

SAFE PRACTICES



Check this section for details to assure that you can actually conform to the policy you are creating. Not every section is necessary, but you must at least insist on visibility of any volunteer working with a minor—be that another adult present, open doors or windows in the meeting room

SAMPLES OF POLICY TEXT BELOW



Safe Practices for Ministry

Minimum Age Requirements

Because we believe that people under the age of 18 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment needed to be fully responsible for peers or persons younger than they, St. Sanctuary Church will not permit individuals or groups of persons under age 18 to be solely responsible for younger youth or children, including infants. A primary volunteer or Youth Director must be present for all activities with children and youth.

Child or Youth	Staff or Primary Volunteer	Helper
Infant care (age 0 through Kindergarten)	25 yrs	18 yrs
Church School (1st - 5th grade)	25 yrs	12 yrs
6th - 8 graders (middle schoolers)	25 yrs	18 yrs
9th - 12 graders (high schoolers)	25 yrs	20 yrs

Recommended Ratios

Whenever possible, the following minimum ratios will be used in all events involving children and youth: [\(determine what ratios are prudent and achievable\)](#)

Child or Youth	Primary Volunteer or Staff	Child/Youth
Infants	1	2
Toddlers	1	5
Preschoolers	1	7
Church School (1st - 5th grade)	1	10
6th - 12 graders (mid-high & high schoolers)	1	15

No minor or vulnerable adult will be left unsupervised after a church activity.

Team Leadership

Whenever feasible a minor will *not* be in the primary care of only one adult. Teams of adults (preferable male and female) will supervise activities. This policy has four purposes: It provides for more than one adult to help ensure the appropriate levels of supervision, it protects adults from unfounded allegations, and it lessens the possibility of an adult becoming a “guru” who thrives on the dependency of minors as well as an adult having undue influence over an individual. It also provides coverage for the group when there is an emergency situation or need to work with a minor separately from the group.

The Two-Adult Rule

At least one approved primary volunteer and a secondary helper (*not in the same family is recommended by insurance companies*) must be present at all times during a church-sponsored class, meeting, event or ministry when children or youth are involved. If no second adult can help or be in the immediate vicinity, the activity/class will be cancelled or a roving supervisor will repeatedly, randomly monitor the room. Two adults must be present with children younger than first graders.

Youth over the age of 12 may assist an adult in supervising children’s activities; however, such assistance does not alter the recommendation that at least two adults be present.

*(Though the “two-adult rule” is strongly recommended, if that seems impossible to accomplish for your church, your policy might instead say something like: **The two-adult rule is our goal when working with youth. Situations in which an adult is completely alone with one or more youth are to be avoided.**)*

Visibility

All staff members, volunteers, and the youth and children themselves should not be afraid to be seen modeling nurturing and respectful behavior. All rooms used as gathering places for children and youth will be centrally located and visually accessible so that volunteers and staff are easily observable by other adults and there is no isolation or secrecy. Visibility is especially important when supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants or children. When children or youth are present, windows may not be covered and doors may not be blocked. If there is no window in the meeting room’s door, the door must remain open whenever children are present. All unnecessary adjacent rooms and closets should be locked. Activities should never take place in private rooms, offices or isolated parts of a building.

Open Door Policy

All events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults should be open such that parents, care givers, and others can observe the activity.

Pastoral Care and Counseling

The pastoral staff encourages anyone in the congregation to ask for spiritual guidance and emotional support whenever the need arises. The pastors offer **pastoral care** whenever there are life crises such as death, illness, divorce, loss of job, or any other transition or circumstance that is causing distress. This pastoral care includes prayer, direction, and encouragement offered to individuals or families in our congregation who are struggling spiritually, physically, or emotionally for any reason. A program staff person or lay volunteer* may also provide pastoral care, but should do so under the supervision of an ordained pastor.

However, the pastors on our staff do not offer ongoing, comprehensive **counseling**, regardless of their training. Pastors may meet with individuals/families up to three times in the same year for the same life issue, but shall then refer the individual/family to a professional therapist, spiritual director, or other specialist outside the church for more ongoing counseling or support. (If the pastor refers the individual/family to a counselor and that counseling relationship does not work out, the pastor may meet with the family once more to seek to refer to another appropriate person.)

Pastors will maintain **confidentiality** about their pastoral care sessions unless someone is at risk of harming him/herself or someone else; then in compliance with denominational standards and state law, community intervention specialists and/or protective services will be contacted.

Pastors and other staff will never receive **compensation** for pastoral care or counseling extended to congregants.

For pastoral care of **minors**, team counseling is preferable whenever possible. A male/female team is generally appropriate for counseling either gender. If team counseling is not feasible, parental permission shall be obtained before a pastor, director or volunteer can meet privately with a child or youth. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) for their child to receive pastoral care from a particular pastor. another adult must be notified of the location of the meeting and persons involved. If possible, female adults will counsel female youths and males counsel males.

Pastoral care of minors should be done in a public place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others, thereby guarding carefully to avoid seclusion. At any session, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session—or the pastor, director, and responsible adult should be easily visible through the door's window. If necessary, one-on-one meetings may also be in an openly visible, public area, such as the courtyard or a coffee shop. One-on-one pastoral care sessions shall not be conducted in a private residence without an adult family member present.

Volunteers should not meet with youth more than three times to discuss the same issue, because they are not prepared or supported for long-term

* For example, a Stephen's Minister or Deacon.

counseling or formal therapy. Adult leaders are encouraged to refer youth or vulnerable adults who they suspect have a serious need for counseling to professionals in the community. Questions about appropriate referrals should be discussed promptly with the youth program leader, Christian Education Director, or the pastor.

(Some churches also include: One-to-one programs (like mentorships) shall not be sponsored by St. Sanctuary. Persons interested in one-to-one programs will be referred to agencies skilled in the supervision of such programs, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters.)

Getting Help

Protecting an individual's privacy has limits. Volunteers must tell a clergy person **if a minor discusses harming himself/herself or another, committing a crime, or being abused**. Questions about such cases or other issues of confidentiality must be discussed promptly with the youth pastor (if ordained) or the pastor. Conferring with a pastor on sensitive issues is **not** considered breaking a confidence; the pastor will protect the confidential nature of the discussion, as will civil authorities if the pastor is mandated by law to report the situation to them.

Boundary Issues

It is important for the adult workers to be clear about appropriate behaviors. Adult workers must be attentive to appropriate dress codes, appropriate use of language, and appropriate demonstration of affection and encouragement. There must be no use, sale or distribution of alcohol or illegal drugs at activities involving children or youth. These boundary issues will be included in the annual training for youth and children workers and volunteers.

Informal Contact (Independent of Church Activities)

Informal contact refers to phone calls, text messaging, letters, or face-to-face contact between an adult volunteer and a minor that is not connected to official church activities. The church recognizes that informal contact between volunteers and youth frequently occurs. However, volunteers should seek permission of parents before having informal contact with their youth. The volunteer should clearly let the parent know the nature of the contact and that it is not part of church activity. Parents are responsible for monitoring this informal contact.

Gifts

Those working with youth are generally discouraged from giving personal gifts to youth. When the giving of personal gifts is desired, the volunteer must first notify the minor's parents and youth pastor. Gifts can easily be misinterpreted. Gifts given to groups of young people are appropriate, such as graduation presents or awards of participation.

Romantic Involvement

No volunteer or staff working with youth or vulnerable adults is allowed to date or become romantically involved with any recipient of his or her ministry. Any volunteer or staff with prior incidents of sexual misconduct may not volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults or minister to them in any way. There are no exceptions to this guideline.

“Check-in/Check-out” Procedure for Young Children

Parents/guardians will sign in their children when leaving them in the nursery or kindergarten class and sign them out when picking them up. A child will be released only to the person who dropped him/her off, unless otherwise instructed by the person who leaves the child. Under no circumstances will a child be released from the nursery to a person under the age of 18. Permission slips will be available for parents or guardians to sign, authorizing alternate options for the release of the child(ren).

Involvement of Parents and Guardians

Parental permission shall be obtained in advance for involvement in church sponsored overnights, off-site or special events or whenever an adult might be spending time alone with a child in an unsupervised, one-adult situation.

When planning an event for youth and children that will require adult drivers and/or adult chaperones, it is necessary to provide at least two weeks advanced notice to the potential adult volunteers. Such notice is important to give the adults enough planning time and for the organizers to ensure the roster of volunteers is completely filled. The event will not be able to proceed without sufficient adult driver and/or chaperone duties confirmed.

Only assigned volunteers may be in the nursery or preschool, with the exception of nursing mothers and parents called to the room to calm an upset child.

Bathroom Protocol

For a child and/or vulnerable individual needing to go to the bathroom and who requires assistance, the following will apply:

- If the child and/or vulnerable individual needs assistance getting to a bathroom an adult will accompany her/him to the door of the bathroom. The adult will wait outside the bathroom for the person to exit the bathroom and accompany him/her back to the program area from which they came.
- If the child and/or vulnerable individual needs assistance in the bathroom the following will apply:
 - A. If a child, a parent or guardian needs to be contacted to take such child to and from the bathroom.

B. If a child and a parent or guardian is not available then a second adult must be present with the adult who is assisting the child and/or vulnerable individual.

Sunday School superintendents or other church leaders will make random visits to all classrooms and periodically check the bathrooms that are being used by children and youth during St. Sanctuary Church functions.

General Safety

A copy of St. Sanctuary's Safe Church policy and a first aid kit with instructions will be kept in the area where minors and vulnerable adults are present. An escape plan and the location of the fire extinguisher must be posted near each classroom door. Phone and/or intercom access must be available in those areas or nearby (unimpeded by a locked door).