

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 safe sanctuary 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 Safe Sanctuary

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.

SUMMARY

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. All adults shall complete an application/consent form. The applicant gives permission to have references checked and background screening completed by the appropriate authority.
2. The application will be processed and background screening completed by the company with which the conference has a contract, and references may be checked.
3. All applicants must complete Local Church Safe Sanctuary training.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

1. If an adult worker/servant observes or suspects a violation of the Safe Sanctuary policy, these steps must be taken immediately.
 - A. Address any immediate needs the child or youth may have.
 - B. Report concerns to event coordinator.
 - C. Cooperate with leadership and authorities throughout the crisis.
2. If an adult 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)

Recommended Resource: *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* by Joy Thornburg Melton (Discipleship Resources, ISBN 0881772208)

Background checks through *Background Information Systems* (214) 360-9159,
dale@criminalbackground.com

APPENDIX A

Texas Family Code

TITLE 5 – THE PARENT – CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND THE SUIT AFFECTING THE PARENT – CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Subtitle E – Protection of the Child

Chapter 261 – Investigations of Report of Child Abuse or Neglect

Subchapter A – General Provisions

Sec.261-001, Definitions,

In this chapter:

- (1) “Abuse” includes the following acts or omissions by a person:
 - (A) mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child’s growth, development, or psychological functioning;
 - (B) causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child’s growth, development, or psychological functioning;
 - (C) physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm;
 - (D) failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child;
 - (E) sexual conduct harmful to a child’s mental, emotional, or physical welfare;
 - (F) failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child;
 - (G) compelling or encouraging the child to engage in **sexual conduct** as defined in Section 43.25 (see page 7), Penal code; or
 - (H) causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is **obscene** as defined in Section 43.21 (see page 7), Penal Code, or pornographic.
- (2) “Department” means the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.
- (3) “Designated Agency” means the agency designated by the court as responsible for the protection of children.
- (4) “Neglect” includes:
 - (A) the leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and the
 - (B) ... which a license or certification is required, has direct contact with children. The term includes teachers, nurses, doctors, and day-care employees.
 - (C) The requirement to report under this section applies without exception to an individual, whose personal communications may otherwise be privileged, including an attorney, a member of the clergy, a medical practitioner, a social worker, and a mental health professional.
 - (D) The identity of an individual making a report under this chapter is confidential and may be disclosed only on the order of a court or to a law enforcement officer for the purposes of conducting a criminal investigation of the report.

Sec. 261.102 Matters to be Reported

A report should reflect the reporter’s belief that a child has been or may be abused or may be abused or neglected or has died of abuse or neglect.

Sec. 261.103 Reports Made to Appropriate Agency

A report shall be made to:

- (1) any local or state law enforcement agency;
- (2) the department if the alleged or suspected abuse involves a person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child;
- (3) the state agency that operates, licenses, certifies, or registers the facility in which the alleged abuse or neglect occurred; or
- (4) the agency designated by the court to be responsible for the protection of children.

Sec. 261.104 Contents of Report

The person making a report shall identify, if known:

- (5) the name and address of the child
- (6) the name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child: and
- (7) any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.

Sec. 261.106 Immunities

- a) A person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of alleged child abuse or neglect or who testifies or otherwise participates in a judicial proceeding arising from a report, petition, or investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect is immune from civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed.

Texas Penal Code – Section 43.21, and 43.25

Sec. 43.21 Definitions

(a) in this chapter:

- 1) “**Obscene**” means material or a performance that:
 - A. the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest in sex;
 - B. depicts or describes:
 - (i) patently offensive representations or descriptions of ultimate sexual intercourse, sodomy, and sexual bestiality: or
 - (ii) patently offensive representations or descriptions of masturbation, excretory functions, sadism, masochism, lewd exhibition of the genitals, the male or female genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal, covered male genitals in a discernibly turgid state or a device designed and marketed as useful primarily for stimulation of the human genital organs; and
 - C. Taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, and scientific value.

Sec. 43.25 Sexual Performance by a Child

- 2) “**Sexual conduct**” means actual or simulated sexual intercourse, deviate sexual intercourse, sexual bestiality, masturbation, sado-masochistic abuse, or lewd exhibition of the genitals

Texas Family Code – Chapter 71

Sec. 71.01 Definitions

- 3) “**Family**” includes individuals related by consanguinity or affinity, as determined under Sections 573.022 and 573.024, Government Code, individuals who are former spouses of each other, individuals who are the biological parents of the same child, without regard to marriage, and a foster child and foster parent, whether or not those individuals reside together.

APPENDIX B

Age-Appropriate Discipline Methods – Children

Our goal is to ensure that every child who participates in a Ministry is offered a safe environment where God is the center of all that we do and say.

To do this, we need the children to follow these basic rules:

1. Treat everyone with kindness and respect.
2. Follow directions given by the teacher or leader of a ministry.
3. Stay in the classroom at all times unless escorted by a teacher or leader.
4. Remember, there is no fighting, name calling or rude behavior.
5. Use all equipment properly. Treat property with respect and clean-up after yourself (remember this is God's House)

As parents and teachers we realize that children are filled with energy. However, should a child's behavior become disruptive to the class or any ministry, the following actions shall be taken:

Pre-school:

1. The teacher/leader shall redirect the child's focus to an activity.
2. A verbal warning and separation from the source of disruption i.e. separate children, put toy away, etc.
3. Time-out in the classroom. Use this time to explain to the child why it is important to exercise proper behavior.
4. As a last resort, the parent/guardian shall be located and asked to sit with the child or remove them from the activity for that day.

Elementary:

1. The teacher/leader shall redirect the child's focus to an activity. Ex: ask the child to help
2. A verbal warning and separation from the source of disruption. Ex: separate children, put toy away, etc.
3. Time-out in the classroom. Use this time to explain to the child why it is important to exercise proper behavior.
4. As a last resort, the parent/guardian shall be located and asked to sit with the child or remove them from the activity for that day.

APPENDIX C

Age-Appropriate Discipline Methods –Youth Covenant of Conduct

Galatians 5:22-23

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with passion and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

I agree to participate in activities of WordServe youth ministry activities.

During these events I agree to:

- treat all persons, regardless of race, religion, and culture, with respect and consideration
- respect the facility we are using
- portray a positive role model for others by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, tact and maturity

During these events I agree to not:

- use profanity
- purchase or participate in the use of drugs or alcohol
- participate in inappropriate displays of affection or sexual activity
- conduct myself recklessly such that I cause injury to myself or others
- make terroristic threat that would indicate intent to do bodily harm to self or others
- participate in criminal mischief, reckless damage or destruction of property, structures, equipment, or vehicles, and theft
- bring or use any weapon(s), fireworks, pets, pornographic materials or any other inappropriate items
- abuse others; physically (e.g. strike, spank, shake, slap), verbally (e.g. humiliate, degrade, threaten), sexually (e.g. inappropriate touching, exposure or comments), or mentally (e.g. inconsistent standards, communicating one behavior and rewarding the opposite)
- bring any electronic game, equipment, boom boxes, tape players or other items that may distract attention from my participation or use when it would prevent others from getting appropriate and necessary rest

Above all, I agree to have fun at WordServe youth ministry activities.

I understand that:

- any damage that should occur because of my negligence, I am financially responsible
- all penalties are left up to the discretion of the applicable Youth Pastor, or his/her representative, with consultation of other Youth Counselors. Note that penalties may include the possibly of being sent home at the parents expense.
- The WordServe Youth Covenant of Conduct does not cover all situations. In the event that something arises that is not mentioned, the applicable Youth Pastor, or his/her representative, reserves the right to make all necessary decisions.

APPENDIX D

Incident Report

**Incident Report
Recipient's page**

Date: _____ **Name:** _____

Incident: (if another child was involved, do not place their name here.)

Actions that were taken: _____

Disposition of child: _____

Caretakers of child who witnessed incident and took care of child: _____

Staff that was notified: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Copy given to parent _____

Copy given to supervisor/in file _____

If there are any questions concerning the mentioned incident, please do not hesitate to call us at 281-455-5258

Incident Report
To be given to parent of child who was the instigator

Date: _____ **Child's Name:** _____

Incident (do not use the recipient's name here)

Discipline measures taken:

Staff that was notified:

If there are any questions concerning the mentioned incident, please do not hesitate to call us at 281-455-5258