

Wisconsin Annual Conference Youth Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Approved by Conference Youth Council, October 2018

These policies and procedures shall serve as minimum standards for all Conference and District sponsored events for youth. Various conference entities, such as Camp and Retreat Ministries, may develop procedures specifically related to events sponsored by that entity, so long as they contain provisions to meet all the procedures outlined below. If childcare is provided as part of the youth event, all childcare providers will conform to these policies as well.

Definitions

- Youth:** 1) Any person age 12-17, or
2) Any person age 18 who is still in high school, or
3) Any person age 10-12 who is considered a youth in their local congregation.
- Adult:** 1) Any person over age 18, or
2) Any person age 18 who is no longer a high school student
- Conference:** The Wisconsin Conference of The United Methodist Church.
- Event:** A Conference or District sponsored activity or ministry that involves a gathering of youth.
- Staff:** 1) Any paid employee of the Conference or District, or
2) any paid employee of any board or agency of the Conference or District who has been charged with the care and supervision of participants at an event.
- Chaperone:** An adult who provides direct supervision of youth. This person must be able to take responsibility for a group of youth – giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety, etc.
- Participant:** A youth who is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise engaging in an event or activity sponsored by the Conference or District.
- Volunteer:** Any unpaid adult. May or may not also qualify as a *Chaperone*.

Procedures

Selection and Screening of Adults

Background Checks: Prior to beginning service, each prospective staff or volunteer must unconditionally agree to a criminal background check. The Conference Office will facilitate a national criminal background check and will maintain the legally required records. The Conference is not responsible for maintaining files for adults who volunteer at their local congregations. Background checks for volunteers and seasonal or single-event staff will be repeated annually. The Conference board/agency who is using the adults will incur the cost for the background check.

Five Year Rule: To be a Chaperone, an adult must be at least five years older than the oldest youth they will supervise. Young adults who do not meet the *five year rule* may serve as

staff/volunteers provided that they serve under the supervision of one or more adults who do meet this criteria. No one under age 18 and no one who does not meet the *five year rule* will be given supervisory responsibility for a group of youth.

Operational Procedures

Open Door Rule: All Conference and District activities with youth shall be held in open areas or rooms with windows in the doors. Where this is not possible, doors will be left open. No adult will be alone with a youth of any gender behind closed doors for any reason.

Two Chaperone Rule: There will be a minimum of two Chaperones present at every youth event or program. One adult will not be alone with one youth. For small group activities in which one adult supervises each group, groups are to meet in open areas, ideally in sight/sound range of another group. At no time will a youth be left unsupervised.

Traveling: It is ideal to have a minimum of two Chaperones when traveling. It is acceptable to travel with one Chaperone if other accountable Chaperones will be joining the group at their location. At no time should one adult be alone in a vehicle with one youth, unless that adult/youth are parent/child. Youth shall not be drivers for any part of an event or program, even if they are driving only themselves or their own vehicles.

Sleeping Arrangements: Adults shall not sleep in the same rooms as youth. Exceptions will be considered in the case of 'bunkhouse' or similar style lodging facilities in which there are more than four people to a room. Adults shall not share a bed with a youth, even if the adult is that youth's parent.

Bathroom Facilities: Adults and youth may use the same bathroom facilities. Adults will not shower at the same time as youth, unless each shower is fully contained and separated by full length walls/doors.

Social Media: Any social media group set up in the name of a conference camp, youth event, or other ministry shall have at least two adult administrators. Social media communication, texting, or other electronic communication between adults and youth should be confined to public posts or copied to another adult leader and/or the participant's parent. Adults will not post photos or personal information regarding youth participants (to whom they are not related) on a personal social media page or website, even with permission.

Special Situations:

When individuals under 18 years of age attend an event not designed for children or youth (or unexpectedly accompany an adult to an event designed for adults), then those in charge of the event cannot be expected to have had screening of volunteers or staff or appropriate supervision requirements established, nor can they be expected to assume responsibility for such attendees.

When an individual congregation plans an event, their local Safe Sanctuaries policies apply. If that congregation opens their event to other congregations, the hosting/planning congregation must align the event with their local Safe Sanctuaries policy.

Training

The board/agency hosting each conference or district event is responsible for training and orientation of staff and volunteers. No individual will be allowed to serve until they have completed the appropriate training. Staff and volunteers for any conference-sponsored event will receive training which will include this policy and accompanying procedures along with site- or event-specific procedures. Before beginning service, each staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by this policy and accompanying procedures.

Reporting Suspected Incidents

Mandated Reporting: In Wisconsin, any person who thinks child abuse and/or neglect has happened or might happen can make a report to Child Protective Services or law enforcement. It is enough to have "reasonable cause" to suspect child abuse. CPS and not any Wisconsin Conference staff will determine if the information given by the reporter meets the legal requirements to initiate an investigation.

Procedure for Reporting Child Abuse: If a volunteer or staff person suspects child abuse, whether committed by another volunteer or staff person or by someone else in the child's life, he/she must report that suspicion immediately to his/her supervisor (or supervisor's supervisor), or the person in charge of the event. The supervisor will assist the volunteer or staff person to make a report to Child Protective Services. Contact information for all counties and tribes can be found at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families website: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/reportabuse>.

Reporting Policy Violations: If you witness a violation of this policy, please report it to the person in charge of the event, his/her supervisor, Director, or District Superintendent. Contact information can be found at the conference website (www.wisconsinumc.org).

Honest and good faith complaints are welcomed. The conference, including the aforementioned persons, will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken.

After Care: Following any report of incident within a district or conference event, the person in charge of the event shall work with conference staff, the District Superintendent, and/or the local church to provide ongoing support and care for all involved.

Media Inquiries

Should a staff member or volunteer of any district or conference event be contacted by the media for comment on any alleged violation of this policy involving the Conference or The

United Methodist Church, that staff member or volunteer should direct the media person to the Assistant to the Bishop. No other staff member or volunteer is authorized to speak on behalf of the conference or district.