

Youth Safety Policy

*Policy Proposal for the Southwest Texas United Methodist
Conference Council on Youth Ministries*

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to reduce the risk of abuse to youth at conference events, and to keep them otherwise safe. The policy has the additional purpose of protecting workers with youth. We live in a time when people who would abuse youth come to churches seeking contact with youth for sexual purposes. The intimate nature of relationships established between youth and youth workers requires a definite line to be drawn between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Nature of the Policy

This policy is to be applied uniformly. This policy attempts to set a minimum standard for conduct. Necessary forms and documents to implement this policy shall be uniform and obtained from the Southwest Texas United Methodist Conference office.

Definitions

Youth Sponsor – any person so designated by the sponsoring district, District Superintendent, conference, and/or Conference Youth Director with approval documentation on file with the conference. Except as otherwise delineated, the Conference Youth Director shall be held to the standards of a youth sponsor.

Church Sponsored event – any activity where a youth sponsor or Conference Youth Director and a youth are gathered in relation with the Southwest Texas Conference United Methodist Church.

Application of the Policy

This policy shall apply to all youth ministries, activities, gatherings, meetings, trips, sleeping situations and outings conducted or facilitated by the Southwest Texas United Methodist Conference Council on Youth Ministries. Youth Sponsors under the direction of the Conference Youth Director shall make efforts at meeting and exceeding safety standards prescribed herein.

Selection and Screening of Workers with Youth

Workers with youth are those persons with direct contact and supervision of youth. This does not include persons who may function only as drivers, kitchen workers, etc., who have no sustained contact with and supervision of youth. The approved workers with youth are responsible to see that such non-approved workers behave in an appropriate and responsible manner. All persons wishing to work with youth, whether paid or volunteer, shall fill out an application that contains the following information.

- A. Identification (photocopied and on file).
- B. Address.
- C. Employment history for the past 5 years.

- D. Volunteer work during the past 5 years.
- E. Church membership during the past 5 years.
- F. Personal references with complete address.
- G. Consent to verify all information and to contact references.
- H. Waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church caused by information gathered by the church.
- I. A statement that they have never been arrested or convicted of a criminal offence involving a minor.
- J. An official background check and a release form which will be updated ANNUALLY.
- K. Certification that the information provided is true and correct.
- L. Affirmation of willingness to be subjected to random drug tests paid at the church's expense.
- M. Completion and signed certification of the Child Protection Training video or exam.

The Conference Youth Director or sponsoring district represented by the sponsoring District Superintendent in the case of a paid worker may accept or deny an application based on any of the above requirements. Only after the screening process is complete can the Conference Youth Director and/or sponsoring District Superintendent confer the status of youth sponsor. Once the status is conferred, the designee may begin working with youth. This process also applies to members and ex-officio members of the Southwest Texas United Methodist Conference Council on Youth Ministries who are serving at the time of this policies adoption.

Supervision of Youth

- A. There must be at least a five (5) year age difference between youth event leaders and the youth with whom they work. Youth event leaders must otherwise be a minimum of eighteen (18) years of age.
- B. Youth are not permitted to socialize or have personal visits in the home of the youth sponsor or Conference Youth Director.

The ratio of youth sponsors to youth must be such as to assure the safety of the youth, bearing in mind the age level and type of activity.

Additional Policies Regarding Trips and Special Events

Adequate adult leadership shall apply for all trips, special events and outings. Coed overnight activities require male and female leaders.

All drivers of vehicles must be 21 years of age or older, have a valid Texas driver's license and proof of current liability insurance. Drivers must not be using medication which may impair their ability to operate a vehicle and if a driver has had recent surgery or illness, he/she must be released by his/her physician as capable of driving a vehicle.

On trips the adult leaders shall designate a specific location where all people will meet and depart. They shall prearrange a schedule of checkpoint stops for the group where they meet and see that all are accounted for and safe. There shall be a daily destination point.

The safety rule of four is to be followed. No fewer than four persons shall go on an overnight trip. If an accident occurs, one stays with the injured and two go for help.

Unmarried male and female leaders require separate sleeping facilities. Male and female youth participants will not share the same sleeping facilities.

On rustic outings, using tents, no youth will stay in a tent without adult supervision.

For all events, written permission of the parent or guardian must be obtained. The parent or guardian shall also sign a release for medical treatment.

Reporting Child Abuse

Requirements of the State of Texas:

1. The state of Texas deliberately defines child abuse in a vague manner. The code states a report should reflect the reporter's belief that a child has been or may be abused or neglected.
2. The state of Texas considers anyone who suspects abuse to be a mandatory reporter. Institutions who in the normal course of events have direct contact with youth are considered in the category of professionals and are obligated to report any suspected abuse within 48 hours.
3. The report must contain the name and address of the child and the name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody or welfare of the child, and any pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.
4. The report is to be made to any state or local law enforcement agency or Child Protective service.
5. Failure to report is a class B misdemeanor with a fine of up to two (2) thousand dollars and/or 180 days in jail. Failure to report also exposes the individual and the church to risk of civil liability, and the Senior Pastor/Leader of the local church.
6. Those who report suspected abuse are immune from civil or criminal liability as long as that person did not knowingly or intentionally make a false report.
7. Those who report are entitled to confidentiality except that their identity may be released to law enforcement officials who are investigating the allegations.