



Recommendations for Youth Protection and Adult Leadership Criteria

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Recommendations for Youth Protection and Adult Leadership Criteria:

Youth protection policies and procedures minimize and/or prevent risk. Every faith based organization or program should operate within policies and procedures that balance the mission of the ministry with the risks inherent in children and youth programming. This document contains best practice criteria to be included in the youth protection policies and procedures.

1. Adult Volunteer and Staff Screening:

Criteria: the Youth Serving Organization shall develop, implement, and maintain a screening and application process which includes:

- a. **Criminal Background check:** Volunteers and staff will not be accepted to work with children or youth if they have been convicted, or have pending charges for a felony or misdemeanor involving a sex offense, violent act, child abuse or neglect.
- b. **Application:** Volunteers and staff shall complete an application which includes references, previous volunteer/work experience, and past victimization.
- c. **Personal Interview:** All qualified applicants will be interviewed by an authorized interviewer. (See sample interview form.)

2. Educational Component:

Criteria: the Youth Serving Organization shall develop an educational training to be completed by the volunteer/staff prior to working with children and youth. Training should include but is not limited to:

- a. **Mandatory reporting:** All adults are mandated by law to report to local law enforcement and/or Child Protective Services (1-800-252-5400) any good faith suspicion or belief that a child is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically neglected, exposed to violence, exposed to any form of sexual exploitation including the possession, manufacture, or distribution of child pornography, online solicitation, enticement, or showing of obscene material. Professionals shall make a report not later than the 48th hour after the professional first suspects abuse. The responsibility to report cannot be abdicated to another person; Texas Family Code Section 261.101.
- b. **Incident Report:** Once the Mandated Reporting requirement has been met, it is important to notify the established chain of command within the faith community. Reporting to the designated person within the faith community does not negate the responsibility to report to the proper authorities.
- c. **Child Abuse Awareness Training:** Required training shall include physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect.
- d. **How to respond to a disclosure of abuse:** Required training shall include information about what to do and what not to do if a child discloses abuse or neglect.
 - Volunteers/staff shall gather only enough information to notify the proper authorities, never having the child confront the alleged offender, and never promise the child they can keep the disclosure a secret.
 - It is important not to interrupt the child during their disclosure. Allow them to tell their account of abuse before you ask follow-up questions. Again, it is important to only gather enough information to notify the proper authorities.
 - Repeat back what the child tells you, giving them an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings.

- It is helpful to the child to assure the child that you take what they are telling you seriously, that you will do what you can to get them some help, and that what happened is not their fault.
- Never have the child confront the alleged offender.
- Never promise the child you can keep the disclosure a secret.
- It is important to take what the child says seriously and to remain calm displaying an open non-judgmental demeanor.

e. **Communicating with the child's family:** Children's Advocacy Center of Collin County recommends reporting abuse to Child Protective Services or local law enforcement prior to contacting the child's family. At the beginning of a child abuse investigation, it is not always clear who is safe for the child to be around. It is important that authorities make the first contact with the alleged offender. Therefore, if the alleged offender is a member of the victim's immediate family; please do not notify the family about the disclosure or report of abuse.

f. **Responding to abuse within the faith community:** This protocol relates to allegation of abuse that occur on premises, during organization-related activities or among organization members.

Allegations of abuse or a concern about a child may arise in the following ways

- A child discloses abuse
- An adult expresses a concern about a child to a church member
- Signs of potential abuse are noticed
- Patterns of boundary violations are witnessed
- An adult confesses to abuse

Responding to the abuse allegation within the faith community

- Do not confront or notify the alleged abuser
- Ask the child open-ended questions but leave the investigation to the professionals
- Gather identifying information such as the child's name and date of birth, the family's address and telephone number
- Do not delay; report your suspicions immediately
- Document the incident and follow appropriate steps for alerting the proper chain of command within the faith community

g. **Regular Review of Institutional Procedures:** It is best practice to require follow up training annually or bi-annually at a minimum for staff and volunteers working with youth. Additionally, each faith community should review and revise, if needed, the youth protection policies and procedures on a regularly scheduled basis.

h. **Positive Discipline:** Required training shall not only include rules prohibiting physical discipline, but also shall offer positive discipline techniques.

3. Policies and Procedures for leadership while working with youth:

Criteria: the Youth Serving Organization shall have policies which address the following:

- Two-deep leadership (two adult rule):** Two, unrelated, qualified adult leaders, both of whom must be 18 years of age or older, are required for all activities, trips and outings that involve children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
- Ratio of leaders to youth:** A reasonable ratio of adults to children and youth should be maintained at all times for activities involving the supervision of children and youth. The appropriate ratio of staff members/volunteers to children and youth should be

based on the number and age of the participants, the nature of the activities and the location where the activities are taking place. At a minimum, state guidelines for adult to child supervision should be followed as it pertains to Nursery, Parent's Day-Out Programs, and/or Pre-School Programs.

The following are guidelines for adult to child/student ratios:

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Nursery | 2 adults per 8 infants |
| Pre-School | 2 adults per 12 children |
| Elementary School age | 2 adults per 18 children |
| Youth | 2 adults per 15 youth |

- c. **Isolated one-on-one contact restricted:** Isolated one-on-one contact between adults and children/youth/vulnerable adults is highly discouraged. In situations that require personal confidences, such as a conference or counseling, every effort should be made to ensure that the meeting is in a location that is observable and/or interruptible. It is also recommended that these types of meetings be documented. Parents should not leave the premises if their children are in a one-on-one counseling session.
- d. **Monitoring of Youth Leaders:** Youth may volunteer with children programs but do not replace an adult volunteer. Youth volunteers are subject to all policies and procedures, and must be monitored by adult leaders.
- e. **Appropriate Attire:** Proper clothing for activities is required. Clothing should always be modest for youth and adult leaders.
- f. **Pick up and release of children:** No child under 11 shall be taken from or allowed to leave church property, either unattended or in a group without specific permission of parent(s) or guardian. Infants and children through 5th grade must be picked up by:
 - the parent/guardian
 - an adult authorized by the parent or guardian
 - siblings authorized by the parent or guardian
- g. **Overnight accommodations:** For events or activities that require overnight accommodations employees and volunteers will observe the following rules:
 - Two adults who have previously completed the background and reference check as well as required training must be present
 - The child/youth to adult ratio will be met
 - In an open environment such as a lodge, fellowship hall, or sanctuary at least two adults will be present.
 - Boys and girls should have two separate sleeping areas monitored by an adult leader of the same gender
 - In a hotel environment, adults shall sleep in a separate room from children, youth and/or vulnerable adult
 - In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each adult and child/youth will use a single bed set or sleeping bag
 - Employees and/or volunteers will monitor sleeping children/youth by periodically conducting visual bed checks. During these checks, employees and/or volunteers should never physically touch a student unless in the case of an emergency
- h. **Discipline:** Children, youth and vulnerable adults should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events.

It is the policy that employees and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors. Disciplines such as using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management are better options.

Discipline should be constructive and reflect age-appropriate-spiritual values. Physical punishment, name-calling and belittling comments are never permitted.

Adult leaders are responsible for monitoring the behavior of children and youth members and interceding when necessary. Parents of participants who misbehave will be informed and asked for assistance in dealing with the discipline problem. When the misbehavior constitutes a threat to the safety of the child or to the safety of others, the child, youth or vulnerable adult will be removed from the activity and where feasible, the parents will be asked to pick him/her up. Youth Protection guidelines and procedures must be followed when a child, youth or vulnerable adult is removed from an activity.

The adult leaders will review repetitive or serious incidents of misbehavior in consultation with the parents of the child, youth or vulnerable adult to determine a course of corrective action including possible revocation of the child, youth or vulnerable adult's participation in activities.

- i. **Permission slips:** Prior to any activity away from the church, a Parental Permission, Release and Consent to Medical Treatment Form must be signed by the parent or legal guardian. This can be done electronically.
- j. **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, youth and/or vulnerable adults 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, youth and/or vulnerable adult in question. If that does not solve the problem, then leadership should address the issue.

Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately.

- k. **Respect of privacy:** Adult leaders should respect the privacy of children/youth/vulnerable adults in situations such as changing clothes and going to the bathroom, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults must protect their own privacy in similar situations. In cases where a child needs help

in the bathroom, the door should remain open to a sufficient degree to allow observation by other adults but maintain the child's privacy.

- l. **Nudity in view of youth prohibited:** Volunteers should never be nude in the presence of children, youth or vulnerable adults in their care. Special planning by adults should be taken to ensure the showering or changing of clothing takes place in a private setting.
- m. **Spiritual boundaries:** As young people are led in the development of their faith story, it is essential that they are guided, and that their emotions are not manipulated. 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 the spiritual message be presented with "no strings attached." Each person involved must be able to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form.
- n. **Tobacco and Intoxicants prohibited:** No tobacco products or alcoholic beverages shall be used when working with children, youth or vulnerable adults. Volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while performing duties, while working with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- o. **Appropriate use of digital devices:** sexting and taking/sending of sexually explicit content is prohibited. It is unacceptable to use cameras or any recording device in areas where privacy is expected such as bathrooms and showers.