

[Ministry Name] SAFE HAVEN GUIDELINES



Model Policies for the Protection of All People from Abuse



Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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Introduction

For the sake of the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are intentional, open and clear about the integrity and standard of conduct to which each congregation, institution, organization or agency in ministry is called and to which its leaders are held accountable. This document is intended to provide guidelines for a “Safe Haven” for people of all ages in congregational life. This document pays special attention to children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Who are child abusers? Research has shown that child abusers come from all ethnic and economic groups. Based upon the case studies that have been made, many who abuse children do so out of ignorance of proper disciplinary techniques, thereby inflicting emotional or physical abuse. Unlike physical abuse of a child, which may be accidental, child sexual abuse is a premeditated act. Child molesters defy the stereotypes we have created. It is not easy to identify these individuals. In 75% of reported cases of sexual abuse, the victims or their families knew the offenders.

Note: Children and adults with disabilities often become target for all kinds of abuse. Vulnerability to sexual abuse is increased due to physical or mental conditions perceived by the abuser to increase the child’s helplessness.

Theological / Biblical Framework

Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord. Psalm 127:3 (CEV)

For members in our congregations, becoming a Safe Haven for children, youth, vulnerable adults and their families affirms our Baptism into the priesthood of believers.

Directly from the Affirmation of Baptism, Evangelical Lutheran Worship page 236:

“You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and to share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”

Scriptures for Reflection:

Mark 10:13-16 Jesus blesses the children

Mark 9:33-37 Who is the greatest?

Mark 4:35-5:1 Jesus stills a storm.

There are many other scriptures in both the Old and New Testament that give the responsibility for care of all children to the adults, parents, grandparents, God parents, etc. Every congregation is called to be a place of hope and healing for people of all ages in their community.

Adopting the “Model” Guidelines as Policy

All agencies, institutions and organizations serving children youth and vulnerable adults are encouraged to use these guidelines to develop policies for the prevention of abuse. It is intended and expected that local adaptations, changes, amplifications, improvements, expansions, or other types of revisions be made.

Implementation of your policy should include regular training of adults in your congregation, organization or agency. It is the work of the local expression or institution to develop, implement, teach and hold accountable people who work with children and youth.

Disclaimer

This document is intended as a suggested guideline. It does not cover every issue that you may want to consider in the development of such policies, nor does it necessarily reflect the law of each state. You should consult with your own legal counsel and other professional advisors or insurance policies before adopting any policies for the prevention of abuse.

Acknowledgements

Resources used to create this document include:

Safe Haven for Children, ELCA

The Boy Scouts in America

The Girl Scouts in America

The Episcopal Church – Safe Guarding God’s Children

Guidelines for a Safe Haven Congregation – First Edition and Second Edition

Texas Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, ELCA

Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

YMCA

Brotherhood Mutual Insurance

Minnesota Department of Human Services

Darkness to Light

Definitions

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and, as such, are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through guidelines, policies and codes of conduct is not meant, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate love and compassion for children youth and vulnerable adults in sincere and genuine relationships.

Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

- A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years old.
- A youth is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.
- A vulnerable adult is anyone over age 18 who meets one of the following qualifications:
 - Has a physical, mental or emotional disorder that makes it difficult for the person to care for themselves without help and to protect themselves from maltreatment
 - Is in a hospital, nursing home, transitional care unit, assisted living, housing with services, board and care, foster care or other licensed care facility
 - Receives services such as home care, day services, personal care assistance or other licensed services

Church Personnel

For the purposes of these guidelines, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the church:

1. All Rostered leadership whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. All paid personnel whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of service. For example: Custodians, Office Staff, Pre-schools, After-school Programs, Theater Groups, Choirs, and Day Camps.
3. Those who contract their services to the church, its congregations, schools or other agencies.
4. Volunteers, including any persons who enters into or offers him or herself for a church related service, or who actually assists with or performs a service, whether or not they have been selected or assigned to do so. Volunteers include members of advisory boards, committees, adults serving as adult leaders at youth gatherings, as drivers, at camp, in Sunday school classrooms, etc.

Types of Abuse

Neglect: Omission of a child's, youth's or vulnerable adult's basic needs, physical, environmental, emotional, medical and nutritional, that are necessary for their well being, or the failure to protect them from harm.

Emotional Abuse: Verbal or nonverbal violence toward a child, youth or vulnerable adult that gives the message that the person is "not good" and never will be. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child, youth or vulnerable adult that results in an observable and/or material impairment in the person's growth, development or psychological functioning.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child, youth or vulnerable adult.

Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation: Any sexual contact with a child, youth or vulnerable adult by an adult. These acts may range from touching of the penis, vagina, buttocks, or breast/chest area to sexual intercourse. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult. This includes showing a child or youth pornography.

- Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth.

Economic Exploitation: Economic exploitation is the deliberate use of a child, youth or vulnerable adult for money or power.

Bullying: Bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose. Usually, bullying happens over and over. Bullying also can happen on-line or electronically.

Church Personnel fall into to one of two categories:

For the purposes of this guideline, the following are included in the definition of **Church Personnel who regularly work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults:**

1. All rostered persons whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth more than three times a year.
3. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children, youth and vulnerable adults in ministries, programs or activities more often than three times a year or for a program that last one month or more (i.e. regular Sunday School teachers, Confirmation mentors, childrens ministry volunteers, etc.).
4. All persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle more often than three times a year or for a program that last one month or more.
5. Any persons whose living quarters are on the grounds of the congregation, school or other related agency.
6. All persons who work or assist in the nursery more often than three times a year or for a period that lasts one month or more.

For the purposes of this guideline, the following are included in the definition of **Church Personnel who occasionally work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults:**

1. All paid or volunteer Church Personnel whose work regularly takes them throughout the facility or grounds or who have keys giving them access to the buildings on the grounds.
2. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children youth or vulnerable adults in ministries, programs or activities infrequently, generally no more than three times a year or for one program or activity during a year that lasts less than a month (i.e. assisting with preparation of the Christmas Pageant, teaching one “unit” for rotation Sunday School, serving as a substitute Confirmation mentor, etc.
3. All persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle no more than three times a year. (i.e. driving to camp, synod gatherings, service projects, etc.)
4. All persons who work or assist in the nursery three or fewer times a year, whether on an emergency basis or otherwise.

Screening and Selection

Any and all **Church Personnel who regularly work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults** should be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:

1. A standard application completed by the applicant.
2. Criminal records check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years, and other states, if any. This check is to be repeated every 3 years.*

This check should include:

- multi-state or national criminal search
- national sex offender search
- Social Security number validation
- name and address history
- alias search
- County Courthouse Criminal Search (if recommended by background check company at the time of check)
- Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person may be providing transportation

3. Individual interview or conversation with the applicant.
4. Two reference checks from people who know the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant works with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
5. Signed Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct (see appendix).

Any and all **Church Personnel who occasionally work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults** should be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:

1. A standard application completed by the applicant.
2. Individual interview or conversation with the applicant.
3. At least one Reference Check from a person who knows the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant interacts with children youth or vulnerable adults.
4. Signed Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct (see appendix).

** When first implementing this practice, in order to make running background checks more financially feasible you may want to considering receiving authorization from all Church Personnel who regularly work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults, but only running the background checks on 1/3 of them each year until you are caught up.*

All information gathered about an applicant should be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination, in consultation with others as necessary, of whether or not it is appropriate for the applicant to work with children youth or vulnerable adults. Church Personnel who work with or around children or youth should have a personnel file that is kept in a secure location.

To the extent possible, no adult will be permitted to supervise an immediate adult family member when working with our around children youth or vulnerable adults. For the purpose of this guideline, immediate family member is defined as spouse, partner, child, parent, sister, brother, similar in-law relationship, stepchild, step-parent, step-sibling, grandparent or co-habitant.

It is recommended that a person be a regular participant of the congregation or ministry for a minimum of six months before being invited to work with children and youth.

Education and Training Requirements

At least 1.5 hours of abuse prevention education and training is recommended for all **Church Personnel who regularly work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults** before they start their work or, if that is not possible, one hour of abuse awareness training before they start their work and the rest of the training within three months of starting.

At least .5 hours of abuse awareness education and training is recommended for all **Church Personnel who occasionally work with and around children, youth or vulnerable adults** before they start their work.

Church Personnel who are responsible for screening, selection and supervision of others in programs for children, youth or vulnerable adults are recommended to attend your synod's boundary workshop every three years.

Check with your synod office or nearby organizations about local training events or with other congregations for recommendations of other training sources.

Desirable and Undesirable Behaviors

Christian ministries are committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment that protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and our Church Personnel from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries, it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate; otherwise that decision is left to each individual. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows Church Personnel to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church Personnel working around or with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Affection

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Brief hugs. Preferred hugs are side-to-side hugs, one-arm hugs and a-frame hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-Fives” or fist bumping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arm around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for huddles with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

Inappropriate behaviors and interactions can be detected and stopped. The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children, youth or vulnerable adults in ministry settings because many of them are the behaviors that molesters use to groom children, youth, vulnerable adults and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves, sexual abuse.

Some inappropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Lengthy or full body contact embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over seven years old on the lap
- Any sexualized touching; touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers

- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child, youth or vulnerable adult
- Touching knees or legs
- Wrestling
- Tickling
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child, youth or vulnerable adult to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child, youth or vulnerable adult
- Any form of unwanted affection or physical contact
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You look really hot in those jeans” or “I bet the boys love it when you wear that.”
- Snapping bras, giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear
- Giving gifts or money to individual children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Private meals, meetings, outings or events with individual children, youth or vulnerable adults in a non public place
- Sexual intercourse or oral sex

Other Harmful Behavior

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Using, possessing, distributing or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while serving as adult leaders, participating or assisting with programs
- Dating or becoming romantically involved with a child, youth or vulnerable adults
- Children, youth or vulnerable adults left unsupervised or given an inappropriate amount of responsibility
- Adults sharing inappropriate jokes, stories or personal confessions with or around children, youth or vulnerable adults. This includes conversations about their own sexual activities, dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the internet with children, youth or vulnerable adults
- Dancing, games, skits, or jokes that make fun of a person’s gender, ethnicity, socio-economic reality or sexual orientation
- Possessing or viewing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program
- Transporting one child, youth or vulnerable adult alone
- Leaving one adult alone with one child, youth or vulnerable adult at any time, even when waiting for a parent who is running late to pick up the child or youth

- Asking a youth to transport another child, youth or vulnerable adult. Youth transporting youth should only be done with parent permission
- Adults meeting alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult in a private location - out of the sight of others – such as a Sunday School room, a home, hotel room or cabin
- Housing one adult with one child, youth or vulnerable adult at a camp, youth gathering or other overnight event, unless the adult is an immediate family member of the child, youth or vulnerable adult.
 - It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleeping in the same open space with multiple children, youth or vulnerable adults (example: a church basement or camp lodge).
- Dressing, undressing, bathing, or showering in the presence of children, youth or vulnerable adults unless unavoidable
- Using physical punishment in any way for behavior management
 - No form of physical discipline is acceptable.
 - This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting or any other physical force.
 - Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth or others.
- Using harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management
- Participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities

Monitoring and Supervision of Programs

The monitoring and supervision of programs and activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults is important and involves several aspects. Structural guidelines or standards for the programs and activities can provide a system for managing this supervision.

These include such things as:

1. Clarity on who approves new programs
2. How many adults need to be present
3. Ensuring Safe Haven Guidelines are followed

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Every program for children, youth or vulnerable adults should have established ratios for leaders and participants. When both males and females are participating, male and female adult presence is preferred. A ratio of one leader to six participants is a good place to start, taking into consideration the nature and age of participants.
- Existing programs (more than two years old) should be monitored for safety so that there is no assumption that care is taken to supervise programs as leadership is handed from one person or team to another over time.
- Documentation of applications, screening requirements and training are kept up to date over time so that standards do not decrease.
- Church Personnel over the age of 21 should directly supervise Church Personnel under the age of 18 and be physically present during all activities.
- Each program will consider age-appropriate procedures to ensure the safety of children, youth or vulnerable adults using restrooms and showers, baths, diapering, dressing. Personnel should remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.
- At least two unrelated (non-family members) Church Personnel are recommended to supervise activities.
- Signed Permission to Participate forms (including Emergency contact information and consent for treatment) should be required for all activities. See the appendix for a sample.

Action Plans

Confidentiality

When a child, youth or vulnerable adult asks if you can keep a secret, you should tell them that you are not able to make that commitment if someone has been hurt, is being hurt or could be hurt. Assure them that you care about them and that you want to hear what they have to say. You may be a mandated reporter who is required by law to share when you hear about abuse, suicide threats or information regarding crimes (see FAQs about Mandated Reporting in appendix)

Action plan to be followed immediately when you suspect abuse:

1. Document your concerns
2. Share concerns with supervisor, pastor or board chair
3. Report suspected abuse to legal authorities (usually county human services)
4. Continue to love and support the child or youth and seek to have appropriate follow up care by you or others in church

Action Plan for Known Abuse:

1. Give affirmation & hope
Praise the child, youth or vulnerable adult for having the courage to come forward.
Give hope through your willingness to listen, understand and care for them.
2. Give Assurance.
“I love you no matter what.”
“God loves you no matter what.”
“You can be totally honest.”
“Please don’t be afraid to tell the whole story to county workers or police. “
“One way you can help prevent others from being hurt is to be honest and truthful with the county workers and police about what happened.”
“I don’t know everything we’ll need to do, but I will stay with you and help you get through this.”
3. Encourage the child, youth or vulnerable adult to get professional help. Assist them or have someone in the church assist them in connecting with a professional counselor. Work with parents or guardians to make a plan for recovery.
4. Continue to be part of spiritual healing of the child, youth or vulnerable adult as appropriate.

Resources may be found at New Growth Press in books such as Caring for Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Basyle Tchividjian and Justin S. Holcomb or Recovering from Child Abuse: Healing and Hope for Victims by David Powlison

Reporting Inappropriate Behavior, Policy Violations or Abuse

Reporting Inappropriate Behavior or Policy Violations

1. When Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors, behaviors that are inconsistent with the policy they should promptly report their observations.
2. Such inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations that relate to interactions with children or youth should be reported in one of the following ways:
 - A telephone call, email, or meeting with the immediate supervisor of that person,
 - A telephone call, email, or meeting with the pastor or other leader in authority,
 - A telephone call, email, or meeting with the church council president, organizational or agency board president,
 - A telephone call, meeting, or email to the synod bishop, or assistants to the bishop.

If you're not sure what to do with the information you have, seek out someone who can advise you.

3. All reports of inappropriate behavior or policy violations with children, youth or vulnerable adults need to be taken seriously.

Reporting Abuse

1. Church Personnel may be Mandatory Reporters required to report known or suspected abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults to the appropriate county or state authorities. See FAQ's about Mandatory Reporting in appendix.
2. Failure to report suspected abuse of children youth or vulnerable adults is a crime if you are a mandatory reporter. Reports may be made confidentially and anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, "in good faith" means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.
3. In addition to reporting to the state authorities, Church Personnel are to report any suspected or known abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults that may have been perpetrated by Church Personnel directly to the pastor, organizational or council president so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims.
4. Reports of suspected or known abuse that involve rostered Church Personnel (pastors and deacons) should be reported to the Bishop or Synod Ministers.

Guidelines for Counseling and Advising

Unless you are a trained, certified, professional counselor, you are not qualified to handle every situation that may arise as you serve children, youth and vulnerable adults in ministry. Issues that should be referred to a trained professional after responsible reporting include:

- Neglect
- Emotional Abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation

Suicide

Suicide threats or casual remarks should always be taken seriously. Report this immediately to police or health care workers. The person may sound casual about suicide, but only because suicide seems no worse than the other mental pain that they are already suffering.

Parents/guardians and the pastor in the congregation should always be alerted about suicide threats. Suicide threats often require the involvement of mental health professionals.

More information can be found at <https://suicidepreventionministry.org>.

Suicide Prevention Ministry is an independent Lutheran organization.

Ministering to Sex Offenders

As we consider individuals with publicly known criminal records involving sexual offenses wanting to participate in worship and other ministry activities, this places the church's desire to welcome those in need in tension with creating a safe environment for others involved in ministry activities.

While excluding sex offenders from ministry activities and property would be a simple solution, many churches and ministries look on this as an unsatisfactory response. Including sex offenders in ministry activities and protecting others who attend their churches at the same time requires ministry leaders to develop a policy and establish procedures to accomplish these goals.

General sex offender policies may include:

- Launching a response team for handling allegations and information regarding a sex offender who is currently attending or who wishes to participate in ministry activities
- Establishing a chaperone team to provide security and accountability for sex offenders during ministry activities
- Creating a participation agreement with individual sex offenders, establishing the conditions of their participation in ministry activities
- If victim(s) of the sex offender are active in the congregation, primary consideration is given to the victim. The sex offender may not be in the same space as the person or people they have offended.

Please contact your insurance company for additional guidance in this area.

Social Media

"Social media are a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people." -Doreen Moran, Digital and Social Marketing

"Friending:"

Friending or following youth is a powerful ministry tool when used appropriately. When adults "friend" people under age 18 they should also request to "friend" their parents. Involving parents in this decision is important. An example of this request:

"I would like to request to be your child's friend on facebook and/or twitter. I prefer "friending" both youth and their parents as part of my practice to promote transparency and appropriate adult – youth relationships. I encourage you to monitor all of your child's social media practice. I am happy to support you in navigating social media with your youth."

This practice promotes the safety of children and youth while providing good accountability with the adults who work with youth.

Posts:

Social media, by its very definition is a public forum. There is no privacy in social media, even with the use of security settings. Think before you post. Would you say this in a room filled with congregation members? With youth?

Be aware of unintended consequences as people interpret posts.

Groups or Pages:

Consider communities that gather on social media in the same way you would a community gathered in a room or a home. Youth Pages or Groups should be monitored at all times by Safe Haven Adults.

Going Beyond the Basics: Poverty, Children and Advocacy

Children who live in poverty tend to suffer from a wide range of health related problems, including hearing and vision problems. Many poor families are unable to afford notepaper, books or activities that promote learning. Special fees for art supplies, science labs or team sports may be out of reach. Poor children have far less access than others to computers. People living in poverty often do not have health insurance. Poverty can bring a quiet sense of shame for children and their families.

Racism, sexism, citizenship status, and classism are all factors that affect the economic health and well-being of families. The impact of poverty makes it almost impossible for children to grow up feeling safe, secure and protected. When parents or care givers are consumed with survival issues, there is little time or energy left for tending to the emotional and spiritual needs of their children.

If our congregation is truly committed to helping the children, our focus needs to be broadened beyond our own families and the families in our congregations to encompass all children.

Effectively working towards a Safe Haven for children and youth living in poverty includes:

- a. Advocacy
- b. Discovery (learning)
- c. Accompaniment
- d. Community Organizing

Action Plan: What can my organization, agency, congregation or family do to respond to poverty with children youth or vulnerable adults?

- _____ Look with honesty at your neighborhood. Talk directly with local schools (teachers, counselors & principles) needs facing the children in your area. Consider the gifts of your congregation. Where is the match?
- _____ Consider larger issues: abuse, addiction, hunger, safety, housing, education, gangs, drugs. Pick one; become informed as to how this issue is being expressed in your community, where services are and where the needs are. Can you help?
- _____ Support parenting needs. Every community has this need. Every congregation can do this.
- _____ Create mentoring programs in partnership with local schools.
- _____ Be involved in any recovery programs needed, including responding to natural disasters.
- _____ Write letters to support change in public policy regarding needs, (Example: WIC, affordable housing)
- _____ Consider a sister-parish relationship with a church experiencing poverty in or out of this country.
- _____ Pray for the children others are not praying for. Be relentless. Involve others.
- _____ Contact local congregations whose membership is less economically privileged. How can you be stronger as partners?

Appendix

Congregations use standard forms to simplify managing their Safe Haven community. The forms in this appendix are samples of documents used in several congregations.

Please customize these pages to correspond with your own guidelines. If you need assistance developing other forms, contact the synod office. We will be happy to work with you.

All release forms should be reviewed by your congregation's attorney and insurance company.

Student & Adult Participation Form

Personal Information:

Participant's Full Name: _____ Prefers: _____ Current grade: _____

Name of School Student: _____ Birth Date: _____

T-Shirt Size: YS YM YL AS AM AL AXL AXXL

Mailing Address: _____

Student E-Mail: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Cell/Home #: _____

Cell/Home #: _____

Work #: _____

Work #: _____

Email: _____

Email: _____

In case of an emergency, contact this person if parents cannot be reached:

Name: _____ Relationship to student: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Medical Information

Does your child (or you) have any allergies or other medical conditions of which we should be aware?

☐ Yes ☐ No (If, yes, please explain on the back of this form)

Does your child (or do you) have any diagnoses or history of behavioral or learning concerns which we should be informed?

☐ Yes ☐ No (If, yes, please explain on the back of this form)

Insurance Co. _____

Phone Number: _____

Policy # _____

Name of Insured: _____

Participant's Covenant

In registering for this event, I realize that I may be participating in events which purposes may include: Christian learning, service and fun. I will refrain from using alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs - no smoking allowed for people under age 18. I will not bring anything that could be considered dangerous (fireworks, knives, lighter, etc.). I will participate fully in the life of the event, honor the time commitments, and respect the rights of others. I understand that failure to abide by this covenant will result in consequences; one of which includes being sent home immediately at my own expense.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Authorization for Participation of Minors (Under 18) I give permission for my child to participate in youth and family ministry activities sponsored by __ (ministry name) __, including travel to and from locations, for the period of _____. I understand that my child's failure to abide by the covenant may result in his or her being sent home at my own expense. (Adult violators will be asked to leave.)

Medical and Liability Release of a Minor or Self I, the individual or parent/guardian of _____ (child's name or your name), authorize a representative of __ (ministry name) __ to take such action as deemed necessary for the care, welfare and health of, myself/my child including the giving and consent of medical treatment. I hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless from any expense of claims of any nature __ (ministry name) __ and its representatives. I understand that I am responsible for any charges that may be incurred.

Media Release: I the individual or parent guardian of _____ give permission to use, publish, or disclose newsletters, brochures, periodicals, posters, websites, or other media related vehicles, any photographs, videos, audios, and any other material which I or my child may have appeared, spoken, written, or otherwise been represented. I understand that a copy of this release will be kept on file to indemnify __ (ministry name) __ against any of their use of the materials indicated.

Participant or Parent/Legal Guardian (if participant is under 18)

Date

First Aid Log

[illegible]

Writing a Group Covenant

Bible verses to look up and read together...

Matthew 22:34-40

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Luke 15:1-7

John 13:34-35

Matthew 18:15-17

1 Timothy 4:12

Question to answer for all participants...

What do these verses tell us about whom we are as people of God?

What do these verses tell us about how we should behave on our trip?

How will we solve conflicts?

How will we hold each other accountable?

Adult Commitment...

Adult sponsors should meet before the trip to work out the following:

What are the expectations of the adults on this trip?

What are the different gifts each person offers the trip community?

How will decisions be made?

How will accountability happen?

In case of a crisis or serious situation, who is the point person?

How will communication with families and the congregation happen?

Who will handle each step of the preparation process?

Who is responsible for follow up?

Sample Covenants

#1 Covenanting with children:

Keep it simple! The following example is used with Camp Hope Ministry, Inc. and signed by all participants. The meaning of each form of respect is discussed.

Showing respect for:

- J esus
- O thers
- Y ourself

#2 Covenanting for retreats with Jr & Sr High Youth:

Participant's Covenant:

MUST BE SIGNED BY EVERY PERSON ATTENDING EVENT!

In registering for this event, I am participating in an event which has as its purpose: Christian worship, fellowship and growth. I will refrain from using alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs – no smoking is allowed (for youth), I will not bring anything that could be considered dangerous (fireworks, knives, lighters, etc.) I will participate fully in the event, honor time commitments and respect the rights of others. I understand that failure to abide by this covenant will result in consequences; one of which includes being sent home immediately at my own expense.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

#3 Covenanting for an extended experience: A discussion about the following topics should be discussed and addressed in the covenant.

Respectful Behavior: How will you live together as a community during this experience?

Safety Issues: Name unsafe behavior or items that are prohibited in this experience.

Conflict Resolution: How will you manage conflicts as a group?

Consequences for breaking the covenant: Agree in advance how violations to the covenant will be handled.

Follow through: Are there expectations for the group after the experience?

Scholarship Request

Confidential

Event _____ Date of Event _____

Student name _____

Parent's name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Email _____

NOTES:

- Financial Assistance is available for all youth and family ministry events.
- All information on this form is completely confidential.
- The Scholarship Request Form should be submitted with the student's registration event form as soon as possible.
- The student's family is asked to contribute whatever amount of money they can.
- Financial Assistance, if approved, is available for the registration fee only.

Please describe the situation that causes your need at this time. Indicate how much the family can provide and the scholarship needed.

Approved amount _____

Staff signature _____ Date _____

Volunteer Application

Confidential

Check desired ministry area: ☐ Children ☐ Junior high ☐ High School ☐ Young Adult ☐ Other

First Name: _____ MI _____ Last _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone: _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Email: _____

Best times to reach me at home are: _____ May we call you at work? _____

Employer: _____ Employer's Address: _____

Position at work: _____ Years at current job: _____

Birth Date (please include year): _____

Church Membership: ☐ Member ☐ Regular Participant

How long have you participated in this church? ☐ less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 3-5 years ☐ 5+ yrs

Emergency contact Name: _____ Relationship: _____ Phone: _____

Previous Addresses for the last 10 years:

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

High school:	City, State:	Grad year:
College/tech school:	City, State:	Grad year:
Degree and major:	Minor	

Other education, training, and licenses applicable to volunteering:

Church (name, city, state, and zip)	Dates	Area of service	Contact Person	Phone
1.				
2.				
3.				

1. What have you been doing to grow spiritually in the past year?

2. Why are you interested in serving as a volunteer?

3. Explain your background in student ministry at this ministry or elsewhere if any.

4. What special qualities or qualifications would you contribute as a volunteer?

Please provide three character references (other than family members) who can identify your strengths and weaknesses and describe your background.

Name: _____ Home/Work Phone _____ Relationship _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Home/Work Phone _____ Relationship _____

Address: _____

Please circle the words that best describe you, and cross out words that least describe you.

trustworthy dependable active compassionate reliable self-starter punctual flexible laid-back quick thinker
spontaneous decisive teachable team player humorous thoughtful solitary leader cautious risk taker
patient reflective honest organized creative disciplined faithful critical thinker proactive team player

Have you had any prior injuries that might be aggravated by volunteering? _____

Are you currently taking any medication prescribed by a doctor for physical or other conditions that would affect your ministry? _____

Do you have any medical conditions that might be hazardous to others? _____

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, please explain.

Have you, at any time, been involved in or accused, rightly or wrongly, of sexual abuse, maltreatment, or neglect?

☐ yes ☐ no

Have you ever been accused or convicted of possession / sales of controlled substances or of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs?

☐ yes ☐ no

Are you using illegal drugs?

☐ yes ☐ no

Have you been arrested or convicted for any criminal act more serious than a traffic violation?

☐ yes ☐ no

Have you ever been involved romantically or sexually with any student in the youth ministry, or had sexual relations with any minor after you became an adult?

☐ yes ☐ no Have you ever gone through treatment for alcohol or drug abuse?

☐ yes ☐ no

Have you ever been asked to step away from ministry or work with students or children in any setting, paid or volunteer?

☐ yes ☐ no

Is there anything in your past or current life that might be a problem if we found out about it later?

☐ yes ☐ no

Is there anything else that might impact your service with children and youth?

☐ yes ☐ no

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, please explain.

I understand Safe Haven Guidelines and agree to be bound by them.

☐ yes ☐ no initial here: _____

I, the undersigned, give my authorization to _____ (ministry name) representatives—hereafter referred to as The Church—to verify the information on this form. The Church may contact my references and appropriate government agencies as deemed necessary in order to verify my suitability as a church youth ministry worker. I authorize The Church to perform background checks on myself and I will complete training on preventing and responding to abuse.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for student ministry. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by The Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature that may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, because of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Safe Haven Guidelines and to refrain from conduct unbecoming to Christ in the performance of my services on behalf of The Church. If I violate these guidelines, I understand that my volunteer status may be terminated. By signing this application, I state that all of the information given about myself is true.

I further state that **I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF, AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN ACT.** This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant's Name (printed) _____

Applicant's Signature

Date

[Ministry Name]
Child Abuse Prevention Code of Conduct

1. In order to protect [MINISTRY] staff, volunteers, and program participants – at no time during [MINISTRY] program may a volunteer or staff person be alone with a single child, youth or vulnerable adult (hereafter referred to as child or children) where they cannot be observed by others. As volunteers and staff supervise children, they should space themselves in a way that other staff can see them. 2. Volunteers and Staff shall never leave a child unsupervised. 3. Volunteers and Staff should conduct or supervise private activities in pairs – bathroom supervision, first aid, putting on bathing suits, taking showers, etc. When this is not feasible, staff should be positioned so that they are visible to others. 4. Volunteers and Staff shall not abuse children including: • physical abuse – strike, spank, shake, slap; • verbal abuse – humiliate, degrade, threaten; • sexual abuse – inappropriate touch or verbal exchange; • mental abuse – shaming, withholding love, cruelty; • neglect – withholding food, water, basic care, etc. Any type of abuse will not be tolerated and may be cause for immediate dismissal. 5. Volunteers and Staff must use positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than competition, comparison and criticism. Physical restraint is used only in pre-determined situations (necessary to protect the child or other children from harm), is only administered in a prescribed manner and must be documented in writing. 6. Volunteers and Staff respond to children with respect and consideration and treat all children equally regardless of sex, race, religion, culture.	7. Volunteers and Staff will respect children’s rights to not be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. 8. Volunteers and Staff will refrain from intimate displays of affection in the presence of children, parents, and staff. 9. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs during program hours is prohibited. 10. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children during program hours is prohibited. 11. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one’s personnel life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents is prohibited. 12. Volunteers and Staff will portray a positive role model for children by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, courtesy, tact, and maturity. 13. Volunteers and Staff may not be alone with children they meet in [MINISTRY] programs outside of the [MINISTRY]. This includes sleepovers, and inviting children to your home with no one else present. Babysitting is acceptable because it is initiated by the parent. 14. Volunteers and Staff are not to transport one child alone without written or verbal permission from parents or guardians. 15. Adult Volunteers and Staff may not date program participants under the age of 18 years of age. 16. Staff should not release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian. 17. Volunteers and Staff will document and report suspected child abuse.
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I understand that any violation of this Code of Conduct may result in being released from volunteering or employment.

Volunteer or Staff Signature

Supervisor Signature

Date

[MINISTRY] thanks the YMCA of the USA for the original creation of this code of conduct.

Frequently Asked Questions about Mandatory Reporting

Who Are Mandated Reporters?

All professionals in the following fields: education, health care, social services, childcare, mental health, law enforcement, correctional services, and clergy. All mandated reporters are required to report immediately upon learning of maltreatment.

What do I report?

Children

- Physical Abuse – includes any physical, threatened, or mental injury inflicted on a child by a person responsible for care of a child
- Sexual Abuse – includes any act or threatening of criminal sexual conduct by a person responsible for the child's care or by a person in a position of authority over a child
- Neglect – is the failure to provide a child with necessary food, shelter, clothing or medical care; the failure to protect a child from conditions or actions that seriously endanger the child's physical or mental health when reasonably able to do so

Vulnerable Adults

- Abuse, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, use of restraints, involuntary seclusion or punishment
- Neglect, including failure to provide necessary food, shelter, clothing, health care or supervision because of neglect by a caregiver or because the vulnerable adult cannot meet their own needs
- Financial exploitation, including theft or withholding of money or property and/or use of money or property not for the vulnerable adult's benefit.

Who do I report to?

Children

- Call your county's child protection department, the police department, or the county sheriff 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Human Services phone numbers can be found here: www.mn.gov/dhs/report-abuse/

Vulnerable Adults

- Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center at 1-844-880-1574 which is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week

When do I report?

- Most state law indicates that a report should be made when there is reason to believe that a child has been abused, is being abused, or is in danger of being abused. You should make the report as soon as you have reason to believe or receive a disclosure. You do not need to have proof and knowledge beyond a reasonable doubt that abuse is occurring. Again, this means that you do not have to have proof just knowledge to reasonably suspect abuse. Do not wait for proof or more information to make a report.

What information will I need to provide when making a report?

- You will need to provide the name, address, and age of the child or vulnerable adult, the name(s) and address(es) of the parents or guardians, and the nature of the abuse.
- The name of the perpetrator and the relationship to the child or vulnerable adult as well as any other details of the abuse are helpful. If the child or vulnerable adult does not readily supply this information, do not continue to question or investigate further. Law enforcement or child protective services will perform the investigation, and you can add details to a report if they later become available.

Do I need to provide my name when making a report?

You do not need to provide your name; however mandated reporters contact information is confidential and protected by law. While anonymous reports are allowable, it is helpful to provide your name in the event that further information is needed.

What are the penalties for not making a report?

A person who is required to report abuse and who fails to do so has committed a crime.

Am I liable if I make a report and it is not substantiated?

No. Those persons making a report in good faith are protected from liability.

What if I think I don't have enough information to make a report?

It is always best to err on the side of the child or vulnerable adult. The agency you are reporting to will help determine if there is enough information to proceed. If there is not, the report remains on file. If you receive additional information you can always call back and add to the report. If additional reports are made for that same person, then sometimes, multiple reports can lead to an investigation.

Should I tell parents or guardians of my report?

It is best not to contact parents or guardians about your suspicions before making a report. Doing so could result in retribution against the child or vulnerable adult, destruction of evidence, or temporary removal of a perpetrator from the home. Under some conditions you may need to maintain open communication with the parent or guardian. When this happens, never accuse a parent or guardian of wrongdoing and explain that you are legally responsible to report.

Additional Tips

When in doubt, call protective services, share the situation without using names and ask them if you should make a report.

Trust your gut. If something doesn't feel right, make a report. You do not need to understand the whole situation. You are providing a puzzle piece to professionals whose job it is to investigate abuse.

If you do not report, a child or vulnerable adult may never get the help they need.

What should I do if a child discloses abuse to me?

- When a child reports abuse to you, it is very important that you listen without expressing anger or disbelief. Children first need to know that they are believed and that the abuse is not their fault. Listen attentively and ask only open-ended questions, like "then what happened?"
- If possible, determine what happened, where and when it happened, and by whom. This is sometimes called a "minimal fact" interview. However, do not ask leading questions or try to draw out information, even if you are certain you know the answers. This can re-traumatize the child and contaminate the investigation.
- Do not attempt further investigation on your own – and especially do not investigate physical signs. Report immediately to law enforcement, child protective services, or both. Do not make false promises to the child like keeping the disclosure confidential. Trained investigators need to gather facts and details, and this may involve talking to the child.