

Respecting the Dignity of Children and Youth

Safe Church, Safe Communities
Standards Concerning Child or Youth Abuse Prevention
in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota

In our Baptismal Covenant, we promise to respect the dignity of every human being. This and other *Safe Church* policies establish and maintain standards intended to ensure that faith communities are safe places where all of God's people are loved and encouraged to grow into the people God calls us to be.

Each faith community should adopt its own set of Safe Church Policies and practices in accordance with canonical requirements. These updated ECMN Safe Church Policies can act as a starting point for your faith community. No policy can foresee every possible circumstance to which it may be applied. Please contact the office of the bishop for consultation and resources if assistance is needed.

Age Definitions:

- Child: Anyone under the age of 12 years.
- Youth: 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 and still in high school.
- Adult: Anyone who is 18 years old or older and not in high school.

Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse Defined:

Sexual misconduct by a caregiver, whether clergy or lay, employee or volunteer, includes the sexual abuse or sexual molestation (including exhibitionism, sexual exploitation, and genital contact) of a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent, as well as those who are not legally incompetent.

Child abuse by a caregiver, whether clergy or lay, employee or volunteer, includes physical abuse (any non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries), emotional abuse (including verbal assaults and excessive demands on a child or youth resulting in a negative self image and/or disturbed behavior, as well as bullying), and physical neglect.

Some Terms Used in this Document:

Intake Officer: The person(s) designated to receive information regarding an offense for which a member of the clergy may be held accountable under Title IV of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, which sets out the disciplinary process for clergy.

Leader: A person, adult or youth, who engages in ministry with children or youth. Examples include Sunday school teachers, camp counselors, and team members.

Mandated Reporter: A person who is required by state law to report reasonable suspicions of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation to the appropriate state agency. State law mandates that members of the clergy, persons performing official duties on behalf of a church or religious body, or persons employed by a religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train, or counsel a child on a regular basis report suspected abuse of children and/or youth.

For more information on Minnesota Guidelines for Mandated Reporting, please see:
<https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/licensing/maltreatment-investigations/mandated-reporter-resources/>

Pastoral Relationship: Any relationship (1) between a member of the clergy and any person to whom the member of the clergy provides or has provided counseling, pastoral care, spiritual direction or spiritual guidance, or from whom such member of the clergy has received information within the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent, or (2) between a lay minister and any person to whom the lay minister is offering prayer, ministry, and/or any person from whom the lay minister has received sensitive, personal, or confidential information in the course of offering ministry.

Supervisor: A person who has oversight responsibilities for a ministry program and/or Leaders in a ministry program.

Screening of Employees and Volunteers:

Volunteer leaders and supervisors must be known and active in any entity for at least six months before engaging in ministry with children and youth.

In the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, all entities are required to screen all employees and volunteers working with children and youth. For some positions, screening consists only of a public records check. For other positions there are additional screening requirements of a written application, interview, and reference verification. It is imperative to comply with Minnesota law when conducting a public records check:

- Such checks must be completed before the employee or volunteer begins interacting with children and youth;
- Public records checks shall include all available criminal records and sex offender registries;
- A Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) records check is needed if transporting children and youth as part of, or an extension of, ministry, or for a congregation-sponsored event;
- A credit check is required for anyone with check signing authority; and
- Public records checks must be updated at least every three years.

Each entity must keep and maintain all application and screening records secure and confidential in its office. This includes a signature by each applicant verifying receipt of a copy of this policy, including any special procedures or variations approved for particular circumstances.

Education and Training:

All persons who engage in ministry with children and youth shall have training that is tailored to their role and ministry function. Training shall be appropriate to each person's function according to the latest standards, found on the Safe Church page of the diocesan website.

Certification of training shall be renewed every three years, and the organization shall keep records sufficient to evidence compliance with this policy.

Specific training course requirements will be adopted by the Council of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota and communicated in a timely manner to congregations for implementation.

As of January of 2023, the Episcopal Church in Minnesota encourages completing Safe Church training and record keeping via Praesidium Academy, contracted by the Church Pension Group and the Episcopal Church.

For current Safe Church training standards, modules, and practices, please refer to the diocese' website, or direct questions to the bishop's staff member(s) responsible for Safe Church training.

Monitoring and Supervision:

All people who minister to children and youth will have ongoing supervision. Such supervision shall review the scope, accountability, and responsibility of the ministry with the person engaged in the ministry. Each person engaged in such a ministry should know who supervises their ministry and how to contact the supervisor at all times.

A. Unrelated Adults Required

There shall be at least two unrelated adults (at least two years older than the eldest participant) present at ministry settings and events designed for children and youth. If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youth, that adult shall report those circumstances to the supervisor as soon as possible.

Only one adult may be sufficient in well-monitored, visually accessible program space on the congregation's property, provided that another adult can maintain visual contact with the adult program leader. This can be accomplished by designating an individual to conduct frequent random checks of spaces throughout the building(s). See also sections on Overnight Programs and Transportation.

B. Creating Safe Space for Children and Youth

To create a safe space, it is necessary to anticipate and avoid circumstances in which children and youth are exposed to inappropriate materials, unmonitored adult contact, or unsupervised peer contact.

- Alcohol (sacramental or otherwise) shall not be stored in publicly accessible areas.
- Children and youth shall have adequate supervision when using electronic devices belonging to any church organization. Devices shall have adequate password protection. Each user shall have their own account and password. See Diocesan Guidelines for Social Media and Electronic Communications (Appendix A).
- Anyone with keys or electronic access to the congregation's buildings shall meet all the requirements for screening and training.
- Spaces not in use should not be readily accessible.

C. One-to-One Conversations with Children or Youth

When one-to-one conversations occur between an adult and a child or youth, another unrelated adult is either to be present or capable of visually monitoring the conversation.

- Planned or unplanned on-site conversations can take place in a public location, away from where others can hear but in view of other adults.
- Planned off-site conversations/meetings can take place in a public place (such as a coffee shop or restaurant) in view of other adults.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if a child or youth discloses a situation pertaining to abuse, neglect, self-harm, or exploitation because of mandatory reporting laws.

Impulsive or secretive activity, online or in-person with children or youth, may foster a high-risk situation, and is therefore to be avoided. See Appendix A.

D. Privacy

A child or youth who expresses the need or desire for increased privacy should be provided with reasonable alternative arrangements. Reasonable alternative arrangements may include the use of a private area, or a separate changing schedule, or use of a single stall restroom. Any alternative arrangement should be provided in a way that protects the child or youth's ability to keep their status confidential. They should not be required to use a locker room, restroom, or sleeping accommodations that conflict with their gender identity.

Safe bathroom/shower facilities will be provided. Adults should either have separate shower facilities or shower at other times than the youth. Separate dressing facilities should also be provided. See section on Overnight Programs.

Please see the Episcopal Church in Minnesota website for more resources and information regarding camp sleeping arrangements, including best practices for LGBTQIA.

E. Violence and Weapons

No one is to strike, hit, or otherwise physically threaten or harm anyone at any time.

Bullying of any kind by anyone is prohibited.

Children and youth shall not have weapons of any kind at any event or program for children or youth. Exceptions to this restriction may be made for camp programs or other specific programs with prior approval.

F. Behavioral Standards for Adults in Ministry with Children or Youth

Adults who work with children and youth are expected to model the patterns of healthy relationships that children and youth deserve in all settings. Interactions should meet all requirements outlined above, and adults should be discouraged from initiating a private relationship with any unrelated child or youth away from sanctioned activities of the congregation.

Adults may offer appropriate physical expressions of care, which may include:

- High fives and fist bumps;
- Hand-holding while walking with small children or in prayer;
- Brief touching of shoulders, hands, or arms;
- “Laying on of hands” under appropriate pastoral supervision;
- Brief hugs and arms around shoulders.

Adults shall not under any circumstances:

- Provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, marijuana, drugs, cigarettes, tobacco products, e-cigarettes, vapes, or pornography;
- Arrive under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, illegal drugs, or misused legal drugs at any children’s or youth event or when they are responsible for children or youth at an event;
- Consume non-sacramental alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs at any children’s or youth event or when they are responsible for children or youth at an event;
- Engage in illegal behavior or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior;
- Engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit, or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth; or
- Apart from planned pre-approved educational programs, discuss their own sexual activities, fantasies, or their own use or abuse of drugs or alcohol with children or youth.

G. Special Considerations for Off-Site Programming

Off-site programs, trips, and events present additional challenges for maintaining best practices for safe and healthy ministry.

Prior Approvals

Written parental approval is required prior to viewing any movie, whether offsite or on-site, rated “PG-13” or above, or participating in any conversation or program containing sexually explicit or violent content. These same prior approvals are required when the site is a private residence, hosting such events as cook-outs, pool parties, progressive dinners, etc.

Registration, Waiver, and Release Forms

All children, youth, and adults shall complete and sign a registration form and a waiver and release form before participating in any off-site programs of the congregation. Confidentiality must be preserved with respect to medical and other sensitive information in the forms. Such forms can encompass a program year.

- There must be a parent/guardian’s signature on all release and waiver forms for minors. Digital signatures are acceptable.
- Completed release and waiver forms shall be maintained in a secure location on-site or online. Such forms shall be saved for a minimum of ten years or until the participant attains the age of 25, whichever is greater.
- Permission slips shall be provided for each off-site event and shall be signed by the parent/guardian.
- Prior permission for a minor to be photographed or recorded on film, videotape, audiotape, or other electronic media is required from a parent/guardian.

First Aid and Medications

- Current certification in First Aid, CPR, and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is strongly encouraged for those who work with children and youth.
- A first aid kit, appropriately stocked for the event and participants, shall be available in an easily accessible location.
- A record must be kept of all medication or first aid given to a participant. This record shall include the participant’s name, the date and time of service, the name of the person administering medication or treatment, and a description of the medication, dosage, and/or treatment given.
- All medications (prescription and over the counter) belonging to minors shall be given to a responsible person, unless otherwise agreed upon by the parents and the responsible person. Exceptions may include inhalers, epi-pens, and birth control pills.
- Only the responsible person, or an adult designee, shall administer medications.

Supervision

At any gathering of children or youth, there shall be at least two unrelated adults, with one being age 25 or older.

Minimum ratios of adult to child/youth shall be in accordance with American Camp Association (ACA) guidelines as follows:

- 5 years & younger — 1 adult for each five overnight participants and 1 adult for each six day participants
- 6–8 years — 1:6 for overnight, and 1:8 for day
- 9–14 years — 1:8 for overnight and 1:10 for day
- 15–18 years — 1:10 for overnight and 1:12 for day

When there are new leaders-in-training, the leadership teams should also have a reasonable number of experienced adult leaders to provide support.

Insurance

All trips to off-site destinations must have adequate insurance in case of emergency.

H. Overnight Programs

Overnight programs shall provide safe, supervised sleeping arrangements.

- No bed, cot, or sleeping bag shall have more than one person sleeping in it.
- Supervision by two unrelated adults is required in any space where one or more youth are sleeping.
- It is acceptable for all participants to sleep in the same open area when dressing rooms and bathrooms provide appropriate privacy.

During hotel stays:

- At least 2 children or 2 youth will be in each room.
- Adult supervisors or chaperones will have rooms on the same floor, scattered among the rooms with children or youth, with at least one adult room by the stairs or elevators;
- An adult leader assigns rooms and room occupants.

I. Transportation

For events that originate and/or terminate at the diocesan, congregation, or organization's facility, all drivers (other than those who are driving only themselves or immediate family members) must be at least 21 years of age and provide proof of insurance and a current driver's license, a completed volunteer driver information form, and have a satisfactory DMV records check.

Parents/guardians are responsible for the transportation and safety of their children and/or youth to and from the event. This responsibility includes the transportation of any other passengers in their vehicle.

J. Camps

All camps and camping programs of the diocese shall follow the guidelines for offsite programming established in this policy. In addition, camps should aim to follow American Camp Association standards to the best of the camp's ability.

K. Travel

Adult Leaders and Chaperones

Minimum ratios of adult to youth need to be greater due to the possibility of leaving an adult behind with a participant in the event of a medical emergency.

- 9–14 years — 1:5
- 15–18 years — 1:7

Regardless of group size, no group should travel with fewer than three adult chaperones. One adult, minimum age 25, should serve as the travel administrator who is responsible for all aspects of the trip, including carrying all necessary documentation, contacts, and forms including medical releases, community covenant, emergency contacts, itineraries, and cash and/or credit card capacity to address emergencies.

It is a best practice that, one adult, minimum age 25, should hold a current medical certification to manage administration of necessary and permissible medications, administer immediate and necessary first aid, and triage medical situations to determine if care of an individual needs to be taken to a higher level of care. When this is not possible, one person should be designated to supervise the administration of medications as instructed on medical release forms, and a clinic near the destination should be identified ahead of time in order to respond to health emergencies as rapidly as possible.

A copy of all documents should be left with an accountable person at the entity's office. That person should also serve as the local emergency contact person for communications between the traveling group and families at home.

Insurance for Travel

Short-term trip or supplemental insurance, available through the congregation's insurance provider as an added rider must be secured.

It is recommended that all travelers carry evidence of personal health insurance. Because not all individuals have access to affordable and adequate health insurance, it is recommended that health insurance be added to trip insurance.

L. Suspected Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation of Children and Youth or Violations of this Policy:

Anyone who has reason to suspect that abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children or youth has taken place should immediately inform one or more of the following:

- The bishop diocesan or the canon to the ordinary in the case of the diocese;
- Member of the clergy in charge or the senior warden in the case of a congregation;
- The director, head, or other governing officer in the case of other organizations; and/or
- The Intake Officer in case a member of the clergy is suspected of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation, or any other form of misconduct.

The person(s) receiving reports of violations of this policy shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected.

M. Congregation and Organization Adoption, Implementation, and Audit

Congregations will adopt a policy for the protection of children and youth that is consistent with or exceeds the requirements of this policy. The policy will be available to all adults and paid and unpaid volunteers who minister to children or youth.

Each congregation and organization will conduct a self-audit annually to confirm compliance with Safe Church policies and report the audit to the bishop's office.

The audit will include confirmation of:

- Public records checks, application forms, records of screening and reference verification of paid and unpaid persons;
- Records of compliance with screening and training protocols;
- Procedures for responding to concerns and incidents; and
- Evidence of compliance with "safe space" requirements.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Social Media and Electronic Communications

1. Adults who work with youth should maintain appropriately stringent privacy settings on all social media networks.
2. Adults interacting with youth via social media are encouraged to set up a closed (but not hidden) group to which other adults have administrative access. Youth who submit friend requests to an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be admitted as a friend on the adult's personal account.
3. Adults should not submit friend requests to youth.
4. Establish and clearly communicate norms for behavior and appropriate content for online youth groups, and moderate accordingly.
5. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused, neglected or exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and appropriate legal authorities.
6. Adult leaders of youth groups and youth members who depart should be removed immediately.
7. It is good practice to include at least one other adult in text message or e-mail correspondence with youth, when appropriate. Also, text and e-mail only during appropriate hours (for example, not during school hours or late at night).

E-mail considerations:

1. E-mail should not be used for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, or emotionally charged.
2. When sending large group e-mails, respect and protect recipients' privacy by placing their addresses in the "blind" BCC field.

Publishing and posting online content:

1. Common sense and common courtesy are two good guides.
2. Always cite sources and make sure content comes from credible ones before sharing or posting. Respect copyrights.
3. Secure signed release forms from parents or guardians of minors participating in children's activities that may be photographed or videoed for online distribution.
4. Do not post contact information for minors.