

I. INTRODUCTION

The Office of Youth Ministry has received numerous requests from congregations for aid in developing documents that would provide guidelines to foster the protection of children and youth.

To encourage and empower congregations with this task, the Synod Youth Mission Force of the Delaware Maryland Synod has created a resource with regard to the creation and implementation of a child protection policy at the congregational level.

The suggestions included in this resource are intended to aid in the protection of children and youth who participate in church sponsored activities and to aid in the protection of youth workers from false allegations.

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III. DEFINITIONS

A child or youth is any person considered to be a minor under the laws of the state in which the church resides.

Sexual abuse and physical abuse are defined by the statute of each locality and should be obtained from the local Department of Social Services.

An employee is anyone called by or hired to work for the church for salary or wages or is paid by other arrangement.

A volunteer is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or other pecuniary benefits.

A youth worker is anyone who works with children and/or youth. The term youth worker applies to both employees and volunteers.

IV. STATUTES

The child abuse statute is available from the local department of Social Services.

V. STANDARDS

Abuse Prohibited: Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the children and youth of the church shall not violate their responsibility by engaging in acts of sexual or physical abuse.

Two-Adult Rule: At least two (2) youth workers, one (1) over the age of 21, shall be present in all church activities involving youth. Activities meeting in a classroom setting (e.g. Sunday school, vacation bible School, choir rehearsals) may be supervised by one (1) youth worker in the classroom when there is visual access to the classroom (e.g. a door with a window, an open door) and there are other youth workers present in the immediate vicinity.

Recommended adult to child ratios for children in a classroom setting are as follows:

0-24 months	1 adult to 3 children
2 years old or a mixed group including 2-year-olds	1 adult to 6 children
3 to 5 year old	1 adult to 10 children
6 to 8 year old	1 adult to 15 children

(Information provided by National Association for the Education of Young Children)

Assessment of the capability and training of staff and volunteers as well as special needs of the children should supercede these recommendations when deciding upon ratios.

Transportation of Youth: When youth are transported as part of a church activity, they shall be transported in groups with at least two (2) youth workers in each vehicle unless the senior pastor or his/her designee waives this requirement. Waivers will be granted when the number and age of youth to be transported in each vehicle provides adequate protection against abuse. If a waiver is granted, youth workers should obtain, in advance of the trip, written permission from the parent or guardian for his/her child to accept such transportation arrangements. If a waiver is not granted and an emergency arises which necessitates that two adults cannot be in a car the youth worker supervising the activity is advised to report the situation to the senior pastor or his/her designee immediately.

Permission Slips: Youth must have permission to participate in any overnight activity or any activity that takes place away from church property. That permission must be in writing, signed by a parent or guardian. It must identify the activity in which the youth is participating. The senior pastor or his/her designee may waive the requirement for the permission slip where it would serve no useful purpose (for example, a picnic off church property where the youth would be accompanied by a parent.)

Overnight rule: It is recommended that churches use the recommendations stated for adult to youth ratios when planning overnight trips. It is further recommended that two (2) of the youth workers be at least 21 years of age. Overnight coed activities must be chaperoned by both male and female youth workers. Each youth worker must occupy a bed, sleeping bag, or mattress by him/herself. If providing adequate supervision to youth requires the youth worker(s) to occupy the same room or tent as the youth, the permission slips should inform parents of the activity and the sleeping arrangements. Youth must provide these written permission slips signed by a parent or guardian to participate in overnight activities.

VI. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Applications, Interviews, References Required: Anyone who wishes to work with children or youth within the church, including employees and volunteers who have worked with youth within the church for less than the past three years, are required to submit an application. The application will request information regarding the applicant's suitability to work with youth and will request authorization for church officials to obtain from law enforcement authorities any information they have regarding the applicant. The church should decide whom on the staff or church council will initiate criminal background checks with the concurrence of the senior pastor. An interview with appropriate staff as designated by the pastor and church council is also required. The interview may be waived where the youth worker has been working in the church for more than one year prior to the child protection policy. Applications and related papers will be kept confidential (i.e. maintained in locked files with access limited to those with a clear need for the information they contain.)

Six-Month Waiting Rule: Applications to serve as a volunteer youth worker shall not be approved unless the applicant has been a church member for no less than six (6) months.

VII. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

All alleged incidents of child physical and sexual abuse should be reported to the appropriate government officials as required by law. Each church needs to decide who on the staff will be involved in the reporting. It is recommended that the person making the report as well as all church officials cooperate fully with government authorities regarding the allegations.

VIII. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

It is important that all allegations of abuse be taken seriously. In every situation, respect for the dignity, right to privacy and confidentiality of all persons involved must be maintained.

The person who has been accused should be relieved of his/her duties until all of the authorities have completed their investigation. If the person is a paid employee, the personnel committee of the church, or similar group will decide between paid or unpaid administrative leave. The investigating authority should advise the church whether or not other parents, or staff should be informed of the allegations.

The church should designate one person as a spokesperson should media attention arise. This person and this person only will be the one through whom all media contacts are made.

Close documentation should be maintained beginning with the report of abuse.

The child and parents should be referred to counseling within the community as an additional support service.

The Synod staff may be contacted for additional support, help and resources.

APPLICATION TO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

This application is a confidential, mandatory part of a process to help the church provide a safe, nurturing Christian environment for our children and youth. Persons responsible for the care and supervision of our children are in a special position of trust and confidence. Therefore, all persons seeking to work with children must complete this application.

Personal Information

Please attach a copy of our driver's license or other photographic identification.

Name _____ Date _____

Social Security # _____ Driver's License # _____

Present Address _____

Telephone # (home) _____ (work) _____

Permanent address you have maintained at any time during the last five (5) years

Are you 18 years of age or older? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been charged or convicted of a crime, particularly a crime involving the sexual or physical abuse of children? Yes _____ No _____

If Yes, Please explain

Church of Youth Related Work

Name and address of any additional church of which you are currently a member.

Names and addresses of all the churches you have attended on a regular basis at any time during the last five (5) years.

Please tell us about any church work you may have done with children and/or youth during the last five years, giving the church's name, address, date and participation and the names of persons who would know about your work.

Tell us about your work with children or youth at any time during the last five (5) years excluding the work listed in response to the previous question. Provide the organization's name, address, and dates of work and persons who know about your work.

List your talents, training and education that might help enrich the lives of our children and youth.

Personal References

Please list three (3) references to include 1 professional, not former employees or relatives. These people need to have known you over the last five (5) years.

Name _____ Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____

Name _____ Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____

Name _____ Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____

The information in the application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize my references and churches listed in this application to give any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness to work with children and youth. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization including recording custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family on account 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 bylaws and policies of the church and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in performance of my service on behalf of the church. I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT.

Applicants Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____