

Southwest Conference

**Safe Conduct Policy
& Procedure
for
Working with Youth
and Vulnerable
Adults**

Adopted Feb. 2021

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I. Statement of Policy

As a community of Christian faith, the Southwest Conference is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, Clergy, employees, and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. The Southwest Conference supports principles of SafeConduct, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the Conference in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith. The Southwest Conference strongly opposes and prohibits “sexual exploitation”, “sexual harassment” or any form of exploitation or abuse of persons regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or ability. It is the intention of our Conference to affirmatively nurture good behavior, and to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline persons who violate this policy.

Every member of the Conference, whether “authorized clergy”, leader, lay staff, volunteer, contractor, or parent, has a role to lead those who look to them individually for guidance, to monitor their behavior and redirect them as they cross boundaries of SafeConduct. Our Conference shall nurture good conduct as demonstrated by personal behaviors that are consistent with our Christian values. As we might conduct an orchestra, we shall guide and lead in ministry.

II. General Definitions

1. Physical abuse is injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a youth.
2. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a minor and an adult or between two youths. This includes any activity which is intended to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the minor.
3. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a minor that results in an observable and material impairment in the minor's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
4. Neglect is the failure of a person with responsibility for another person to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, protection, or supervision to the degree that the person's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm.
5. A Minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as youth throughout policy).
6. A Vulnerable Adult is anyone aged 18 or over, who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of a disability, age, or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
7. Mandatory Reporters are those persons required by state law to report suspected abuse to police or child welfare agencies.
8. Clergy includes any person who is authorized for ministry by the United Church of Christ, who serves the Conference in any capacity whether called as pastor or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, or volunteer capacity.
9. Clergy, employees, and volunteers indicate the adults responsible for the welfare, safety, and supervision of youth and vulnerable adults. Minors may not be counted as supervisors of youth or vulnerable adults.
10. Staff may refer to the program's leaders or the Conference's employees of called clergy. Context is important when understanding this term in the policy.
11. Facility refers to the approved location of the activity. It might be the Southwest Conference office, a church or a camp.

III. Code of Conduct with Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The following Code of Conduct is intended to assist Clergy, employees, and volunteers in making decisions about interactions with youth and vulnerable adults. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact your supervisor.

The Southwest Conference provides youth and vulnerable adults with the highest quality services available. We are committed to creating an environment for youth, vulnerable adults, and persons who serve them that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated and confirmed abuse will result in immediate dismissal from service with the Southwest Conference. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth and vulnerable adults or allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. Southwest Conference will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

This Code of Conduct with Youth and Vulnerable Adult outlines specific expectations of the Clergy, employees, and volunteers as we strive to accomplish our mission together.

1. Youth and vulnerable adults will be treated with respect at all times.
2. Youth and vulnerable adults will be treated fairly regardless of race, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, or religion.
3. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined by Southwest Conference.
4. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will avoid affection with youth and vulnerable adults that cannot be observed by others.
5. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions as outlined by Southwest Conference.
6. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not stare at or comment on youth and vulnerable adults' bodies.
7. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not date or become romantically involved with youth and vulnerable adults.
8. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of youth and vulnerable adults.
9. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not have sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on Southwest Conference's property.
10. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not have secrets with youth and vulnerable adults and will only give gifts with prior permission.
11. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will comply with Southwest Conference's policies regarding interactions with youth and vulnerable adults outside of our programs.

12. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with youth and vulnerable adults.
13. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with youth and vulnerable adults in a private setting. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will use common areas when working with individual youth and vulnerable adults.
14. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not abuse youth and vulnerable adults in anyway including (but not limited to) the following:

Physical abuse: hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints;

Verbal abuse: degrading, threatening, cursing;

Sexual abuse: inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations;

Mental abuse: shaming, humiliation, cruelty; and

Neglect: withholding food, water, shelter, or protection

15. Southwest Conference will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult. In addition, Southwest Conference will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:

- a. *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
- b. *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
- c. *Nonverbal or relational bullying* – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
- d. *Cyberbullying* – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
 - Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
 - Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
 - Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
- e. *Hazing* – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
- f. *Sexualized bullying* – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.

Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all youth and vulnerable adults, Clergy, employees, and volunteers.

16. All Clergy, employees, and volunteers must follow state-specific mandatory reporting requirements for the state in which the Conference activity is held. They should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. They will:
 - a. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
 - b. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect youth and vulnerable adults against abuse.
 - c. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
 - d. Follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken.
17. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will report concerns or complaints about other employees, volunteers, adults, or youth to their Southwest Conference supervisor, the Conference Minister or Associate Conference Minister, the Conference Moderator, or Praesidium's Anonymous Helpline at 855-347-0751.
18. Southwest Conference cooperates fully with the authorities to investigate all cases of alleged abuse. Any Clergy, employee, or volunteer shall cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any external investigation by outside authorities or internal investigation conducted by the organization or persons given investigative authority by the organization. Failure to cooperate fully may be grounds for termination.
19. Clergy, employees, and volunteers may not have engaged in or been convicted of youth and vulnerable adult abuse, indecency with a youth and vulnerable adult, or injury to a youth and vulnerable adult.

IV. Policies for Working with Youth

Policies define the range of acceptable behavior in an organization. Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to youths, when staff know and understand policies, they can identify, interrupt, and report policy violations. Simply interrupting a policy violation can prevent a false allegation of abuse or put an offender on notice that no one works in private, the rules apply to everyone, and violations will be detected.

A. Physical Contact

Southwest Conference's physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting youths, Clergy, employees, and volunteers. Southwest Conference encourages appropriate physical contact with youths and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by Clergy, employees, and volunteers towards youths in the organization's programs will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Southwest Conference's policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Side hugs• Shoulder-to-shoulder or "temple" hugs• Pats on the shoulder or back• Handshakes• High-fives and hand slapping• Verbal praise• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms• Arms around shoulders• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)• Fist or elbow bumps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-frontal hugs• Kisses• Showing affection in isolated area• Lap sitting• Wrestling• Piggyback rides• Tickling• Allowing a youth to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg• Any type of massage given by or to a youth• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer• Compliments relating to physique or body development• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

B. Verbal Interactions

Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to youths in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must not initiate sexually oriented conversations with youths. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are not permitted to discuss their own sexual activities with youths.

Southwest Conference's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

<i>Appropriate Verbal Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Verbal Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive reinforcement• Appropriate jokes• Encouragement• Praise• Encouraging use of appropriate verbal interactions, and/or appropriate physical interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name-calling• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving youths in the personal problems or issues of Clergy, employees, and volunteers• Secrets• Cursing• Off-color or sexual jokes• Shaming• Belittling• Derogatory remarks• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate youths• Derogatory remarks about the youth or his/her family

C. One-on-One Interactions

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. The Southwest Conference aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by the organization administration.

In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved, Clergy, employees, and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions

- When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to, high-fives, fist or elbow bumps, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other Clergy, employees, and volunteers that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly drop in.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

Tutoring/ Private Coaching/ Individual Rehearsal:

One-on-one situations, such as tutoring and private coaching sessions, introduce additional risks for false allegations. Clergy, employees, and volunteers should be aware of our policies regarding tutoring and private coaching:

- a. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must have supervisor approval for any tutoring, individual rehearsal, or private coaching sessions.
- b. Tutoring, rehearsal, and coaching sessions with Southwest Conference's youths may not occur outside of the organization.
- c. Supervisors must keep a schedule of private tutoring and coaching sessions, which should include times, youths involved, and location of sessions.
- d. Supervisors must gain documented permission of the youth's parent or guardians before approving the session.

D. Off-site Contact

Many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. This contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put staff, volunteers, and Southwest Conference at increased risk.

1. The Southwest Conference prohibits individual or private interactions outside of regularly scheduled program activities unless approved by the organization’s Administration. Pastoral Care needs for youth shall be referred to the pastor or youth leader of the congregation with which the youth is affiliated.
2. Off-site contact with Conference youth is permitted when an activity or outing is organized and sponsored by a Southwest Conference local church, and Clergy, employees, and/or volunteers are invited by the organizer to participate.

E. Electronic Communication

1. Any private electronic communication between Clergy, employees, and/or volunteers, including the use of social networking websites like - Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, texting, etc. - is prohibited. All communication between staff and youths must be transparent.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication:

<i>Appropriate Electronic Communication</i>	<i>Inappropriate Electronic Communication</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youths ONLY when copying in a supervisor or the youth’s parent • Communicating through “organization group pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums • “Private” profiles for Clergy, employees, and volunteers which youths cannot access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating comments • Sexually oriented conversations • Private messages between Clergy, employees, and volunteers with youths • Posting pictures of organization participants online or on social media • Posting inappropriate comments on pictures • “Friending” participants on social networking sites

In addition, provide this information to your participant’s parents so that they know what is appropriate and inappropriate from your staff.

2. Cell Phone Use

While assigned to work with youths, staff are not permitted to use electronic communications device except during approved breaks and emergency situations. Internet use, text messaging and/or emailing pictures while assigned to work with youths is strictly prohibited regardless of the type of device used and whether for business or personal reasons. Employees need to ensure that friends and family members are aware of this policy.

Use of personal electronic communication devices to contact (via voice, text, or pictures/video) organization members and/or program participants for personal and/ or inappropriate reasons shall

be grounds for discipline up to and including termination of employment or participation in the program.

There are occasions in which staff will need to use personal or organization issued electronic communication devices. In these cases, staff will have explicit direction from supervisors governing use. Situations which may require use of organization issued or personal electronic communication devices include:

- a. Field Trips;
- b. Off-site Programs; and
- c. Emergencies.

F. Gift Giving

Molesters routinely groom youths by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to the youth. They might instruct the youth to keep the gifts a secret, which then starts teaching the youth to keep secrets from parents. For this reason, Clergy, employees, and volunteers shall only give gifts to groups of youths, and only under the following circumstances:

1. Administration must be made aware of and approve the gift.
2. Parents must be notified.

Giving a gift or gifts to an individual youth is prohibited.

V. Screening and Selection

The process of screening and selecting employees and volunteers is an essential element of management due diligence.

Note: Each board member, employee or volunteer now serving and regardless of length of service must be willing to set an example for all others who follow in their ministry. Therefore, at the time this policy is first adopted, all incumbent board members, employees and all incumbent volunteers who work with children shall execute the following procedures.

A. Standardized Application

All applicants for positions that include working with youth and vulnerable adults shall complete an application prior to serving with the Southwest Conference. The application should be reviewed by the Personnel or the Nominating Committee for completeness, high risks and fit with position requirements. If the application is not 100% complete, the applicant may be screened out, the applicant may be asked to complete the application, or the missing information may be obtained during an interview. However, the Southwest Conference shall endeavor to follow a consistent approach to applications missing information.

Offers should not be made until an application is 100% complete. Applications should be kept in the personnel file.

Volunteers must be active members of Southwest Conference for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs. There shall be **no exceptions** to time requirement, even when volunteer candidates come from another judicatory with similar programs.

See Appendix A. for a Sample Application. Visit *Know Your Score!*[™] resources for additional sample resources.

B. Interviews

All applicants shall be interviewed during the selection process and prior to serving. The purpose of the interview is to determine whether the applicant possesses the skills needed to perform the job requirements and whether the applicant demonstrates characteristics of a potentially abusive person. The interview should also provide the applicant with information about job responsibilities and expectations.

Interviews may be conducted by members of the Personnel Committee or Conference staff member responsible for the program (i.e. camp). Interviewers shall employ behavioral interviewing techniques to assess suitability for the work to be done. Individuals being considered for working with youth and/or vulnerable adults shall be assessed for their suitability to serve those populations, and the interview shall specifically discuss the Conference's commitment to protect children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

The interviewer shall take notes as to applicant responses to the interview questions, and the interpretive guide should be used to evaluate applicant responses. After the interviews are completed, the applicant may be screened out or the applicant may continue in the Screening process. The information recorded will be kept in the personnel file whether or not the applicant is hired or selected.

See Appendix for resources necessary for complying with this policy.

C. Reference Checks

Reference checks shall be conducted for all applicants prior to service. Applicants will be required to supply a minimum of three references, including two professional and one personal reference. If the person responsible for screening the applicant does not believe the references are appropriate, additional references may be required from the applicant.

A fourth reference, from the applicant's pastor, is also required.

References should be conducted by telephone. The person responsible for the screening should inform the referent that the applicant is applying for a position with the organization and will explain that the applicant will have access to a vulnerable population. The person interviewing the referent will use standard reference questions and will record the responses of the referents on the reference question form. The high-risk checklist will be used to help evaluate referent responses.

Offers of engagement shall not be made until the required number of references is contacted. Completed reference check forms should be kept in the applicant's personnel file if the applicant is engaged.

See Appendix B. for Sample Reference Check Questions. Visit *Know Your Score!*[™] resources for additional sample resources.

D. Background Checks

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks shall be conducted for all applicants. Generally, the information will be obtained prior to employment of the applicant; however, if the length of time needed to receive the results of these checks is unduly long, Southwest Conference may be petitioned to allow the applicant start the position and remain in the position until the criminal background results are obtained and reviewed provided satisfactory reference checks have been completed. No employees or volunteers shall not be left unsupervised with youths until the criminal history results are returned.

The background check(s) should include the following:

- National multi-state criminal records search;
- National sex offender registry search;
- Social security number trace and alias search; and
- County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked for the past 7 years

Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each applicant prior to executing the check.

In addition, applicants may be asked to undergo criminal drug screening prior to service. Applicants responsible for transportation shall have a driver's license check performed to identify past driving concerns.

E. Decisions

A committee of three consisting of one member from Personnel Committee, the Associate Conference Minister or the Conference Minister and the program lead (i.e. Camp Director, event organizer) shall review each application, including the reference check forms and background check) and agree that the applicant is eligible for service as Clergy, employee or volunteer.

Where a criminal record exists, consideration shall be given to:

- Seriousness of the crime;
- Statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors;
- Length of time since the last offense;
- Pattern of criminal activity; and
- Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.

Conviction for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to work with children and/or vulnerable adults:

- Violent crimes;
- Sexual assault;
- Sexual abuse or neglect of a child;
- Sexual abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult; and
- Drug offenses or driving offenses (depending upon position requirements)

Arrest data are not grounds for disqualification, only convictions. The status or relevance of other crimes will be considered individually.

Before an offer of engagement is made, the committee named above should review all information obtained. The application process needs to last a sufficient length of time to allow for the careful collection and evaluation of information about applicants and to allow the applicant time to self-select out of the process if they have concerns about the position.

Following the review, each committee member shall sign and date one of two documents that becomes part of the applicant's or employee's permanent personnel file:

*"We have reviewed the criminal history of <Applicant name> and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant would be **acceptable** for the position."*

OR

*"We have reviewed the criminal history of <Applicant name> and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is **not acceptable** for the position."*

VI. Training

The goal of the Southwest Conference is first to prevent abuse of children and other vulnerable adults. We wish to identify and nurture SafeConduct™, to lead and to guide through adequate training. It is difficult to comprehend that anyone among us, our friends and family, would commit such acts willingly. Nevertheless, persons who have been presented with no behavior standards and do not understand boundaries may unwittingly engaged in behaviors that may be perceived as predatory. Their personal reputations and that of the Southwest Conference are then at risk.

To fulfill our leadership obligation, each new employee and new volunteer who works with children and/or vulnerable adults shall complete a specific program of training within 30 days of assuming duties. Training shall be offered free of charge through the **Armatus** training suite by **Praesidium, Inc.** Fulfillment of training requirements shall be verified through the *Armatus* program and the individual's supervisor.

Training shall be repeated annually. Records shall be maintained by the staff member responsible for the Personnel file and verified by the Associate Conference Minister or the Conference Minister. Training records shall be audited prior to the start of Camp each year, at minimum annually, by the Personnel Committee.

Abuse prevention curriculum shall include:

- Organization level
 - Review of expected conduct and boundaries defined in this policy.
 - Review of standards applicable to ministry.
 - Explanation of procedures for reporting violations of standards of conduct and suspected child abuse.
 - Explanation of individual statutory reporting obligations.
 - Identifying and managing high-risk situations such as bathroom use, transition times, and free times.
 - Physical security procedures.
- Abuse prevention education:
 - Effects of sexual abuse.
 - Types of child molesters.
 - Characteristics of abusers.
 - How child molesters operate: access, privacy, and control.
 - Protecting oneself from false allegations.
 - Examples of child-on-child sexual abuse, even among young children.
 - Characteristics of children more likely to act out sexually.
 - Characteristics of children more likely to be abused.
 - High-risk activities and circumstances.
 - Specific monitoring and supervision activities to prevent child-on-child sexual activity.
 - How to respond to incidents of sexual activity between children.

The Conference Minister shall assure that each employee and volunteer working with youth and vulnerable adults has mastered requirements and provide supervision and guidance as required to assure required conduct.

The Armatus training suite by Praesidium, Inc. is a robust on-line training program administered through the Southwest Conference in collaboration with the United Church of Christ Insurance Board. It is completely paperless and provides a perpetual record of training. The program covers all curriculum outlined herein. Information about the training program can be found at <https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-central/safeconduct-abuse-prevention/> and <https://www.praesidiumib.com/armatus/>



VII. Monitoring and Supervision

When Clergy, employees, and volunteers are adequately supervised, potential offenders are less likely to act on their impulses because they face detection. When youths are adequately supervised, they too are less likely to engage in inappropriate interactions with others. Similarly, the facility must be monitored, particularly out-of-the-way locations or locations that might permit an offender undue access to or privacy with a youth. Effective supervision and monitoring require that a variety of methods be used frequently, at both scheduled and random times.

A. Facility Monitoring

Building architecture can increase or mitigate the risk of an incident or accident. Because most incidents of sexual behavior occur in private, the extent to which privacy is managed, risk is managed. In order to ensure that all of the locations are properly and consistently monitored, an adult program volunteer or a Southwest Conference staff member must complete a site inspection checklist.

B. General Supervision

General supervision procedures:

1. **Administrative and Supervisory Visits to Youth Programs-** Youth supervisors and administrators will regularly visit all youth programs to ensure that all activities are well-managed, and that this policy is observed by everyone in attendance.
2. **Ratios-** Each program will follow the ratio requirements that are applicable to the goals of the program and the design of the program area. The employee or volunteer-to-youth ratio may be adjusted for programs that serve youths with special needs. The Southwest Conference shall use the following employee or volunteer-to-youth ratio for supervision.
 - 0 - 2 years - one adult to three children.
 - 2 - 3 years - one adult to four children.
 - 4 - 8 years - one adult to six children.
 - 9 - 12 years - one adult to eight children.
 - 13 - 18 years - one adult to ten children.

At all times a minimum of two employee or volunteer youth supervisors will be present with youth and/or vulnerable adults. Vulnerable adults may not serve in the capacity of supervising youth or vulnerable adults.

3. **Mixed Age Groups-** In most incidents involving one youth abusing another youth, the youths are from different age groups. Each program is responsible for establishing specific guidelines for additional monitoring and supervision of activities that involve youths from different age groups. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must be aware that close line of sight supervision is required when monitoring programs that mix age groups.

C. Monitoring Youth in Facilities

1. A parent or legal guardian shall complete a participation application for every youth and/or vulnerable adult desiring to participate in a Southwest Conference program. This application will include identifying information, any special medical or behavioral circumstances, any legal indemnifications, the youth's date of birth, and emergency contact information. In

- addition, all youths shall sign-in AND sign-out of program facilities so that the program has a record of the participants who are in the facility at all times.
2. Participants and their parent or guardian shall sign a Code of Conduct that outlines the program's behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This Code of Conduct will include a systematic disciplinary policy which explains that youths will be suspended or dismissed from the program for policy violations. Require parents to sign this Code of Conduct as well, so that they are aware of the program's policies and progressive disciplinary procedures.
 3. While a parent orientation may not be feasible in all circumstances, every effort will be made to provide parents/guardians with the expectations and requirements, and to establish a relationship with the parents/guardians.
 4. While in the facility, youths can be supervised directly, indirectly, or with a combination of the two techniques.
 - a. For direct supervision, the program may offer structured, scheduled activities (i.e. basketball tournaments, swimming activities, arts and crafts, etc.) Leaders of these activities directly supervise the participants.
 - b. For indirect supervision, the program must designate certain building or campus areas as authorized areas. Authorized areas could include a gymnasium, a game area, or a classroom for doing homework and so on. Authorized areas must be easily visible and routinely and systematically checked by staff. Youths should know that they will be supervised by staff at all times, and all staff should know which areas are authorized and which are not. Supervision standards for the authorized areas will be developed for each program
 5. All supervision Clergy, staff, and volunteers should wear nametags or identifying clothing so that youth/vulnerable adults can easily recognize them.
 6. Train all supervisory personnel:
 - a. To greet participants that enter the facility; to direct participants to the structured activities or authorized areas; and, to redirect youths who are not in an authorized area or who are not participating in a structured activity.
 - b. To be aware of the risks involved with mixing age groups and how to monitor activities involving mixed age groups.
 - c. To routinely monitor high risk areas (such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and unused rooms). Specific supervisory personnel shall be designated to monitor these areas (i.e., Managers on Duty).
 - d. Supervisory personnel shall document.

Ultimately, all youth/vulnerable adults must be supervised at all times, regardless of age, either directly in structured activities or indirectly when they are in authorized areas.

D. Monitoring High Risk Activities

1. Bathroom Activities

Most incidents of youth-to-youth abuse occur in the bathrooms. When supervising restroom use,

- a. Adult staff should inspect restrooms before allowing youth/vulnerable adults to enter.
- b. For “Group Bathroom Breaks”:
 - Supervisory personnel shall take groups of two or more youths to the bathroom – following the “rule of three” or more.
 - If the bathroom only has one stall, only one youth should enter the restroom while the others wait outside with the staff.
 - If there are multiple stalls, only send in as many youths as there are stalls.
 - Minimize youths of different ages using the bathroom at the same time.
 - Supervisory personnel shall stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot.
- c. For single use restrooms:
 - Require youths to ask permission to use the bathroom.
 - Supervisory personnel shall frequently check bathrooms.
 - Supervisory personnel shall stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot.
- d. Supervisory personnel shall NOT use the bathroom at the same time as youths.
- e. If assisting young children in the stalls, the staff should keep the door to the stall open.

2. Locker Room Activities

The locker room procedures include:

- a. Supervisory personnel shall stand within earshot of the locker room when in use by youths.
- b. Supervisory personnel shall intermittently and briefly check inside the locker room so users know the locker room is monitored.
- c. Supervisory personnel shall discourage the use of locker rooms by youths of different ages at the same time.
- d. Supervisory personnel shall prohibit the use of locker room horseplay such as towel snapping.

3. Shower Activities

Clergy, employees, and volunteers and youths/vulnerable adults must shower at different times. Create supervisory personnel shower schedules that will always permit supervision of the youths/vulnerable adults.

- a. While the youths shower, at least one staff member should stand in the bathroom doorway and within earshot of the youths. Ensure that only one youth is in each shower; shower curtains that do not go all the way to the floor or with clear upper panels can be useful for this purpose.

4. Transition Times and Free Times

Transition times and free times pose a high risk for incidents because during these times, Clergy, employees, and volunteers may not be assigned a particular group to supervise. To decrease the risk of incidents, implement the following procedures:

- a. Require youths to remain in line-of-site of staff at all times.

- b. Specify and adhere to the staff-to-youth ratio.
- c. Specify narrow geographic boundaries in the program areas.
- d. Ensure that all staff are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).
- e. Include bathroom procedures.
- f. Require periodic roll calls for each age group.
- g. Require supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and sweeps of the entire activity area.

5. Playground Activities

The playground procedures require:

- a. Youths to remain in line-of-site of staff at all times.
- b. Definition of specific and narrow geographic boundaries around the playground area.
- c. Specific instructions on how to monitor barriers of supervision (such as storage sheds, playhouses, tunnels, and shrubs).
- d. That all supervisors are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”).
- e. Specific bathroom procedures.
- f. Supervisors to conduct periodic roll calls for each age group.
- g. Supervisors to conduct periodic check-ins and assessments of the activity period and of the entire activity area.

6. Transportation Activities

Transporting youths/vulnerable adults may increase the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse if Clergy, employees, and volunteers are alone with a passengers or may make unauthorized stops. In addition, transportation activities may provide a time for unsupervised youths to engage in youth-to-youth abusive behavior. Every vehicle must have at least one supervisor in addition to the driver.

Southwest Conference transportation guidelines:

- a. Require written parent/guardian permission for all youths on a trip. Supervisors take these permission forms and medical releases with them on the trip.
- b. Require supervisors to have a list of the youths on the trip. The supervisors take roll when boarding vehicles, when leaving the vehicles, periodically throughout the trip, and then again when boarding the vehicles.
- c. Specify staff-to-youth ratios. When possible, do not count the driver in the supervision ratio.
- d. Require supervisors to sit in seats that permit maximum supervision.
- e. Discourage mixed age groups from sitting together. When possible, high risk youths are seated by themselves or with a staff member.
- f. Prohibit drivers from making unauthorized stops.
- g. Where applicable require drivers to document the beginning and ending time of the trip and the mileage, names of the individuals being transported, and the destination.
- h. Require documentation and reporting of any unusual occurrences to Conference staff.

When public transportation is used:

- a. In addition to the transportation procedures listed above, youths should remain in one area of the vehicle (bus, train, plane), if possible.
- b. Clergy, employees, and volunteers that are assigned to a group should remain with that group on the vehicle.
- c. Take a head count or call roll immediately after entering and leaving the vehicle.

In situations where Clergy, volunteers, or staff transport youths in non-organization vehicles:

- a. Conference staff must be notified of all transportation activities.
- b. Use the “rule of three” when transporting youths/vulnerable adults: At least two adults must transport a single youth, or at least two youths must be present if transported by a single adult.
- c. Youths must never be transported without written permission from a parent. In emergency situations texts or emails from parents granting such permission are acceptable.
- d. Youths must be transported directly to their destination. No unauthorized stops may be made. A series of stops to drop off youth/vulnerable adults is acceptable.
- e. Drivers must document beginning and ending times and mileage, the names of youths, and other Clergy, employees, and volunteers who are involved in transportation, purpose of the transportation, and destination.
- f. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must avoid unnecessary physical contact with youths while in vehicles.
- g. When possible, Clergy, employees, and volunteers should avoid engaging in sensitive conversations with youths.

See Appendix D. for Sample Volunteer Driver Qualification Form & Agreement.

7. Off-Site Activities

Southwest Conference off-site procedures include:

- a. Requiring Conference staff approval for all off-site activities.
- b. Requiring parental approval.
- c. Specifying staff-to-youth ratios for the activity.
- d. Requiring staff and youths/vulnerable to be easily identifiable.
- e. Requiring specific bathroom and locker room procedures as applicable to the outing.
- f. Requiring transportation procedures.
- g. Requiring instructions for a supervisor to observe the off-site activities at scheduled times and random intervals.
- h. Considering specific recommendations based on the location and type of activity (for example, Amusement parks, Water Parks, Arcades, etc.).

See Appendix C. for Sample Field Trip Preparation Checklist.

8. Overnight Activities

Overnight stays present unique risks to youths and staff. They often involve changing clothes, groups of both genders and different ages in a more intimate atmosphere than usual, more unstructured activities, and increased supervision demands for staff.

Supervision Guidelines:

- a. All overnight activities must be documented and approved in writing by the Conference Minister.
- b. Conference staff are expected to regularly and randomly observe overnight activities on a scheduled and periodic basis.
- c. The Director should appoint a “lead” staff to supervise the overnight. A meeting with all staff is conducted to discuss the unique risks of overnight trips, unique elements of the specific overnight trip and to review the specific policies and procedures.
- d. Provide parents with written information about the overnight activity. All parents must sign a permission slip for their youths to attend the overnight.
- e. Determine the appropriate staff-to-youth ratios before the event and schedule staff accordingly.
- f. Meetings with the group should be hosted in open and observable areas; meetings should not be hosted in staff or youth rooms.

Overnights at the Facility:

- a. Physical boundaries within the site must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- b. Assign each staff to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each staff should then maintain a role sheet that lists all of the youths in his or her group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the event including during sleeping times.
- c. Assign staff to high risk areas in facility, such as the bathrooms, entrances and exits, hallways, etc. If it is not possible to assign specific staff to these areas, assign specific staff to conduct periodic facility “walk-throughs”.
- d. When making sleeping assignments care must be given to gender and sexual orientation of youth/vulnerable persons. Parents must approve the sleeping assignment of their youth/vulnerable adult. Staff will be assigned near the entrances and exits to sleeping rooms. If this is not feasible, separate males and females by as much space as possible.
- e. When performing room checks, staff should always go in pairs.
- f. At least one, preferably two staff must stay awake overnight.
- g. Overnight stays at private homes are prohibited unless approved by the Conference Minister.
- h. If in a cabin type setting, the staff should be placed in bunks to maximize supervision around the cabin and in a way that decreases the chances of youths sneaking out and aids in evacuation if necessary (such as by the door).
- i. In hotel rooms, assign youths to rooms considering gender, sexual orientation and age. It is preferable to assign 3-4 youth to a room with each person having their own bed. Staff must have their own rooms.

- j. All staff are to be on duty in the halls or cabins or grounds at night until at least an hour after lights out and all rooms are quiet.

9. Teen Leadership Program

Older youths who participate in teen leadership programs are still youth participants and not staff or volunteers. Therefore, even though they are often given more responsibility, teens in the leadership programs must be provided with guidelines regarding appropriate behavior, and then supervised accordingly. In addition, Clergy, employees, and volunteers must understand and recognize that these teens are still youths and not their peers. Therefore, the following guidelines will be in force for teen leadership programs that includes:

- a. A screening process for teen leaders which includes
 - A standard application
 - An interview with behaviorally based interview questions
 - References (from teachers, counselors, family friends, etc.)
- b. Training teen leaders in their role in programs and on program policies about appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This training should include the following information:
 - Appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions and the importance of maintaining behavioral boundaries between teen leaders and younger youths and between teen leaders and Clergy, employees, and volunteers.
 - Clarity on the relationship between teen leaders and Clergy, employees, and volunteers.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from being one-on-one with youths.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from escorting youths to the bathrooms.
 - Prohibiting teen leaders from assisting youths with changing their clothes.
- c. Creating a system to monitor the teen leaders.
 - Designate a specific employee or volunteer who is in charge of the teen leadership program and its participants.
 - Require teen leaders to wear clothing or lanyards that identify them as leaders-in-training and differentiate them from both Clergy, employees, and volunteers and from younger youths.
 - Require a supervisor to conduct daily check-ins with teen leaders and their program supervisors.
 - Consider requiring teen leaders to keep a log documenting their daily activities and any problems they encounter. The program supervisor should review these logs daily.

E. Supervisors and Administrators Monitoring On-Site and Off-Site Programs

- **Keep a record.** Document your supervision visits. Include information like your arrival and departure times, which youths and parents were present, and a summary of the information collected. Provide staff with feedback about visits.

- **Vary your observation times.** Do not develop a predictable pattern of observation. Drop in at different times each day. Occasionally leave and come back immediately.
- **Arrive before staff.** Check punctuality and the routine that staff follow to prepare for the youths to arrive.
- **Survey the physical environment.** Is this a suitable location for the activity (e.g. size of area for number of youths, ability to supervise all areas used by youths, landscaping that may inhibit supervision)?
- **Watch activities.** Are they planned and organized? Are the staff actively involved? Ask to see the schedule of activities and compare with what is actually going on at a given time.
- **Observe bathroom and locker room activities.** Observe bathroom and locker room activities to ensure that the staff are complying with the established policies and procedures.
- **Observe Interactions.**

VIII. Responding

How an organization responds to suspicious or inappropriate interactions, policy violations, and incidents or allegations of abuse can dramatically affect the harm to the individuals involved and the damage to the organization. Once a Clergy member, employee, volunteer, youth, or parent has expressed a concern or made an allegation about the treatment of a youth, swift and determined action must be taken to reduce any subsequent risk to the youth, to the accused staff member or volunteer, and to the organization.

A. Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations

Because Southwest Conference is dedicated to maintaining zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that everyone actively participates in the protection of youths. In the event that a Clergy member, employee, or volunteer observe any suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations on the part of others, it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations.

Remember, at Southwest Conference, the policies apply to everyone.

Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors Between Employees/Volunteers and Youth

- Violation of the abuse prevention policies described above
- Seeking private time or one-on-one time with youths
- Buying gifts for individual youths
- Making suggestive comments to youths
- Picking favorites

All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youths will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

1. Employee and Volunteer Response:

If an employee or volunteer witness suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from another employee or volunteer, they are instructed to do the following:

Guidelines for Employees/Volunteers Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations

- Interrupt the behavior.
- Report the behavior to your supervisor, the program director, Conference staff, or other authority.
- If the report is about your supervisor or the program director, contact the Conference Minister or Associate Conference Minister.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

2. Director and Administrator Response:

In the event that a program director, Associate Conference Minister, or Conference Minister receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member or volunteer, the supervisor is instructed to do the following:

Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations

- Report to the next level of administration and determine the appropriate administrator to respond to the concern.
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report.
- Speak with the individual who has been reported.
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
- Document the report in writing including who reported to you, what they reported (be specific), names of victims, names of individuals accused, when and where they reported to you.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, move to the next section, Responding to Suspected Abuse by an Adult, to guide your response.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other Clergy, employees, and volunteers or youths.
- b. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- c. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer shall be removed from the program and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution.

3. Organizational Response:

Guidelines for Organizational Response

- Review the need for increased supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.

B. Responding to Suspected Abuse by an Adult

1. Employee or Volunteer Response to Abuse:

Clergy, employees, and volunteers covered by state mandated reporting laws, must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a youth—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by employees, volunteers, or others—to state authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice. Refer to

- <https://dcs.az.gov/report-child-abuse/mandated-reporter-overview-training>
- New Mexico and Texas law requires anyone with knowledge of suspected child abuse or neglect to report it to the appropriate authorities.

The United Church of Christ is not a religious tradition requiring confession of sins to a person authorized to grant forgiveness or absolution. Thus, clergy in this tradition maintain the confidentiality of conversations and no privileged communication is practiced or recognized. When persons have conversations of any nature (counseling, confession, etc.) with clergy working in programs sponsored by the Southwest Conference suspected or known abuse, neglect, the intention to harm self, or the intention to harm others must be reported. Clergy are reminded to make persons with whom these conversations may arise aware of this fact.

In addition to reporting to state authorities, Clergy, employees, and volunteers serving on behalf of the Southwest Conference are required to report any suspected or known abuse of youths perpetrated by employees or volunteers directly to Southwest Conference leadership so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk. Reports of suspected or known abuse may be made to the following:

- a. Immediate supervisor
- b. Program Director
- c. Conference Minister, Associate Conference minister

Additional Guidelines for Employee/Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse

- If you witness abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- If abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing that he or she was correct to tell to you.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- Immediately report the allegation or incident to the proper organization authorities (based on mandatory reporting requirements) and the designated authority.
- Be sure to document the incident, disclosure, and/or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse. State only the facts.
- It is not your job to investigate the incident but it **IS** your job to report the incident to your supervisor in a timely manner.
- Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report again to your supervisor or the designated organization authority.

2. Supervisors and Administrators Response to Abuse:

In addition to the above response procedures, supervisors and administrators should ensure the following:

Guidelines for Supervisor and Administrators Responding to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse

- First, determine if the youth is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm.
- Gather as much information about the allegation as you can. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc.
- Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.
- Contact the appropriate local authorities as indicated by your mandatory reporting procedures. Make sure you get a case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you speak at the reporting agency.
- Notify the Conference Minister or the Associate Conference Minister
- Suspend the accused employee or volunteer and remove them from the program until the investigation is completed.
- In the event that a Clergy member is accused of abuse the Committee on Church and Ministry Section A shall be informed.

3. Organizational Response:

Guidelines for Organizational Response

- Review the need for increased supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.

C. Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Abuse and Sexualized Behaviors

The thought that one youth may sexually abuse another youth does not occur to many people. Unfortunately, abuse between peers has increased 300% in the past few years. Youth-to-Youth sexual activity and sexualized behaviors often remain unreported in organizations because Clergy, employees, and volunteers are not comfortable documenting these situations, or may not know how.

Most serious incidents of youth-to-youth abuse are preceded by more subtle incidents such as name-calling, taunting, or roughhousing. Interrupting these interactions early and establishing and communicating standards of conduct can keep the program environment safe. Southwest Conference recognizes that the following interactions are high risk and shall be prohibited:

Prohibited Youth-to-Youth Interactions

- Hazing
- Bullying
- Derogatory name-calling
- Games of Truth or Dare
- Singling out one child for different treatment
- Ridicule or humiliation

In order to adequately respond to and track incidents within the organization, all sexual activity between youths and sexualized behaviors of youths must be consistently documented.

1. Employee and Volunteer Response:

Youth-to-youth sexual behaviors can include inappropriate touching, exposing body parts, using sexualized language, making threats of sexual activity, engaging in sexual activity, and similar types of interactions.

If employees or volunteers witness youth-to-youth sexual behaviors, they are instructed to follow these guidelines:

Guidelines for Clergy, employees, and volunteers Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity

- If you observe sexual activity between youths, you should immediately separate them.
- Calmly explain that such interactions are not permitted and separate the youths.
- Notify your supervisor.
- Complete the necessary paperwork including what you observed and how you responded.
- Follow your supervisor's instructions regarding notifying the authorities and informing the parents of the youth involved.
- In some cases, if the problem is recurring discipline may be required including not allowing one or both youths to return to the program.

2. Supervisors and Administrators Response:

If a supervisor or administrator receives a report of a youth's sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the supervisor should do the following:

Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity

- Meet with the staff who reported the sexual activity to gather information.
- Confirm that the youths involved have been separated or placed under increased supervision.
- Review the steps taken by the staff on duty.
- Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.
- Meet with parents of the youths involved.
- Determine what actions should be taken to make sure there is no recurrence, including assessing the suitability of the program for the children involved.
- Notify the proper authorities.
- Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. Review the need for additional supervision.
- b. Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- c. Review the need for additional training.
- d. Alert others in the organization.

3. Organizational Response:

After the internal review of the sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the organization will determine what can be done to prevent a reoccurrence, such as:

Guidelines for Organizational Response

- Review the need for additional supervision.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.
- Alert others in the organization.

D. Responding to Victims

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of the Southwest Conference is to be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, we will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

An incident of alleged abuse that requires medical or psychological care for a victim or family shall be reported to the Insurance Carrier by the Conference Minister. The latter shall discuss with the Insurance Board Claims Department whether the circumstances warrant initiation of Crisis Management services which may include psychological counseling. Upon approval, counseling services may be offered to a perceived victim(s), which may include family members.

Resources are available from the Council of Conference Ministers to provide victim assistance.

E. Notification of Parents

A minor child may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a child is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a child-on-child incident. And violation of policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

While communicating with a parent, and **being mindful of the importance of timely communication**, care shall be given to assessing:

- The specific facts;
- Whether a disciplinary or termination process is required;
- Whether a child should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians);
- Whether “mandatory reporting” is a factor;
- Who shall and in what manner communicate with the parents/guardian;
- Whether the Pastor should be involved in the communication;
- Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident.

Notification of parents shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required.

F. Responding to Media

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals and the Southwest Conference. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Board of Directors to represent the church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the church. Unless designated differently by the Board in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the church shall be the Conference Minister.

Prior to speaking to media, the Conference Minister shall contact and consult with Legal Counsel and the Conference’s Insurance provider to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

The Conference Minister shall consider securing Insurance Board media relations and crisis management resources. Considering the speed of news cycles, a prompt determination is required, erring on the side of seeking help.

IX. Conference Awareness

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the children, parents, vulnerable adults and guardians we serve. They are entitled to know what to expect of our ministries, the Ministers who serve them, and to know the related policies and procedures created to protect the respective ministry constituencies. Constituencies include the children, the parents, the vulnerable adults, the guardians, and the Ministers.

This entire policy shall be posted on the Southwest Conference website.

At the time youth or vulnerable adults are enrolled in the Southwest Conference programs, parents or legal guardians shall be provided:

- A copy of the Southwest Conference Code of Conduct.
- A copy of the Southwest Conference Policies for Working with Youth.
- A summary of the content of the orientation to be provided to children and vulnerable adults regarding boundaries and reporting.
- Information regarding the means to report violations of policy or suspicions of abuse.
- Information regarding their personal obligation to report suspected abuse as it may exist under the state laws applicable to the Southwest Conference.
- An invitation to visit programs in progress at any time at their convenience.

Youth and vulnerable adults shall be provided an orientation covering the following subjects:

- Age-appropriate information about boundaries (with reference to the Code of Conduct);
- How to protect themselves from abuse; and
- How to report boundary violations or incidents of abuse.

Local churches shall be provided with resources, included the training resources used to prepare Clergy, volunteers and staff, for use in their setting with parents, guardians, and youth as listed above so that Southwest Conference members are aware of our commitment to preventing abuse and neglect, and can prepare their members to be informed Clergy, volunteers and participants in our programs.

The orientation may be provided individually or in groups and will be offered at least annually in advance of the Southwest Conference summer camping program.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to report violations of policy, boundaries or suspected abuse to the Director of the respective program at which an incident has occurred and/or the Associate Conference Minister or the Conference Minister. They are also encouraged to report abuse to local authorities.

If for any reason, a parent/guardian believes that the primary contacts have failed to respond or have not given credibility to the parent's/guardian's concerns, the latter may contact the Moderator of the Southwest Conference.

X. Registered Sex Offender Policy

As a community of faith, serving by the example of Jesus Christ, we also seek to attend to the needs of all who seek healing, redemption and fellowship among us. We shall be prepared to accept in our midst those who have violated the most sacred mores of our society at large, in order to provide them refuge, peace, example and support in their recovery and penitence. We commit to doing so with utmost care for the welfare of our Conference, collectively and individually, and the community we serve.

We accept that there are risks to be born in our deliberate association with and ministry to sex offenders who are considered a pariah among the community-at-large as evidenced by the many constraints placed upon their interaction with the community. We agree to honor the needs of the Conference and our community to have reasonable assurance that a sex offender in our care will not have an opportunity to re-offend as a result of lapses in our management of the offender.

We shall consider limited participation or membership of a sex offender in our Conference with utmost care which shall include the following elements:

Registered sex offenders are ineligible to serve in Southwest Conference programs serving youth and/or vulnerable adults. Registered sex offenders may be permitted to serve on Standing Committees whose membership does not include youth or vulnerable adults so long as they declare their registered sex offender status to the Conference Minister and Limited Access Agreement is put in place.

The Southwest Conference will comply with statutory limitations applying in the States of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas as to the movement and activities of a sex offender.

As a judicatory body we rely on our local churches to put in place and to follow SafeConduct policies, Sex Offender Policies, and Limited Access Agreements to protect the whole of the Southwest Conference when Conference events are held on their sites.

Given that criminal convictions are a matter of public record, there shall be no expectation of confidentiality on the part of the offender. As a condition of participation in our Conference, the offender must agree that the leadership of their local church shall make it known to the Southwest Conference that the local church has accepted among them a registered sex offender. The conditions and limitations that apply to participation in the life of the local church shall be known to all and apply to participation in the Southwest Conference.

The following additional considerations shall apply:

Victims in the Conference – In such case as the victim of a RSO (registered sex offender) is a member of the Conference, is a client of other services provided by the Conference, the RSO shall not be permitted to attend Conference activities.

Clergy-penitent privilege – “Clergy-penitent privilege” is a “Rule of Evidence” defining or limiting information which clergy may reveal in a court of law only. “Clergy penitent privilege” does not prevent clergy from informing the Conference of matters which may be relevant to their safety; it does not require clergy to hold information in secrecy.

Ordained clergy shall assume responsibility and take extraordinary care to understand the scope and limitations of clergy-penitent privilege in the State in which they minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and the parameters of confidence and privilege as defined by our denomination. Authorized clergy shall inform the leadership of the church of the general principles of confidence and privilege under which they perform their clerical duties.

Escorts (Parish Associate) – Conditions of limited access for a RSO will commonly require that the offender have an escort while on the Conference premises or at Conference events elsewhere. A person serving as an escort shall not be a spouse, partner or relative of the offender.

Approval & Supervision – With the advice and prior approval of the Church Board, a Limited Access Agreement with a Petitioner (known RSO) may be signed only by the Conference Minister or Conference Moderator.

The Conference Minister, in association with other “authorized clergy” and parish associates (escorts), who shall be named in the Limited Access Agreement, shall be responsible for the general supervision of the Petitioner in all of the latter’s activity in relation to the Conference. Elements of supervision shall include the following:

- Knowledge of the terms of the Limited Access Agreement, including activity limitations placed upon the Petitioner.
- Knowledge of the Petitioner’s offense history sufficient to understand the risks of association with the church and its ministries.
- Willingness to assert activity limitations and to report any violation of restrictions placed upon the Petitioner.
- Willingness to intervene in any onset of a risky or problem behavior.
- Willingness to report all cases of non-compliance to the Senior Pastor.

The Conference Minister shall assess, prior to selection, whether a proposed parish associate is willing to fulfill the above elements of supervision.

Professional privacy – Members who are employed in certain occupations may have a statutory obligation to maintain privacy around the criminal history of their clients who may also be parishioners. Such members shall decline to accept leadership roles which may put them in a position of decision-making regarding individuals who may be their professional clients.

Juveniles – While the criminal record of a juvenile is ordinarily concealed by the courts, the church may come to know the juvenile’s history by other means. Honest disclosure by a juvenile and parents in the volunteer or program application and screening process is required and may reveal that a record exists without knowing the specifics. While a limited access agreement will be required for the juvenile, as for others, every precaution will be taken to preserve the privacy and confidentiality which the law affords a juvenile.

See Appendix E. for Sample Limited Access Agreement.

XI. Acknowledgment of SafeConduct Policy and Procedure

I have read and agree to comply with the *Southwest Conference Safe Conduct Policy & Procedure for Working With Youth and Vulnerable Adults*.

Signature of Applicant

Date

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A. Sample Application

Name: _____

Street address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: Home _____ Work _____

How long at current address: _____

Driver License: State Issued: _____ Number: _____

Have you ever previously worked for (insert organization)? Yes No

If yes, please complete the following. Dates: ___/___/___ to ___/___/___

Position: _____

Please list your addresses in the past five years:

For what position are you applying? _____

What interests you about the position for which you are currently applying?

What has prepared you for the position for which you are currently applying?

Employment history

Dates of Employment (Start with most recent)	Company Name and Address (City, State Zip)	Immediate Supervisor Name and Phone Number	Position Held	Reason for Leaving Position
Started __ / __ / __ Ended __ / __ / __				
Started __ / __ / __ Ended __ / __ / __				
Started __ / __ / __ Ended __ / __ / __				

Educational history

School Name	(City, State Zip)	Type of School	Name of Program or Degree	Program completed?

References

Reference Name	Address (City, State, Zip)	Daytime Phone	How long have you known this person?	Has this person agreed to provide a reference?
Professional/Civic				
Professional/Civic				
Personal				
Personal				
Family Member				

Volunteer experience

Please list your volunteer experiences with non-profit organizations (use back if needed.)

Organization	Duties	Dates	Contact Person	Phone Number

The Southwest Conference appreciates your willingness to share your time and skills. Providing safe and secure programs for our members is of utmost importance to us. The information gathered in this application is designed to help us provide the highest quality programs for the people of our community. Please initial each of the statements below.

- *I declare that all statements contained in this application are true and that any misrepresentation or omission is cause for rejection of my application, or dismissal from my position.*
- *I understand that I can withdraw from the application process at any time.*
- *My signature indicates that I have read and understand the above. **Do not sign until you have read and initialed the above statements.***

Applicant Signature: _____

Date: ___/___/___

Code of Ethics

- Our staff will exhibit the highest ethical best practices and personal integrity.
- Our staff will provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
- Our staff will not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect a youth or adult.
- Our staff will share concerns about suspicious or inappropriate behavior with their supervisor or administrator.
- Our staff will report any suspected abuse or neglect of a youth to the state authorities.
- Our staff will accept their personal responsibility to protect youth and adults from all forms of abuse.

Please Print

Date	_____
Name	_____
Position	_____
Signature	_____

I have reviewed this application and have noted any missing information.

Signature of Screening Manager

_____/_____/_____
Date

High Risk Indicators for Applications

- Application has gaps in dates for employment, education or residence.
- Application includes conflicting or incorrect information.
- Application has omitted or incomplete information.
- The applicant has an unstable work history.
- The applicant provides vague reasons for leaving previous jobs.
- The applicant is unwilling to use former supervisors as references.
- The applicant is overeducated or overqualified for this or other positions with youth.
- The applicant is moving to a lesser-paying job.
- The application shows a pattern of work and volunteer positions with the same type of youth.
- The work pattern shows themes of problems with authority.
- The applicant found out about the position through dropping in on the program.
- The applicant describes youth as helpless, vulnerable or perfect.

B. Reference Check Response Forms

Professional Reference Form

Name of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Reference: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: _____

Hello, my name is <your first and last name> with the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. <Applicant's name> has applied for a position with us and said you might be able to tell us about their previous work. Is this a good time for you to talk with me?

<If applicable> I would like to start by letting you know that the applicant has applied for a position working with youth or vulnerable adults, so it is extremely important for us to make sure that every applicant is suitable for this type of position. I appreciate your help with this.

1. How long have you known the applicant? _____

2. How do you know the applicant? _____

3. How would you rate the applicant's ability to learn new information and skills?

____ Above satisfactory ____ Satisfactory ____ Below satisfactory

4. Can you give me an example of when the applicant was able to learn something new and use it in his/her work?

5. We are looking for someone who will adhere to the best practices of our organization. How would you rate the applicant's ability to follow policies and procedures?

____ Above satisfactory ____ Satisfactory ____ Below satisfactory

6. How would you rate the applicant's ability to work with and relate to other adults?

____ Above satisfactory ____ Satisfactory ____ Below satisfactory

7. Have you observed the applicant working with youth?

____ Yes ____ No

If yes, how would you rate the applicant's ability to relate to youth?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

8. Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to youth?

9. In what types of situations have you observed the applicant working well with youth (enjoying the work, being effective)?

10. In what types of situations have you observed the applicant not working well with youth (becoming frustrated, angry, resentful or non-productive)?

11. How would you rate the applicant's ability to use good judgment in normal conditions?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

12. How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with youth?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

13. How would you rate the applicant's ability to use good judgment in stressful conditions?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

14. Can you give me an example of when the applicant used good judgment?

15. Are you aware of any reason why we should not allow the applicant to work with the youth we serve?

16. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Thank you very much for your time.

_____ / / _____

Signature of Screener **Date**



Personal Reference Form

Name of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Reference: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: _____

Hello, my name is <your first and last name> with the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. <Applicant's first and last name> has applied for a position with us and said you would be a good person for us to talk with about them. Do you have a few minutes to talk with me now?

I would like to start by letting you know that <Applicant's first and last name> has applied for a position working with youth / vulnerable adults, so it is extremely important for us to determine that every applicant is suitable for this type of position. I appreciate your help with this.

1. How long have you known the applicant? _____

2. What is your relationship to the applicant? _____

3. How would you rate the applicant's ability to work with and relate to youth?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

4. Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to youth?

5. We are looking for someone who can stay calm and control frustration even under very frustrating conditions with youth. How would you rate the applicant's ability to be patient and stay calm?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

6. Have you ever known the applicant to use harsh or abusive discipline with a youth?

7. Would you be comfortable placing one of your own loved ones in the care of the applicant? Why or why not?

8. What are the applicant's hobbies and recreational activities?

9. How would you rate the applicant's ability to relate to adults?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to adults?

10. We need a person who can be supportive and understanding of a youth's needs. How would you rate the applicant's ability to be genuinely supportive and understanding to a person in need?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

11. Think of a time when the applicant was able to show genuine concern for another person who needed comfort. Tell me about that time.

12. How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with youth?

___ Above satisfactory ___ Satisfactory ___ Below satisfactory

13. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Thank you very much for your time.

Signature of Screening Manager

Date

High Risk Indicators for References

- References were reluctant.
- References did not know the applicant well.
- References have short term relationships with the applicant.
- References refused to answer particular questions.
- Reference information differed from the applicant's account.
- References described applicant as having high-risk characteristics.
- References provided evasive responses.
- References reported specific concerns about the applicant.

C. Sample Field Trip Preparation Checklist

Field Trip Preparation Checklist

1. Specific location of the off-site activity. (Example: The Children’s Museum)

2. Name of the primary contact at the off-site location (Example: Mary Smith, Director of Group Sales at the Children’s Museum)

3. Address and telephone number for the location.

4. Parent permission sheet attached to this document for review.

5. Name and cell phone number of the supervisor for the off-site activity.

6. The employee to child ratio for the trip and names of all who will be attending.

7. Required attire for employee and child during the off-site activity.

8. Amount of time required for the off-site activity.

9. Estimated departure time and estimated return time.

10. Method of transportation.

11. Completed seating chart attached.

12. Overall supervision guidelines for location (employees will be assigned groups of children to monitor throughout the trip, employees will monitor children in “zones,” etc.).

13. Location of restrooms/locker rooms at off-site location.

14. Cost of the activity.

Last Minute Checklist:

1. All permission sheets returned and compiled for the off-site activity (children cannot participate without a permission slip). Employees must take permission slips to the off-site activity to ensure correct parent contact information.
2. Roll sheets printed and distributed to all employees for all children attending the off-site activity.
3. All required employees present.
4. All employees and children are in approved attire.

D. Sample Volunteer Driver Qualification Form & Agreement

**Volunteer Driver Qualification Form & Agreement for Use
of Personally Owned Vehicles**

Name: _____ Birth Date: _____

Home phone: _____ Work phone: _____ Cell phone: _____

Years of driving experience _____

Driver license No. & State*: _____ Expiration Date : _____

Insurance Carrier _____ Expiration date: _____

Liability Policy Limit -- Bodily Injury _____ Property Damage _____

- 1. Are all licensed vehicles you own covered by insurance as required by law? Yes, No
- 2. Have you ever been denied a driver's license or had one suspended or revoked? Yes, No
- 3. Have you had any moving traffic violations or accidents in the past three years? Yes, No

If the answer to questions 2 or 3 is YES, explain. Give dates and details of violations and accidents on the back of this form.

I AGREE to the following as a condition of being permitted to act as a Volunteer Driver:

- 1. The vehicle owner's insurance is the primary liability insurance coverage in the event of an accident.
- 2. The owner of the vehicle which I am driving is responsible for keeping the vehicle in safe working order.
- 3. The owner of the vehicle is responsible for all damage to the owned vehicle however caused.
- 4. The owner of the vehicle shall maintain liability insurance in the amount of at least
 - Bodily Injury -- \$50,000 per person and \$100,000 per accident or \$200,000 combined single limit; and
 - Property Damage -- \$25,000 per accident
- 5. The church's insurance shall apply in excess of the vehicle owner's liability insurance limits in the event the primary limits are exhausted, and only to the extent the church is legally obligated to pay damages.
- 6. **I will not receive or initiate phone calls while operating a vehicle for church activities, to include receiving or initiating text messages.**
- 7. I will indemnify and hold the church harmless from liabilities and damage resulting from my operation of a motor vehicle not owned by the church. The church will indemnify and hold harmless the volunteer driver for liabilities and damages resulting from acts or negligence of the church.

I hereby AFFIRM that the information I have given is stated truthfully and that I shall abide by the terms of the church's Vehicle Use Policy.

Attach a copy of Driver's License and current Insurance ID Card

Driver Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPROVED: _____ **Date:** _____ **Expiration:** _____

E. Sample Limited Access Agreement

This Limited Access Agreement is executed between:

(Your Church), referred to below as “we”, “the Conference” and “clergy”;

And

(Petitioner Name), referred to below as “you” and “your”

(Your Church), is an “open and affirming Conference” and as such affirms the dignity and worth of all persons as expressed in our Welcome Statement. We are committed to being a religious community open to those who are in need of worshiping with us, especially in times of distress and serious personal troubles. However, based on your background, we have concerns about your contact with children and youth in our Conference. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our Conference and our membership but your participation will be limited to ensure the safety of our children and youth and to assure that you will not be subject to future accusations.

Within these guidelines, the Conference welcomes your participation in worship services, coffee hour, meetings, adult education, and all adult social events. Do not enter the classroom wing or the lower level of the church building. You are to avoid all contact with children and youth on church property or Conference-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- Do not talk with children.
- Do not volunteer or agree to lead, chaperone or participate in events for children and youth including such things as religious education classes, stories or talks for worship, youth group events, activities during intergenerational events, driving or otherwise transporting children and/or youth.
- You will remain in the presence of a Parish Associate who knows your situation at all times. You must meet that person before coming onto church property (or before arriving at any church-sponsored event), remain with him at all times, and depart with him.
- If a child or youth in the Conference approaches you, either at church or in a community place, politely and immediately excuse yourself from the situation.
- Avoid being in the church or any church-owned building or church-rented space at any time without a Parish Associate present with you at all times.
- Do not ask for, seek access to, nor remove from the church any materials, files, directories, etc. listing members and friends of the church.
- We ask that you limit your time in coffee hour to about ten minutes.

As a part of this agreement it is understood that you will have three (3) members of this Conference, approved by the clergy, who know thoroughly your history and are willing to serve as your Parish Associates. You will be welcome on church property and at church-sponsored events but must be accompanied at all times by one of the Parish Associates named below:

(Named Parish Associate 1)

(Named Parish Associate 2)

(Named Parish Associate 3)

To engage your integration into the Conference and to assist you in maximizing your experience with the church it is agreed that you will meet on a bi-monthly basis with the Parish Associates and a member of the clergy together or separately to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. These meetings will also serve as an ongoing review of the implementation of this agreement.

Implementation of this agreement is based upon a review by the clergy of the most current supporting documents as follows:

- A statement from the court as to the nature of the conviction.
- A risk assessment from a qualified therapist.
- A report from a certified treatment provider indicating that you are not at too high a risk for recidivism.

Any change in the above must be reported immediately to a member of the clergy.

REASONS FOR EXCLUDING A PERSON FROM ALL CONFERENCEAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Refusal to allow the clergy to contact the treatment provider and parole officer.
Refusal to go for a risk assessment with a qualified therapist.
- Report by a treatment provider that the individual is at too high a risk for recidivism.
Refusal to sign a Limited Access Agreement.
- Refusal to comply with the requirements of the Limited Access Agreement.

This agreement will remain in effect until/unless:

- You fail to honor the terms of the agreement, thus nullifying it.
- It is superseded by any policies and procedures put in place by the church's SafeConduct™ Committee. The SafeConduct™ Committee in consultation with the clergy is the body responsible for providing you with guidelines, support and counsel for your participation in the life of the Conference.
- You, the clergy, and the SafeConduct™ Committee mutually agree to change the terms of this agreement.

ATTEST: I have reviewed the terms of the above limited access agreement and agree to abide by its provisions. Failure to honor its terms will result in my being denied access to church property and all church events.

Signature

Date

Petitioner Name

Address

WITNESS FOR THE CONFERENCE:

Signature

Date

Name

Conference Official Title

Southwest Conference United Church of Christ
917 E. Sheridan St.
Phoenix, AZ 85006