

Purpose

To provide a safe and caring environment for everyone, especially children and youth (minors under the age of 18), all staff and volunteers who have contact with children and youth must adhere to these policies and guidelines. Faith calls us to create working and living environments that serve as sanctuaries, where everyone can feel safe. That means free from all hurtful, inappropriate, and insensitive interactions.

Child Protection Guidelines

These policies apply to all persons, including staff and volunteers.

Team Leader /Volunteers

There is safety in numbers; therefore, a minimum of two (2) adults should always be present when working with, supervising, chaperoning, or transporting minors, except when a parent is with their own children.

For overnight accommodations, we strongly recommend that at least two (2) adults be present in every room. Recognizing that accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one leader could be adequate, provided that the adult is never alone with one minor.

Abuse

It is a Divine privilege to work with children and youth, and great care is required. Those who violate the child protection guidelines shall immediately be removed from contact with minors. If there is any suspicion of abusive behavior, the appropriate authorities must be called.

- As pertaining to protected interactions with minors, Congregations should apply all their customary protective measures, including membership requirements, references, background checks, etc.
- Adults who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse must not be allowed to volunteer in any activity or program that includes children.
- Adult volunteers/staff should observe the "Two Adult Rule" - never be alone with a minor whenever possible - and adhere to the Code of Ethics and Rules established by your Congregation.

Response Plan

Volunteer/Staff should immediately report any claims or signs of abuse to the DRC who will report to the parents/guardians and the senior leader of the Congregation, who

will determine the appropriate course of action. If abuse is alleged, Texas law requires that the Child Protection Agency be called by the one who received the information.

- The person suspected of abuse shall, for the safety and well-being of the child/youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with minors until the appropriate authority has conducted an investigation. The matter shall remain confidential.
- All communications shall be documented in detail, and shall include the following:
 - Name of the team leader/chaperone who witnessed or received the disclosure
 - Name of the alleged victim, age, and date of birth
 - Name of the person suspected of abuse, time and date of any conversation or any statement made by the person suspected
 - The time and date of alleged abuse
 - Time and date of any action taken by the leader/chaperone, describe action taken
 - Name, time and date of any other statements of others regarding this alleged incident

Definition of Abuse

Verbal Abuse: Any verbal communication that humiliates, degrades, threatens, or seeks to exploit a child or youth.

Physical Abuse: Any act that endangers the physical or mental wellbeing of a minor, including an intentional physical injury caused by a responsible adult or caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is injurious, excessive, or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse includes any communication that contains sexual content, propositioning, or touching for sexual pleasure. This includes, but is not limited to, 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement, 5) any sexual intercourse or sexual conduct, 6) behavior that communicates sexual interest and content.

Physical and Emotional Boundaries

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with those who are vulnerable. While a hug or touch can be appropriate, be careful it feels and looks safe. Expressions of affection should be done in a safe and age-appropriate manner and always in the presence of others.

Screening Leaders/Chaperones

Congregations might screen all Team Leaders and Chaperones.

- Ask for references and conduct a review of those references
- Ask for a criminal background check*

***Persons with a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any capacity.**

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Person(s) having a criminal history of a drug-related conviction within the past five (5) years. NOTE: Any person(s) having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the past five (5) years shall not be allowed to serve as a driver.

Code of Ethics and Conduct

- Adults must serve as positive role models for youth and children by demonstrating respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, and maturity. Workers will be expected to act and react with love, maturity, and understanding in all situations.
- Consumption of alcohol products or illegal drugs is prohibited while serving.
- No adult should initiate or encourage inappropriate physical or intimate contact.
- Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults, offensive language, or screaming. Make every effort to avoid being alone with a minor.
- Volunteers and staff who transport minors must be fully insured and adhere to all traffic laws.

Sensitivity Issues

- Be respectful and be a polite guest and host.
- Be slow to speak and quick to listen.
- Respect the privacy of the client and avoid entering private spaces where you are not working.
- Avoid words or acts that can be offensive to others.
- Avoid wearing apparel or symbols that have a political message or connotation.
- Avoid wearing clothing that may be deemed revealing by certain cultures.
- Treat people of all races, religions, and cultures with respect and consideration.
- Avoid commenting on social values, finance, race, politics, and personal circumstances.
- Avoid the use of profanity.
- Avoid unsolicited conversations about religion. While faith is integral to all we do, forcing our brand or theology on others is not appropriate. It is ok, however, to politely invite the client to join the group in prayer before a meal, or to ask the client how you might pray for them when you go home. If the client expresses

interest, you may consider inviting them to attend your place of worship, provided they are not active in another Congregation.

- Do not play music at a homesite. Music is a matter of personal taste, and often an expression of a particular culture or faith.