

**University Methodist Church
Child/Student/Vulnerable Adults
Protection Policies and Procedures**

100. Introduction

110. Statement of Policy

University Methodist Church of San Antonio, Inc. herein referred to as "the Church" is committed to providing an environment, which is safe and nurturing for children, students, and vulnerable adults who attend Church, or any other Church sponsored programs or activities. Additionally, we will take precautions to protect Church workers from false accusations or suspicions. The Church establishes these policies and procedures to help eliminate the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor or an adult with special needs. The purpose of these policies and procedures is to protect the following:

- The children, students, and vulnerable adults of the Church.
- The workers in the Church.
- The Church's mission and integrity.

To reach these goals, the Church herein establishes policies and procedures that dictate the requirements for child/student/vulnerable adults herein referred to as "C/S/V" workers, and their conduct. The following procedures are designed to protect our children, students, and vulnerable adults, employees, volunteers, contractors, and the entire Church body. The Church will not tolerate any occurrence of abuse and upon learning of such, will report violators to legal authorities and take any other necessary steps to protect our C/S/V.

120. Guiding Principles

It is recognized that certain people have talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of the Church's C/S/V, and we wish to encourage them to use those spiritual gifts. At the same time, standards must be established for those who choose to serve in that capacity. Through prayer, we rely on God's wisdom in developing, implementing, and carrying out His will through these guidelines.

200. General

210. Applicability

These policies and procedures shall apply to all the Church sponsored and/or supervised activities involving C/S/V. All workers assigned to such activities by the Church shall comply with and conduct themselves in accordance with these policies and procedures. Any person who refuses to comply with these policies and procedures or continues to violate them, will be barred from further work with minors or vulnerable adults.

220. Exception for Preschool/Day Hab Subject to State Requirements

The Church operates Preschool/Day Hab programs that fall within the purview of guidelines developed by the State. Nothing in this policy is intended to alter or change any requirement imposed by the State. This policy exempts those programs from the specified Team Approach coverage, understanding that the State requirements for Child/Staff ratios and groupings as found in the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services Minimum Standards & Guidelines for Day Care Centers will be followed. Those staff that are trained by the above-mentioned state guidelines for Preschool & Day Hab positions, must additionally be trained under this instruction when working or volunteering in other ministries where C/S/V training is required.

230. Waiver to Policies and Procedures

The goal of the Church is to promote safety while maintaining practical flexibility in C/S/V. For planning purposes, policies may be waived only in exceptional circumstances or instances outside of the Church's control (example- the Church's affiliation with outside organizations on mission projects or Conference/District directed events). Only the Leadership Council may authorize waivers to the policies established. The child's parents/legal guardian/custodians will be advised in writing of any such authorized waivers. It is recognized there will be occasions when uncontrollable circumstances will require Staff/Ministry Directors to make last-minute judgment calls which could result in deviation from the letter of established rules. There can be no single standard answer or procedure established in advance to cover every conceivable situation which may arise. The spirit of our goal, i.e., the safety of C/S/V, not convenience, must guide their ultimate decision(s). We expect the involved Staff/Ministry Director to address each case on its own merits, and make prudent decisions based upon the information available to them. If, after due consideration, a decision is made to deviate from published policy, the Director concerned will:

- A. If at all possible, consult with the Lead Pastor, Leadership Council, or Finance/HR.
- B. Make a report, in writing and within 48 hours, to the Finance/HR office. This report should detail the circumstances and the exact deviation authorized.

None of the provisions of this paragraph should be construed as a substitute for adequate planning and proper program implementation.

240. Definitions:

- A. Minor: Any child from birth through age 17 or through high school graduation.
- B. Vulnerable Adults: Any person 18 years or older who is supported by the Special Needs Ministry in either a traditional program i.e., Sunday School classroom, Worship, Helping Hands, College, Single or Adult Ministry or within the confines of Special Needs Ministry classrooms.
- C. Church Staff: Any paid employee, full-time or part-time, of the Church.
- D. Staff/Ministry Director: Church employee who is a Director or Assistant/Associate Director responsible to guide, advise, nurture and supervise the cluster of staff who direct and support programming in a ministry area. (For example: Music, Office, Children, Student, etc.)
- E. Worker is any volunteer or staff, regardless of church membership, that supervises children, students or vulnerable adults during a church sponsored event on or off campus.
- F. Custodian: A person who has been given custody of a minor on a temporary basis with the permission of the child's parent or legal guardian.
- G. Adult Leader: Any worker age 18 or older who has a leadership role. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest Participants with whom they work.
- H. Assistant Leader: Any person, regardless of age, who performs full-time, part-time, or volunteer work in the Church under the direct or indirect supervision of an Adult Leader and has contact with minors and vulnerable adults. Workers include, but are not limited to, C/S/V program sponsors, drama and music workers, Sunday school teachers, substitute teachers and Church staff.
- I. Child Abuse: An act or omission that endangers or impairs a child's physical, mental, or emotional health and/or development. Child abuse may take the form of physical or emotional injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, physical neglect, medical neglect, or inadequate supervision. See Legal Appendix, Texas Family Code Section 261.001(1) for statutory definition and other statutory references.
- J. Prohibited Workers: Persons who have been convicted of, placed on regular or deferred adjudicated probation for, received pre-trial diversion for, or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any Prohibited

Offense shall not serve or be employed in connection with any Church-sponsored activity or program involving minors.

- K. Prohibited Offense: Those offenses prohibited by the Texas Penal Code, Chapter 43, Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 481, and such other statutory offenses as pertain to child/adult abuse in the state of Texas. Additionally, "Prohibited Offense" includes any offense involving sexual contact, physical abuse, violence or threatened violence, or such other felony or crime involving moral turpitude as determined by the Lead Pastor in his or her sole discretion.

250. Authority

These policies & procedures will be implemented under supervision of the Lead Pastor & Leadership Committee.

300. Protection Procedures

310. Worker Selection and Screening

- A. Submission of Application - All paid staff and volunteers who apply to work with C/S/V will complete the online application. All workers will be subject to primary screening requirements.
- B. Background checks and reference checks will be completed on all employees and volunteers.
- C. Staff/Ministry Directors will ensure submission of application.
- D. All staff and volunteers must take online training and a test.
- E. All workers will be subject to periodic re-checks of criminal records every two (2) years and required to attend a current training session.
- F. Re-checks of driving records and proof of insurance will generally be done once a year and will be limited to those applicants/workers who drive vehicles, privately owned or the Church owned/rented while performing the Church duties/activities.
- G. Any person denied a volunteer position because of his/her refusal to complete an Application or a denial of a position because of the screening process, may appeal the decision to the Lead Pastor whose decision shall be final.
- H. Those workers who quit volunteering in a ministry with C/S/V for a period of two (2) years, who move out of town or change churches will need to re-apply before serving in a ministry with C/S/V at the Church.
- I. Staff and volunteers may begin to work/serve under the supervision of an adult leader upon the completion of a background check, but the entire process must be completed within 6 months of submitting an application.

320. Qualifications

- A. All workers must complete an online application and background screening prior to working with minors and complete the online training, test within six (6) months of making application.
- B. Prohibited Workers are unqualified.

330. Supervisory Requirements and Rules of Behavior

- A. Team Approach - A minimum of two workers, who have completed the C/S/V application process, shall be present during any activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Persons under the age of 18 who are asked to work with children or vulnerable adults shall do so under the direct supervision of an Adult Leader and will follow all policy guidelines including the application process and training. In pre-school, at least one (1) of the team members must be female.

- 1) In Sunday School or a similar teaching environment, it is acceptable to have individual classes or groups with one worker, provided a second Group Leader or the Staff/Ministry Director has immediate and direct access to the teaching area.
- 2) No worker will be permitted to be alone with a minor or vulnerable adult behind a closed door unless another adult can observe them.
- 3) Events that require overnight accommodations involving our students where accommodations may be restrictive, one worker may sleep in a separate bed in a room with 2 or more students, but no one worker shall be alone with any one student in a hotel/dormitory/cabin room under any circumstances.

B. Restroom Procedures:

- 1) Workers may accompany and assist a child to the restroom after notifying another worker.
- 2) For students and vulnerable adults, assistance will be provided by a worker of the same gender.
- 3) Changing diapers will be accomplished in designated restrooms or Special Needs Ministry classrooms with changing facilities.
- 4) When a child or adult with special needs is going to be left in the classroom for only a short time, parents or legal guardians/custodians should be encouraged to take the child or adult with special needs to the restroom prior to drop off.

C. Overnight or Off Church Property Activities - All overnight or off property activities sponsored or approved by the Church require the prior approval of the appropriate Staff/Ministry Director. *Section 600.*

D. The following behaviors are prohibited for all paid employees and volunteers:

- 1) Intentionally threatening or inflicting physical, verbal and/or emotional injury upon a minor or adult with special needs.
- 2) Committing any sexual offense against a minor or adult with special needs or engaging in any sexual contact with a minor or adult with special needs.
- 3) Making any kind of sexual advance, making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- 4) Physical discipline, such as spanking.

E. Using physical restraint to prevent a C/S/V from doing something harmful to themselves or someone else may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement are always appropriate. The Staff/Ministry Directors shall advise workers on the best age-appropriate behavior management methods.

F. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the Staff/Ministry Directors who in turn will notify the parent/legal guardian/custodian as deemed necessary.

G. Using physical contact to comfort or affirm in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Workers shall not touch C/S/V in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist in the bathroom as noted in Section 330.B.

H. Any person who refuses to comply with these policies and procedures or continues to violate them, will be barred from further work with minors or vulnerable adults.

I. When ministry events violate this policy by mistake or in an attempt to keep the C/S/V safe, the worker(s) should inform the ministry director so that policies and practices can be reviewed and updated.

340. Worker Training

A. Workers will be required to read and acknowledge understanding of the Church C/S/V Protection Policies and Procedures. Workers who do not complete C/S/V training within six (6) months of starting a ministry position will be relieved of their service until training is completed.

B. The online training may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- 1) Texas' legal definition of child abuse from the Texas Family Code.
 - 2) Written information describing Texas laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse.
 - 3) Training in identifying abuse.
 - 4) Recognizing inappropriate behavior and situations open to problems or misunderstandings.
 - 5) Fire and building safety.
 - 6) Best practices for safety
- C. Any significant new development in child protection laws may require immediate re-training of all workers, at the discretion of Lead Pastor or Leadership Committee.
- D. Church Staff will regularly implement appropriate procedures and continuing education concerning abuse.

350. Check In and Check Out

A. Check In:

- 1) Parents or legal guardians/ custodians may be requested to provide the Staff/ Ministry Director with written information stating who is authorized to pick up their C/S/V in case of emergency or who is forbidden by judicial order. (A certified copy of any applicable judicial order must be provided upon request.)
- 2) The parent or legal guardian/ custodian will register their name and the C/S/V's full name in the Church data base where check-in stickers, contact information, allergy or special needs details, photo release permissions, custody arrangements and/or other details pertinent to the safety of the C/S/V is pulled. The parent/ custodian is responsible for verifying important information is correct before leaving.
 - i. Upon drop off, parents or legal guardians/ custodians should keep their cell phone (as listed in the database) available for contact.
 - ii. In Student Ministry, those in 6th grade and up and whose families are registered in our database are allowed to check in and out without parent permission for onsite activities. Off-site activities will require parent/guardian check-in.

B. Check Out:

- 1) Workers will NOT release a C/S/V in their care to anyone other than the registered parents, legal guardians/ custodians, or persons specifically authorized to pick up the C/S/V.
- 2) Parent or legal guardian / custodian identification may be requested at any time before releasing a C/S/V in our care.

400. Nursery-Specific Childcare Procedures

410. Personal Items

- A. All personal items for the child, including diaper bags, blankets, bottles, clothing, and pacifiers, should be labeled with the child's first and last name. Permanent, waterproof labels are preferred.
- B. It is recommended that no personal toys or valuable items be brought into the nursery.
- C. The nursery does not assume responsibility for any personal items left in the nursery.

420. Staffing

- A. Workers working with Nursery age children will follow the Team Approach, as identified in the C/S/V Protection Policies.
- B. All nursery age workers shall be subject to the requirements of the C/S/V Protection Policies.
- C. Restroom procedures
 - 1) Paid staff may accompany a child to the restroom after notifying another worker.
 - 2) When a child is going to be left in the nursery or toddler area for only a short time, parents or legal guardians/custodians should be encouraged to take the child to the restroom prior to check-in.
 - 3) Staff only may change diapers and the change(s) will be accomplished in the open and not behind closed doors.

500. Transportation Procedures

510. Vehicle Requirements

- A. These vehicle requirements pertain to vehicles owned by the Church, those provided by parents of participants, those provided by workers, and any leased or other commercial vehicle provided for transportation of minors or vulnerable adults.
- B. All vehicles shall be in good running order and possess a current license plate, a safety inspection sticker, and passenger restraints as required by Texas law.
- C. All vehicles will have insurance coverage as required by Texas law.
- D. All vehicles will be multi-passenger. No motorcycles, scooters, or mopeds will be allowed. No vehicle will be allowed to carry more than the passenger capacity as specified by the vehicle manufacturer. No one is allowed to ride in the back of pick-up trucks.

520. Qualification of Drivers

- A. All drivers will be workers (as qualified by the C/S/V Protection Policies and Procedures), parents of participants, or the Church licensed commercial drivers. The appropriate Staff/Ministry Director will pre-approve all drivers. Hired bus drivers (charter companies, VIA, School Bus drivers) are not required to go through this training if there is enough trained workers on the bus to supervise the students.
- B. All drivers of Church vehicles will have a current valid driver's license, valid in Texas, with the classification for the vehicle driven and be at least 25 years of age (21 years of age for Church employees). If private vehicles are used, the drivers must be at least 21 years of age.
- C. All drivers will be subject to periodic checks of their motor vehicle driving record.
- D. Disqualified drivers: Persons who have been convicted of, placed on regular or deferred adjudicated probation for, received pre-trial diversion for, or pled guilty or nolo contendere to the following offenses: manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide, consumption or possession of alcoholic beverage in a motor vehicle, driving while intoxicated, or any other intoxicated offense, including but not limited to intoxication assault, intoxication manslaughter, and any drug possession or use charge, will be disqualified to drive the Church vehicles or to transport minors to/from Church-sponsored activities in

their personal vehicles. Appeals to disqualification may be submitted to the Lead Pastor whose decision shall be final.

530. General Rules for Driving

- A. All transportation associated with church sponsored C/S/V activities, is subject to the procedures described herein. The appropriate Staff/Ministry Director must approve any deviation and the concerned parents/legal guardians or custodians will be informed prior to departure.
- B. When two or more personal vehicles are traveling together, only one C/S/V worker can be in each vehicle if that vehicle has more than one C/S/V. The vehicles must stay within sight of each other and have the proper Team Approach before they enter and after they exit the vehicles.
- C. Anyone who drives a church vehicle or rented vehicle to transport C/S/V to and from Church-sponsored activities must complete an Auto Safety Certification form, maintain a current valid driver's license, provide proof of insurance, and comply with all the Church transportation policies.
- D. All drivers will obey all traffic laws.
- E. A parent permission form must be completed for every minor or vulnerable adult transported in a Church-sponsored vehicle. The Staff/Ministry Director or Group Leader will verify that the form has been completed and is on file prior to departure.
- F. The Team Approach, as described in paragraph 330.A. applies to all transportation situations.
- G. In an emergency that threatens health or safety, a driver may transport one minor in a vehicle without a waiver.
- H. The following guidelines regarding safety in vans and other vehicles used to transport minors will be observed:
 - 1) Vehicles will be checked before trip departure and regularly during travel for correct tire pressure.
 - 2) Seat belts will be worn at all times.
 - 3) When driving time exceeds four hours, drivers will rotate the driving responsibility. When traveling in vans, the front seat passenger will remain awake and serve as "another set of eyes" and handle any needs the passengers may have.
- I. Drivers will not be allowed to talk on cell phones or walkie-talkies while driving unless it is an emergency. The driver of the vehicle must pull safely to the side of the road to use the cellular phone. Texting while driving is strictly prohibited.

600. Overnight Activities Procedures

610. Applicability

These procedures cover any activity sponsored and/or supervised by the Church, which requires an overnight stay. This includes, but is not limited to, camping, lock-ins, hotels/motels, and overnight stays in a personal dwelling.

620. Approvals

- A. Any overnight activity requires the prior approval of the appropriate Staff/Ministry Director.
- B. A signed Parent Permission form must be completed for every minor participating. The Staff/Ministry Director or Adult Leader will verify that the form has been completed and is on file prior to the activity.

630. Rules of Conduct

- A. The Team Approach as described in paragraph 330.A. will apply to all overnight activities.
- B. Co-ed overnight activities require male and female Adult Leaders.
- C. The written permission of the parent or legal guardian/custodian is required for a minor to leave an overnight activity prior to its scheduled termination time or to leave with anyone other than his or her parent or guardian/custodian.
 - D. Minors of the opposite sex will not be allowed to sleep in the same room except in group settings under the direct supervision of Adult Leaders.

700. Worker Reporting Procedures

710. Obligation to Report and Immunity

- A. In all cases where any worker has reasonable cause to believe that a minor or vulnerable adult may be abused or neglected, the worker is obligated by Texas law to make a report to a law enforcement agency or to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) Child Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400). If the worker is in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, he or she will telephone the agency (anonymously if desired) and discuss the situation with a counselor. The worker will make a written record of the name and title of the counselor with whom he or she spoke, and the recommendation made by the counselor. *Appendix I.*
- B. The worker shall contact TDFPS within 48 hours of first learning of possible abuse/neglect.
- C. Persons acting in good faith to report, comply with an investigation, testify, or otherwise participate in reporting alleged abuse or neglect are protected in such activity as provided in Texas Family Code, Section 261.106 Immunities. *Appendix II.*
- D. Persons filing false reports regarding abuse may be punished as provided in Texas Family Code, Section 261.107. False report; Penalty.
- E. Persons making frivolous claims against a person reporting a suspected act of abuse may be punished as provided in Texas Family Code, Section 261.108. Frivolous Claims against Person Reporting.
- F. Persons who fail to report an act that they have cause to believe could adversely affect a child's or adult's physical or mental health or welfare may be punished as provided in Texas Family Code, Section 261.109. Failure to Report; Penalty and maybe suspended from working with C/S/V.

720. Notification to Staff/Ministry Director / Lead Pastor

- A. A worker who becomes aware of any **abuse or molestation** within any ministry activity will immediately report the incident or suspicions (in writing, if possible) to the appropriate Staff/Ministry Director or Clergy.
- B. Any inappropriate behavior with a C/S/V, even though it may not be considered true abuse, must be reported.
- C. If an abuse allegation is reported, the worker(s) will:
 - 1) Respond to each allegation in a serious manner.
 - 2) Treat each allegation with confidentiality and respect for the privacy of all involved persons.
 - 3) Cooperate fully with civil authorities.
 - 4) Extend genuine care to all victims of abuse.

800. Response Procedures

810. Responding to the Notification

- A. When someone receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim.
- B. The person reporting the suspected abuse and the appropriate Staff/Ministry Director, in a joint effort, shall complete the written Suspicion of Child Abuse Report and submit it to the Lead Pastor. Appendix II.
- C. In the case of an actual allegation, these guidelines will be followed by the Lead Pastor or his/her designee:
 - 1) Make certain that all investigatory efforts are documented in writing, including dates, times, places and names, etc.
 - 2) Report the incident immediately to TDFPS, and/or local law enforcement, the Church's legal counsel, and insurance company. The Church should not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
 - 3) Contact the proper civil authorities following the guidance of official investigators.
 - 4) Report the incident to the Leadership Council as deemed necessary.
 - 5) Do not prejudge the situation but take the allegations seriously. If appropriate, reach out to the victim and the victim's family, and extend whatever pastoral resources are needed.
 - 6) Treat the accused with dignity and support. The accused will be removed from his or her position as a worker with minors until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved. In the case of paid employees, the Lead Pastor, in consultation with the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee, shall determine the extent to which employment and compensation should be continued during the investigation.
 - 7) Designate a single organizational leader as spokesperson. This spokesperson will be the only person to convey information concerning the situation, and to avoid compromising any ongoing investigation, will convey only such information as is necessary under the circumstances.
 - 8) Use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation, being careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. This public statement will be approved by the Lead Pastor before release.

900. Policy Review and Revision

These policies and procedures will be periodically reviewed with legal counsel and will be modified to ensure compliance with State laws regarding abuse. Any modifications shall be conveyed to all persons affected by the modifications.

1000. Conclusion

We have a responsibility as caretakers of C/S/V to provide a safe place for them to learn and grow in God's love. The development of policies and procedures is key to protecting both the minors and vulnerable adults and the Church by providing a safe and secure environment for C/S/V entrusted to our care.

Appendix I

Symptoms of Molestation

Church workers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below. Physical signs may include:

- Lacerations and bruises
- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Compulsive eating or dieting
- Irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody underclothing

Behavioral signs may include:

- Anxiety when approaching Church or nursery area (beyond normal separation anxiety)
- Nightmares or sleep problems without an explanation
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times.
- Nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity, or withdrawal
- Has a sudden change in eating habits or refuses to eat.
- Sexual self-consciousness
- “Acting out” of sexual behavior.
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child.
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty, or bad
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language, and knowledge.
- Withdrawal from Church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- I don't like [a particular Church worker]
- [A Church worker] does things to me when we're alone.
- I don't like to be alone with [a Church worker]
- [A Church worker] fooled around with me.

Adapted from US Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW)
www.nsopw.gov/en/Education/RecognizingSexualAbuse

Revised: Sept. 2023

Appendix II

**Texas Department of Child Protective Services
Child Abuse Report Form
1-800-252-5400**

[illegible]

* Be sure to obtain a Case Number when called In

Appendix III

Acknowledgement of Child/Student/Vulnerable Adults Protection Policies and Procedures

This is to acknowledge receipt of University Methodist Church Child/Student/Vulnerable Adults Protection Policies and Procedures. By signing this acknowledgement, you have read and agree to abide by the Policies and Procedures of the Manual.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____