

Child & Youth Protection Policy

Trinity Lutheran Church

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Child & Youth Protection Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of Trinity Lutheran Church (TLC) to provide a Christ-like, safe and nurturing environment where children and youth can worship, learn and participate in fellowship activities with other children, youth and adults. TLC Staff Members, Adult Leaders and Youth Assistants are committed to ministering to the spiritual, relational, physical, emotional and social needs of the children and youth who participate in any of the TLC activities.

TLC supports and maintains a zero-tolerance policy concerning child abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Illinois law for any Staff Member, Adult Leader and Youth Assistant to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in TLC activities. It is the responsibility of every TLC Staff Member, Adult Leader and Youth Assistant to act in the best interest of all children / youth in every activity.

In order to minimize the potential for abuse and neglect of a child or youth participating in TLC activities, the TLC Parish Planning Council has authorized and approved the preparation of a Child & Youth Protection Policy. Each TLC Staff Member, Adult Leader and Youth Assistant must follow this policy whenever they are involved with children and youth.

This policy and the referenced guidelines will be reviewed periodically by the TLC Parish Planning Council to evaluate its effectiveness and the need for any revisions.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - *TLC Parish Planning Council*

SENIOR PASTOR - *TLC*

SECRETARY - *TLC Parish Planning Council*

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DEFINITIONS

CHILD / YOUTH: A child / youth is any person under the age of 18. [225 Illinois Compiled Statute (ILCS) 10/2.01]

ADULT LEADER: Any staff member, volunteer or other person age 19+ years old in a position of trust and responsible in any way for the health, education, welfare or supervision of any child / youth participating in a TLC activity.

YOUTH ASSISTANT: A youth age 11-18 years old who is a member of TLC (*or is approved to serve*) and has volunteered to assist workers in children's ministry activities.

STAFF MEMBER: Includes full-time and part-time PAID personnel (*called or contracted*).

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY: An individual or group activity that involves a child age 0-12 years old.

YOUTH MINISTRY: An individual or group activity that involves a youth age 12-18 years old.

DIGITAL MEDIA: Digital media is any content, visual or audio, text or graphic, created with technology and distributed through social media and website applications.

CHILD ABUSE: As used in this policy, child abuse is an action that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development as defined by IDHS. It can include...

- Physical abuse – any physical injury that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burning, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

SEXUAL ABUSE: As used in this policy, sexual abuse is any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography. Includes indecent solicitation or criminal sexual abuse of a child / youth as defined by ILCS.

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1.0 SCREENING PROCESS

Anyone wishing to serve as an Adult Leader / Youth Assistant in a TLC children's / youth ministry must fulfill the following requirements:

- Must attend TLC for at least six months.
- Must have an on-going relationship with TLC.
- Must successfully complete the screening form and process.

SCREENING FORM: An applicant for becoming an Adult Leader / Youth Assistant in a TLC children's / youth ministry must complete the applicable online screening form ([ADULT LEADER SCREENING FORM](#) / [YOUTH ASSISTANT SCREENING FORM](#)). This will assess the applicant's personal background. Information regarding the applicant's relevant criminal history and reference information is requested. All information provided on this form will be kept confidential.

A personal interview with the Senior (or Associate) Pastor/Director of Christian Education may be required and/or a background check of the applicant's criminal record may be conducted. All Adult Leader applicants must complete an authorization form for TLC to conduct a criminal record check if required.

SELECTION PROCESS: The Staff Member or Adult Leader who is administering the applicable children's / youth ministry will determine whether an applicant is suitable. Determinations could include:

- the results of a reference check.
- the results of personal interview.
- the results of a criminal record check (automatic rejection will result if an applicant has been arrested and convicted of child and/or sexual abuse) (for purposes of this guidance, the term "conviction" includes: being found guilty by trial or other form of adjudication, pleas of guilty, no contest or not guilty by reason of mental defect, and a deferred judgment).

Applicants will be provided with a copy of this Policy and Guidelines to review.

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2.0 MINISTRY-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

The following sections provide general and specific guidance for all children's / youth ministries.

2.1 GENERAL – The following categories are simply listed in alphabetical order:

- **Activity Protocol**

- In ordinary situations, there should be at a minimum three people together (i.e., two Adult Leaders & one child/youth; one Adult Leader, one Youth Assistant & one child/youth; one Youth Assistant & two children/youth; etc.) for each TLC children's / youth ministry activity. This can be adjusted with permission from a parent/guardian (ex. private music lesson, tutoring, counseling, etc.
- A Staff Member, Adult Leader and/or Youth Assistant will make every effort to monitor the safety of the children, such as walking through the building, opening doors and checking classrooms.
- When the child's parent/guardian is present, they are responsible for the supervision of their child.
- An Adult Leader in a room will supervise a Youth Assistant.
- When used for a TLC activity the Kids of the Kingdom Children's Playground & Green Space Area will be supervised by an Adult Leader or Youth Assistant at all times when children are playing.

- **Activity Release Protocol**

- Unless otherwise specified, every reasonable effort will be made to ensure that the child / youth is released to the proper parent, guardian or other designated person.
- If a children's ministry activity is scheduled at night when it is dark, parents are asked to come inside the TLC facility to pick up their child.
- If a youth ministry activity is scheduled at night when it is dark, youth will be observed going to and getting in their family car when leaving the TLC facility or meeting place. An Adult Leader will encourage youth who are driving to be careful and observant while driving home.

- **Appropriate Behaviors Protocol**

- An Adult Leader is prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs, and to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco/vaping products while in any TLC facility, while traveling with children / youth, or while working with or supervising children / youth during any TLC activity.
- An Adult Leader and/or Youth Assistant should never be nude in the presence of children. 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.*), a plan will be set concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.
- An Adult Leader and/or Youth Assistant should dress in modest, comfortable attire. Thin-strapped shirts or low-cut shirts should be avoided while serving. First impressions should be taken into account when serving. These clothing items should be avoided:
 - revealing swimsuits
 - revealing/form-fitting clothes
 - shirts with low necklines or that show midriff
 - short dresses, skirts or shorts
- A child's / youth's medication of any kind, including over-the-counter drugs, will ordinarily not be administered by a Staff Member, Adult Leader and/or Youth Assistant to any child / youth while serving in a TLC activity, unless authorized in writing with complete instructions by a parent/guardian.

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- **Bullying/Harassment Protocol**

- Verbal, physical or emotional bullying/harassment is not acceptable at TLC. When bullying/harassment in any form happens, decisive action will be taken through the care and direction of supervising Staff Member. The following corrective and healing process is recommended:
 - Privately and discreetly, and with another adult present, work through a confirmation process that the targeted child / youth is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. The parent of the targeted child / youth will continue to be informed regarding what is happening and provided care and counsel as best determined.
 - First Offense: A merciful verbal warning will be communicated to the offending child/ren / youth and, if deemed necessary, a general reminder will be communicated to the connected group that this kind of interaction is wrong and how we should treat one another in light of Christ's love and mercy. The targeted child's /youth's parent will be notified of what happened, Christ-like care and loving guidance offered, and the overall correction process shared.
 - Second Offense: The offending child/ren / youth will be removed from the connected group (in a seen or supervised location) and the inappropriate interaction or behavior will be identified. The offending child/ren / youth will be informed that communication with the supervising Staff Member and/or Senior Pastor and the offending child's parents will take place so that clear parameters and behavioral goals can be established.
 - Third Offense: The offending child/ren / youth will be taken to the supervising Staff Member and/or Senior Pastor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity.

- **Communication Protocol**

- All communication with a child / youth will be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with a Staff Member or a parent/guardian.
- Texting between a Staff Member/Adult Leader and a child is not permissible. Texting with a youth is permissible with permission and parent acknowledgment.
- TLC-approved digital applications that have messaging features are permissible to use. All messaging will be regularly reviewed.
- A Staff Member, an Adult Leader and a Youth Assistant must maintain a high moral standard in social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in TLC activities with a child / youth.

- **Participation Forms**

- Parents with children who participate in Trinity's children's ministry Jubilation activities are asked to complete the online [Child Awareness Form](#).
- Parents with youth who participate in Trinity's youth ministry activities are asked to complete the online [Youth Participant Consent & Liability Waiver Form](#).
- Adults who participate in Trinity's youth ministry activities, in addition to the [Adult Leader Screening Form](#), are asked to complete the online [Adult Participant Consent & Liability Waiver Form](#).

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- **Screening Process**

- Only adults and youth who have successfully completed the applicable Screening Process are permitted to work in TLC children's / youth ministries.
- Parents are invited to observe and participate in TLC activities in which their child /youth is involved. However, parents who desire to have continuous, ongoing contact with the TLC children's / youth ministries will be required to complete the online [Adult Leader Screening Form](#).

- **Transportation Protocol**

- A Staff Member and/or an Adult Leader will make every effort to transport a child / youth directly to their destination ONLY with the permission of a parent/guardian.
- Absent an emergency, cell phones may not be used by drivers while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- No driver under age 25 may drive TLC-owned or rented vehicles.
- A Youth Assistant is not allowed to drive any child or youth other than their own family member with parent/guardian permission.

2.2 CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

- An Adult Leader and/or Youth Assistant serving in a childcare capacity will have additional expectations and responsibilities, including but not limited to:
 - parental-approved restroom / diaper changing.
 - parental-approved feeding, including infant feeding.
 - appropriate parental-approved non-contact discipline.
- Music Ministry private lessons (*one Adult Leader and one Student*) will be in an agreed upon public area/open room with permission from a parent/guardian.

2.3 YOUTH MINISTRY – The following categories are simply listed in alphabetical order>

- **Communication Protocol**

- An Adult Leader will not make obscene, sexually suggestive or offensive remarks/jokes and will discourage this activity among the youth.
- If there is a need for an Adult Leader to talk with a youth in private, the Adult Leader should choose a place where people are present. Examples of this may include open areas around the church (*or courtyards and hotel lobbies if on a trip*), short walks down a sidewalk, a restaurant or other location.
- Youth should be encouraged to talk with the Adult Leader(s) if they feel that a situation is sexually inappropriate or someone/something makes them feel uncomfortable in this regard. These types of situations could include: unwanted sexual advances by other youth, inappropriate touching, language or gestures, sexual advances by another person, or an encounter with someone outside the group.

- **Music Ministry Protocol**

- Music Ministry private lessons (one Adult Leader and one Student) will be in an agreed upon public area/open room with permission from a parent/guardian.

- **Physical Contact Protocol**

- When a youth is ill and needs care (*but not professional medical attention*), the Adult Leader should make every reasonable effort to enlist the help of another Adult Leader and/or youth to be present and assist. In a medical emergency, however, the welfare of the victim takes precedence, and whatever action is necessary and appropriate must be taken.

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- An Adult Leader may use appropriate physical contact in a public setting to show support, encouragement and affection toward youth who are receptive to this form of expression. The Adult Leader must use good judgment and should never force any physical contact on any *youth (unless required for medical or safety emergency)*. Examples of appropriate physical contact may include a handshake, touch on the shoulder, holding of a hand, or a hug. The appropriateness of any contact will depend in large part on the relationship between the Adult Leader and the youth. Examples of inappropriate physical contact include any form of sexual contact, kissing, and physical contact that might be perceived as sexually stimulating.
- Sexual contact between an Adult Leader with anyone under the age of 18, regardless of consent, is a criminal violation and will be handled as such. Sexual activity between an Adult Leader and anyone 18 or older (*who is not their spouse*) while on a TLC activity is not consistent with the ministry of Christ and is not permissible.
- Youth should be informed that it is important for Adult Leaders to be aware of any of these types of problems, concerns or incidents. If they feel that they cannot speak with the Adult Leader(s) directly about their concerns, they should be encouraged to talk with a parent, pastor or supervising staff member or another youth. The youth should also be informed that if another youth tells them of a problem, concern or incident they need to pass the information along to the Adult Leader(s), or to a parent, pastor or supervising staff member. If requested by a youth, the Adult Leader(s) shall provide a means for the youth to communicate privately and confidentially with a parent, the pastor or the supervising staff member as soon as possible after the request is made.
- **Trip Protocol**
 - In ordinary situations, an Adult Leader should not be “alone” in a hotel room or other accommodation with a youth.
 - Sleeping rooms will be segregated by gender (*consideration for a parent who is the other gender may be considered on a case-by-case situation*).
 - Sleeping rooms will generally not be used for fellowship or other activities. If they are used, the doors will remain open when people of the opposite gender are in the rooms together.
 - When one room is used for sleeping, youth and Adult Leaders of the opposite gender will sleep within an appropriate distance, as determined by the Adult Leader.
 - Appropriate sleeping apparel shall be worn by each person.
 - Privacy will always be respected.
 - Beds may be shared by youth of the same gender.
 - Adult Leaders should not share beds with youth. If the Adult Leader is a same gender parent, sharing a bed with their child / youth is at the discretion of that Adult Leader.
 - Both a male and female Adult Leader shall be present on trips where both genders are represented by youth. On trips where youth of only one gender are participating, an Adult Leader of the same gender shall be present.
 - Youth of the opposite gender should generally not be “alone” in pairs in hotel rooms and other sleeping accommodations. Some discretion is appropriate when specific tasks are being conducted. The Adult Leader should know where the youth are and be aware of the appropriate amount of time needed to complete the task. Examples include loading and unloading luggage, getting items from the room(s), etc.
 - Only the youth and Adult Leaders who are participating in the trip are allowed to stay overnight in the accommodations.

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3.0 CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION TRAINING

All Staff Members and, when appropriate, Adult Leaders and Youth Assistants who participate in TLC activities involving children / youth will undergo the following minimum training:

- Be familiar with the TLC Child & Youth Protection Policy.
- Be taught and have consistent conversations about best TLC child and youth protection practices.
- Watch recommended training videos regarding child & sexual abuse.

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4.0 REPORTING PROCEDURE

In the event a Staff Member, Adult Leader or other person observes any inappropriate behaviors (i.e., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), each has a legal and moral responsibility with respect to child abuse and sexual abuse reporting. They qualify as "persons in a position of trust" and meet the definition of individuals who are required by law to report known or suspected instances of child abuse and child neglect. It is the policy of TLC that all Staff Members and Adult Leaders will immediately report, using the online Incident Report Form, any suspected cases of child abuse, child neglect or child sexual abuse to the supervising Staff Member or the Senior Pastor. This does not, under Illinois Law, relieve the individual from also reporting an instance of child abuse or neglect immediately to the appropriate state agency (*Illinois Department of Children and Family Services*).

Listed below are definitions excerpted from the Illinois statutes and are intended to provide the worker with a summary of the applicable state laws. They are not intended as legal advice.

- **SEXUAL CONDUCT 720 ILCS 5/11**

"Sexual conduct" means any intentional or knowing touching or fondling by the victim or the accused, either directly or through clothing, of the sex organs, anus or breast of the victim or the accused, or any part of the body of a child under 13 years of age, or any transfer or transmission of semen by the accused upon any part of the clothed or unclothed body of the victim, for the purpose of sexual gratification or arousal of the victim or the accused.

- **CRIMINAL SEXUAL ASSAULT 720 ILCS 5/11-1.20**

(a) A person commits criminal sexual assault if that person commits an act of sexual penetration and:
(1) uses force or threat of force;
(2) knows that the victim is unable to understand the nature of the act or is unable to give knowing consent;
(3) is a family member of the victim, and the victim is under 18 years of age; or
(4) is 17 years of age or over and holds a position of trust, authority, or supervision in relation to the victim, and the victim is at least 13 years of age but under 18 years of age.

- **ENDANGERING THE LIFE OR HEALTH OF A CHILD 720 ILCS 5/12C-5**

(a) A person commits endangering the life or health of a child when he or she knowingly: (1) causes or permits the life or health of a child under the age of 18 to be endangered; or (2) causes or permits a child to be placed in circumstances that endanger the child's life or health. It is not a violation of this Section for a person to relinquish a child in accordance with the Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act.

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• **ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILD REPORTING ACT 325 ILCS 5/3**

As used in this Act unless the context otherwise requires: "Child" means any person under the age of 18 years. The law states that an "abused child" means a child whose parent or immediate family member, or any person responsible for the child's welfare, or any individual residing in the same home as the child, or a paramour of the child's parent:

(a) inflicts, causes to be inflicted, or allows to be inflicted upon such child physical injury, by other than accidental means, which causes death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function;

(b) creates a substantial risk of physical injury to such child by other than accidental means, which would be likely to cause death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function;

(c) commits or allows to be committed any sex offense against such child, as such sex offenses are defined in the Criminal Code of 2012 or in the Wrongs to Children Act, and extending those definitions of sex offenses to include children under 18 years of age.

TLC Staff Members and Adult Leaders are mandatory reporters. If a Staff Member or an Adult Leader suspects there may be an instance of child / sexual abuse, they are required to report it to the appropriate state agency. If a Staff Member or an Adult Leader observes suspicious or inappropriate behavior by another person or observes a violation of this policy, it needs to be immediately reported to the appropriate authority. If there is an imminent threat to a child's safety or welfare, they will intervene in the situation (*if it is safe to do so*) and immediately notify the supervising Staff Member and the Senior Pastor.

While all reports need to be confidential, except where required by law, detailed documentation must be kept by all parties involved. The online Incident Report Form should be used to record basic information about the incident as needed.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at TLC, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. If a Staff Member or an Adult Leader believes that a crime has been committed, the Staff Member or an Adult Leader shall immediately notify the supervising Staff Member and the Senior Pastor.
2. The parent/guardian of the child/youth will be notified.
3. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
4. All allegations of abuse will be reported to the civil authorities, to the TLC Senior Pastor and Executive Director, and TLC will comply with the state of Illinois' requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law states. TLC will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities. For most instances related to TLC activities, the "appropriate state agency" will be one of the following:
 - Peoria City Police Department ~ (309) 673-4521
 - Peoria County Sheriff's Department ~ (309) 697-8515
 - Peoria Department of Children & Family Services ~ (309) 671-7900
5. The supervising Staff Member and the Senior Pastor or an appointed representative will complete an incident report and notify the TLC attorney and TLC insurance company and will serve as spokesperson for TLC. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the TLC insurance company.

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6. TLC will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of the TLC attorney will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of TLC should refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

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5.0 ENFORCEMENT OF THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES

A Staff Member and/or Adult Leader who supervises other Staff Members, Adult Leaders or Youth Assistants are charged with the diligent enforcement of TLC Policy. Anyone working with children/youth at TLC is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the Staff Members and must follow this Policy. Violating this Policy is grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from a position in the children's / youth ministry. Final decisions related to Policy violations is the responsibility of the TLC Senior Pastor and the Board of Christian Care.

Supervising Staff Members are required to handle reported violations of this policy and any reported incident of child abuse, sexual assault on a child, or sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust as serious matters. Except as required by law, all information gathered during any internal investigation will be kept confidential. The review procedures include:

- **MINOR POLICY AND GUIDELINES VIOLATION**

The supervising Staff Member will discuss the violation with the person and document that the discussion was held. If there are repeated violations, the person will no longer be allowed to participate in TLC activities involving children / youth.

- **SIGNIFICANT POLICY AND GUIDELINES VIOLATIONS**

The supervising Staff Member and the Senior Pastor will discuss the violation with the person and will interview all involved parties. Detailed documentation will be kept regarding interviews. The Senior Pastor may delegate one or more people to assist him in the review of the reported violation and may consult church committees or boards as needed. Depending on the severity of the violation, the person may be removed from participating in any TLC activities involving children/youth. If the person is a Staff Member, then the established TLC disciplinary procedures will be followed.

- **CRIMINAL CONDUCT**

If at any time during the course of this review it becomes apparent that a crime has been committed, the Senior Pastor will immediately notify the appropriate state agency. At this stage, the TLC review will cease, and all TLC Staff Members and Adult Leaders will cooperate with the state agency in investigating the case.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the appropriate authority and process is a violation of this policy and grounds for Staff Member termination or Adult Leader/Youth Assistant removal. A Staff Member or an Adult Leader who fails to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participating in any TLC activities involving children/youth.

A Staff Member and an Adult Leader/Youth Assistant should discuss immediately with their supervising Staff Member any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy. They should seek counsel from the TLC Senior Pastor, Executive Director, and/or TLC attorney.