



### **Safety Policy Template**

*(use this template to create your specific church/organization child, youth, and vulnerable adult safety policy. The highlighted text shows area where changes and/or additions are allowed.*

*There are questions along the way to assist you and your working committee in your conversation as you decide what to include in this policy.*

*Remember this policy must be adopted by the body that governs the church/organization, and additionally by the Trustees of each church. It must be implemented by all entities in your congregation. It is our recommendation that you review this policy annually.)*

### **CHILD, YOUTH & VULNERABLE ADULT SAFETY POLICY MANDATORY STANDARDS FOR THE *(insert name of your church/organization here)* *(insert date of approval here)***

#### **Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church**

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV).

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

#### **Call**

In response to God’s call to care for the vulnerable, *(insert name of your church/organization here)* is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care. This commitment is in harmony with the Book of Resolutions (§162 *Social Principles*) and the baptismal covenant (*United Methodist Hymnal*).

#### **Purpose**

As part of the Rio Texas Conference, *(insert name of your church/organization here)* is determined to provide an environment in which Participants (as defined herein) are safe from Neglect or Abuse. The scope of this policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff, volunteers, clergy, or lay persons in the *(insert name of your church/organization here)* who have direct or indirect contact with Participants (Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults). This policy sets forth minimum mandatory requirements for screening and training of clergy, lay, staff, or volunteers. Implementation of mandatory ministry procedures and accountability action is required for all ministry leaders within the *(insert name of your church/organization here)* and the Rio Texas Conference.

#### **Commitment**

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Adult Safety, June 2017, *(insert name of your church/organization here)* has adopted



the following set of Safety Procedures to be implemented no later than the close of Annual Conference 2018. Copies of both documents can be obtained through the (insert name of your church/organization here) office.

This safety policy meets or exceeds the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017 and has been reviewed and approved by the (insert name of the body that governs the church/organization) and additionally the Trustees of each church. Any future revisions shall as a minimum meet or exceed the requirements of the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church Policy on Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety, June 2017, and be reviewed and approved by the (insert name of the body that governs the church/organization) and additionally the Trustees of each church.) before implementation.

(insert name of your church/organization here) is fortunate to have persons with exceptional talent for teaching and supporting the spiritual nurture of our children and youth. We wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. These safety procedures are for the well-being of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the ministries of (insert name of your church/organization here). We recognize that safety is an issue that involves the whole church family, not just those who work directly in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Therefore, we are asking all of our church family to be informed and help us provide a safe environment for ministry.

## Definitions

- A. **Abuse:** is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily or emotional harm to a Participant. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk, to a Participant by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation, or prostitution upon the Participant.
- B. **Adult Leader: is any person** including any paid employee, volunteer, clergy, or lay person in the conference, district, or local church who has the responsibility for the care and Supervision of a Participant at an event. Adult Leaders shall no longer be in High School.
- C. **Applicant:** is any person 18 years of age or older seeking to become an Adult Leader in a local church or for a district or conference event.
- D. **Assistant Leader:** is any person 16 years of age or older who has been through the application and safety certification process, but does not qualify for a background check. These are still considered to be Participants and cannot fill the role of a mandatory Adult Leader.
- E. **Day Ministry Event:** is an activity, or occasion sponsored by (insert name of your church/organization here) that involves a gathering and care of Participants during the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm, and does not occur for more than four hours per day in duration of four or more consecutive days.
- F. **Exploitation:** is obtaining or using another person's income, assets, or possessions with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.



- G. **Neglect:** is failure to provide nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.
- H. **Overnight/Extended Hour Ministry Event:** a local church, conference, or district sponsored activity, or occasion that involves a gathering and care of Participants for more than four hours per day in duration of four consecutive days or involves an overnight stay.
- I. **Participant:** is a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult that is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by *(insert name of your church/organization here)*.
1. **Child:** is any person 11 years of age or younger.
  2. **Youth:** is a person 12-17 years of age.
  3. **Vulnerable Adult:** persons over 18 years of age with physical, mental, and/or developmental disabilities.
- J. **Prostitution:** to engage in, to offer to engage, or to force a Participant to engage in sexual contact by either soliciting or receiving a fee or other benefit.
- K. **Rule of Three:** The presence of two unrelated Adult Leaders at all ministry events involving Participants. Any engagement with a Participant requires the presence of two Adult Leaders.
- L. **Safety Policy Administrator:** Your church may choose to identify a staff person, lay person, or committee/task force with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of your safety policy. You might want to add some verbiage here. Here is an example of what might be included: The person at *(insert name of your church/organization here)* charged with the maintenance, implementation, and enforcement of the *(insert name of your church/organization here)* Safety Policy. The Safety Policy Administrator may put together a team to help with this task, but he/she retains overall responsibility. The Safety Policy Administrator reports directly to the senior pastor.
- M. **Sexual Abuse:** is any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.
- N. **Sexual Exploitation:** is any deliberate act that allows or encourages a Participant to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photography, filming, or depiction of a Participant as prohibited under Texas law.
- O. **Supervision:** is the leadership role of a person who is in charge of a group of Participants, giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety and being the leader in all situations.
- P. *For Conversation: Are there other definitions your church would like to add for clarification? Discuss in your Safety Policy Committee (or similar work team) and add them here- making sure to place any new definitions they add in alphabetical order with the others, for ease of review.*

### **SAFE MINISTRY MANDATES**

In accordance with the Rio Texas Conference Safety policy, *(insert name of your church/organization here)* commits to provide adequate Supervision from Adult Leaders.



- A. All ministry events with Participants shall follow the Rule of Three with a minimum of one Adult Leader for every eight Participants. *For Conversation: Does your church want to add other specifics here? Recommended ratios include: Safe Ratios (following the National Association for the Education of Young Children guidelines for safety):*
- infants- 1:3*
  - toddlers- 1:4*
  - children- 1:6*
  - Youth- 1:8*
  - Special needs: (insert name of your church/organization here) will provide a buddy/faith friend for children or youth with special needs. This is in addition to the required 2 certified adult minimum.*
- B. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another Adult Leader. *For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include regarding expected practices for mentoring or consulting? For example- do you ask all mentor/consulting conversations to be held at your church? Do you require that all doors have windows or that doors shall remain open when there is only one adult in the room?*
- C. 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.
- D. Assistant Leaders must work under the Supervision of two Adult Leaders.
- E. Overnight Ministry Events
- Co-ed Overnight Ministry Events require co-ed Adult Leaders.
  - Sleeping accommodations shall include sleeping distance of no less than three feet between Adult Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Participants.
  - Every Participant shall have a completed medical release and parental/legal guardian permission form before they will be permitted to participate at any Overnight Ministry Event.
  - For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include regarding expected practices and overnight ministry events?*
- F. Travel
- Only Adult Leaders will be permitted to drive Participants to ministry events. Drivers must be:
    - 21 years or older
    - have a valid driver's license
    - proof of insurance at the state's minimum limits
    - not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication, impaired, etc.).
  - Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.
  - For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include regarding expected practices for driving? For example- will you require 2 certified adults to be present in every car organized by the church for ministry transportation? If you travel a certain distance (ex: longer than 6 hours) will you require adults to switch drivers allowing the other to rest? If you*



*do not require 2 certified adults in vehicles- will you require persons to follow each other remaining in the other's eye sight?*

- 4. You might choose to state a limit of hours one persons is permitted to drive at a time. For example you might choose to say: Drivers for any ministry event shall only drive for 4 hours before switching to another driver. Following the 4 hour drive time, adults must take an 8 hour break before driving again.*

G. Phone, vídeo, and online communication:

1. Adult Leaders must notify parents/legal guardians before requesting access, friending, texting, contacting a Participant via social media, or using any other form of online phone/video communication.
2. Using the Rule of Three, all group or social media communications must include two Adult Leaders who serve as administrators/moderators. All groups must be closed, private, and shall require the site administrator's approval to join.
- 3. For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include regarding expected practices for phone, video, and/or online communication? For example: Are there specific times ministry leaders will be permitted to text or call a vulnerable person? Do you require ministry leaders to copy parents/guardians on all communication?*

- H. Adult Leaders shall not photograph Participants for use on internet or in print media without written permission of parent/legal guardian. A Social Media best practice resource will be provided by the Mission Vitality Center. *For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include regarding expected practices for photography? For example: Does your church commit to withholding details of vulnerable persons (Name, age, location) when publishing their photos*

## **IMPLEMENTATION: SCREENING, TRAINING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **A. SCREENING**

1. Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders shall submit an application for ministry along with three (work, volunteer, or ministry) references.
2. Applicants should be active in the local church/ministry for a minimum of six months prior to the event or provide additional references affirming their positive leadership with Participants in another ministry setting. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period. In the case of Adult Ministry Leaders or Assistant Leaders, previous ministry experience within the Rio Texas Conference may be transferred in lieu of the six-month waiting period pending approval of Rio Texas Conference office.
3. References shall be checked by conference, district, or local church staff responsible for Applicants.
4. Adult Leaders shall:
  - a. Submit a signed authorization form for a criminal background screening to be completed by the Rio Texas Conference office every two years. This will



include a signed statement that they are not aware of any allegations that would prevent them from working with Participants.

- b. If results of the screening raise questions about fitness of the Applicant, the Rio Texas Conference office shall disapprove the application and notify the event leader and/or local church. Results of criminal background screenings shall be kept confidential. Applicants can request that the conference office share the results of their criminal background screening with another district or local church in the Rio Texas Conference via a signed request authorization form.
5. *For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include for screening? Some churches include an interview with the volunteer or a recommendation from a church member.*

## B. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must be certified for their work at conference, district, and local church events. Certification includes:

1. Evaluation of and submission of the local church policy every year.
  - a. *For Conversation: Are there other expectations that your church would like to include for training? Insert your local church expectations here.*
  - b. *Sample verbiage: All Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders must receive, read, and acknowledge their understanding of the most recent version of (insert name of your church/organization here)'s Child, Safety, and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy by signing and dating the policy. This signed copy will be kept on file in the (insert name of your church/organization here). office. Any Adult Leader or Assistant Leader will receive his or her own copy for future reference.*
2. Completion of Abuse prevention training every year.
3. Safety Certification every two years. Certification will include the following modules:
  - a. Overview of Rio Texas Conference policy.
  - b. Abuse prevention.
  - c. Creating safe spaces, best practices for ministry, sexual ethics and appropriate leader behavior.
  - d. Overnight/extended hour ministry training.
  - e. The certification process will be designed by the Rio Texas Conference and will be offered by trained persons in every district.
4. *If you choose to identify a Safety Policy Administrator in your policy, you might choose to add the following language:*
  - a. *The Safety Policy Administrator is responsible for maintaining an up-to-date list of qualified Adult Leaders showing the latest date of their qualification or recertification.*
  - b. *The Safety policy Administrator shall ensure that each Adult Leader reviews the provisions of this Safety Policy at least annually.*



**c. The Safety Policy Administrator shall participate in the reporting of all allegations of abuse**

### C. ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Every ministry of the Rio Texas Annual Conference, district, and local church shall have a policy that is compliant with the minimum standards of this Rio Texas Policy and must review their policy annually.
2. The Mission Vitality Center at the Rio Texas Conference office will work alongside district staff to ensure that policies are adopted and followed.
3. The Rio Texas Conference Uniting Table in consultation with the Conference Mission Vitality Center shall be responsible for reviewing and revising the Rio Texas Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy.
4. Local churches shall submit their policy and a report on how they are in compliance with their policy annually to the District Superintendent at their charge or church conference.
5. Clergy shall document the date and facilitator when they complete safety certification to their District Superintendent annually via the annual inventory/clergy consultation form.
6. District staff will annually submit a report to the Mission Vitality Center and Office of Intergenerational Discipleship, identifying churches who are in compliance with this policy and/or those still in need of a policy or training.
7. The Mission Vitality Center will work with districts and local churches to keep track of and ensure all conference, district, and local church ministries are in compliance with this policy.
8. A copy of the conference procedures shall be retained in the Rio Texas Conference office.

### **REPORTING ABUSE**

- A.** *(insert name of your church/organization here)* procedures for reporting Abuse are as follows: *(Please add your procedures here.)*
- B.** All reports of alleged Abuse should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of *(please insert position of the person to whom reports of abuse will be brought)*. Texas is a mandatory reporting state. Reports of Abuse, Neglect, Exploitation or Sexual Exploitation of Participants shall be made within 48 hours of suspicion to the Department of Family and Protective services through the Texas Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400 or [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org). Adult Leaders shall report all abuse by anyone- No Abuse should be considered trivial and not reported.
- C.** Any Adult Leader or Assistant Leader accused of Abuse shall be immediately relieved of duties related to any conference, district, or local church event. *(insert the position of the person who will make the decision to relieve someone of their duties)* **You might also choose to add clarifications and/or church procedures here.**
- D.** In the case of Abuse allegations, the senior pastor, District Superintendent, and/or Bishop shall be notified immediately. Parents or legal guardians should be notified in appropriate circumstances.



- E.** It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the accused and to restore such persons to wholeness. *(insert name of your church/organization here)* shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place. *You may choose to add ways you will provide support here. Consider: who will reach out to the victim, the accused, the victim's family, the accused family, and who will care for the persons providing this pastoral care.* Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation. *You might choose to add clarifications and/or church procedures here.*
- F.** Statement to the Media: Local church staff *(you may choose to identify a media contact here)* shall alert the Rio Texas Conference Director of Communications and Media Support when a statement is requested or made to media. The Conference media center has guidelines available for communications with media about the incident(s) which may have been reported.

***It is a privilege to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth. Appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.***