

Abuse Prevention Policies for Children and Youth

The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas



Adapted for use from the 'Model Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse as presented by the Church Pension group in partnership with the Praesidium Academy.

Adopted for use by The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas.

Introduction: Our Theological Commitment

From the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, we are taught that God, the Maker of the Universe, created human beings in His image¹. Because all human life is created in the image of God it stands to reason that all human life should be respected, protected, and loved. Humanity, as extensions of God's being, are worthy of our care and reverence. Our Lord Jesus speaks of this care and reverence without qualification in the Gospels². It is clear to us that, as Christians, we are to care for God's creation regardless of whether they acknowledge his lordship or not.

Within this general care of humanity our Lord emphasizes the care that should be given to children. The story of the disciples being rebuked by Christ because they are shooing away the Children should be foremost in our minds when dealing with the subject of prevention of children/youth abuse. *“But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and so not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven³.” Our job is to bring people to the Savior of the World but abuse accomplishes the opposite effect, that of pushing them away from Him. The abuse of children causes them to be pulled away and in His rebuke of His disciples we can hear our Lord's rebuke to those who would abuse these precious gifts.*

The youth ministries of this church is devoted to fulfilling the mission given to us by Christ Himself, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age⁴.” To accomplish this mission, we must do what is within our power to keep the children and youth that God has entrusted us with safe so that the Kingdom of God can be built up.

God's creation of humanity in His image, His command for us to love our neighbors, His rebuke of the disciples for hindering children, and His commission for us to spread the Gospel to all corners of the globe gives us more than enough reason to state that the protection of our children and youth is a duty and to that duty the youth ministries of this church us dedicated.

¹Genesis 1:27'

²Matthew 9:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; 12:22; Luke 10:27

³Mark 19:4

⁴ Matthew 28:18b-20

Safeguards for Children and Youth

A. Screening and Selection

- i.*** Any and all Church Personnel who **Regularly Work With or Around Children or Youth** shall be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:
 - 1) A **Standard Application (Appendix D)** completed by the applicant that includes and authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks.
 - a. The Standard Application cannot be filled out by anyone who has not been a regular member of this parish for less than six (6) months and who has not attained the age of eighteen (18).
 - 2) Sexual offender registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years.
 - 3) Individual interview with the applicant.
 - 4) Reference checks of persons outside the congregation who know the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant works with children.
 - 5) Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.
- ii.*** All information gathered about an applicant will be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination, in consultation with others as necessary, of whether or not the person is appropriate to work with children or youth.
- iii.*** Church Personnel who transfer within the Diocese of Western Kansas and apply for or are asked to or who do undertake a position working with or around children or youth are required to undergo the same screening and selection process in Section A above. This requirement may be met through a transfer of a copy of their personnel file to the new congregation, school, agency, or program together with completion of a new application, individual interview and reference checks with the congregations, schools, agencies or other programs for which the applicant has worked with or around children or youth since the screening was last done as shown in the applicant's personnel file.

B. Education and Training Requirement

- i.*** ***All Church Personnel Who Regularly Work With or Around Children or Youth are required to take the "Safeguarding God's People & Children" curriculum before they start their work. If this is not possible, the "Safeguarding God's People & Children" must be taken within three months of starting.***

C. Monitoring and supervision and Supervision of Programs

- i.*** ***Every program for children and youth must maintain a minimum 1:10 adult:child/youth ratio.***
- ii.*** ***Church Personnel over the age of 21 must directly supervise Church Personnel under the age of 18 and be physically present during all activities.***

Code of Conduct

Introduction

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and as such are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through policies and codes of conduct are not meant in any way to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to demonstrate its love and compassion more fully for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Relationships in ministry should, ideally, always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or allow harm to occur. This Code of Conduct has been adopted by the Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas to help the church create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them. All Church Personnel are asked to carefully read and consider each statement in the Code and within the Abuse Prevention Policies for Children and Youth.

Code of Conduct

- ❖ Church Personnel agree to do their best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
- ❖ Church Personnel agree to not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
- ❖ Church Personnel agree to comply with the policies for general conduct with children and youth as defined in these Abuse Prevention Policies for Children and Youth.
- ❖ All Church Personnel agree to comply with the Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth.
- ❖ In the event that Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth, church personnel agree to immediately report their observations.
- ❖ All Church Personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders.
- ❖ Church Personnel understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.

- iii. *Church Personnel are not permitted to develop new activities for children and youth without approval from the youth minister or, when no youth minister is available, from the rector. Requests to develop new activities should be submitted in writing to the youth minister.*
- iv. *Each program will develop age-appropriate procedures to ensure the safety of children and youth using restrooms and showers or baths.*
- v. *If possible, when both boys and girls are participating, male and female adults must be present.*

D. General Conduct for the Protections of Children and Youth

The following guidelines are intended to assist Church Personnel in monitoring and supervising behaviors and interactions with children and youth to identify and stop those that may be inherently harmful to children and youth, that are the type used by child molesters to groom children, youth, and their parents, or that may create the conditions where abuse can more easily occur. These guidelines should also be used to make decisions about interactions with children and youth in church sponsored and affiliated programs. They are not designed or intended to address interactions within families. When exceptions to these guidelines must be made, they should be reported to the supervisor of the Church Personnel making the exception as soon as possible.

- i. *All Church Personnel who work with children or youth must agree to comply with the Diocese of Western Kansas Guidelines for Appropriate Affection (Appendix A).*
- ii. *No person will be allowed to volunteer to Regularly Work with Children or Youth until that person has been known to the clergy and congregation for at least six (6) months.*
- iii. *Programs for infants and children under six (6) years old will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.*
- iv. *Church Personnel are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.*
- v. *Parents or guardians must complete the Big Form (Appendix B) before Church Personnel transport children and youth for a church sponsored activity or for any purpose or more than an occasional basis.*
- vi. *Church Personnel will respond to children and youth with respect, consideration and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture or socio-economic status. Church Personnel will portray a positive role model for children and youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity.*
- vii. *One-to-one counseling with children or youth will be done in an open or public or other place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others.*

- viii. *Church Personnel are prohibited from dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth.*
- ix. *Church Personnel are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child or youth.*
- x. *Church Personnel are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented material (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.*
- xi. *Church Personnel are prohibited from using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.*
- xii. *Church personnel are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the Internet with children or youth.*
- xiii. *Church Personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds and sleeping bags with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of all children or youth in the bed or sleeping bag. Male and female children or youth are not permitted to sleep in the same bed, sleeping bag, tent, or hotel room unless those children or youth are part of the same family and the parent or immediate adult of that family is present. It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleep with all the children or youth participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge as long as the room is divided into male-only and female-only and as long as both male and female adults are present.*
- xiv. *Church personnel are prohibited from using harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.*
- xv. *Church Personnel are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities related to children's or youth ministry or camp events.*
- xvi. *Youth are not allowed to transport other children and/or youth for the purposes of children and/or youth activities until the youth reach the age of seventeen (17), have a safe driving record, and have been given permission to transport youth by their parents or legal guardians. This privilege may be revoked immediately by the parent or legal guardian, youth minister, or rector.*
- xvii. *Church Personnel are prohibited from transporting children and/or youth of the opposite sex without another person above the age of twelve (12) in the vehicle.*

Responding to Problems

- A. Reporting Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations with children or youth.***
- i. When church personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors, behaviors that are inconsistent with the Guidelines for Appropriate Affection (Appendix A), or which may violate any provisions of these policies, they must immediately report their observations.***
 - ii. Such inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations that relate to interactions with children or youth should be reported in one of the following ways:***
 - 1) A telephone call or meeting with the immediate supervisor of the person,***
 - 2) A telephone call or meeting with the rector, if the person is not the rector;***
 - 3) A telephone call or meeting with a church warden if the person is the rector;***
 - 4) A telephone call, meeting or fax to the bishop;***
 - 5) Submit a Notice of Concern (Appendix C), signed or unsigned, to the bishop.***
 - iii. All reports of inappropriate behavior or policy violations with children or youth will be taken seriously.***
- B. Reporting Suspected abuse of Children or Youth***
- i. All Church Personnel are required by this policy to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to the appropriate state authorities.***
 - ii. Failure to report suspected abuse of children or youth may be a crime. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, “in good faith” means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.***
 - iii. In addition to reporting to the authorities, Church Personnel are required to report any suspected or know abuse of children or youth that may have been perpetrated by Church Personnel directly to the priest and the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims.***
 - iv. Reports of suspected or known abuse that involved Church Personnel may be reported to the Diocese of Western Kansas in the following ways:***
 - 1) A telephone call, meeting or fax to the bishop;***
 - 2) A telephone call or meeting with the youth minister and rector, if the youth minister and rector are not the persons being complained about.***
 - 3) Submit a Notice of Concern (Appendix C), signed or unsigned, to the bishop.***
 - v. The Diocese of Western Kansas will cooperate with any investigation by state authorities to the fullest extent appropriate and inform authorities that a concurrent internal investigation will be directed by the Diocese of Western Kansas.***

Appendix A: Guidelines for Appropriate Affection

The Diocese of Western Kansas is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for our children's and youth ministries to protect our children and youth from abuse and our Church Personnel from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate; otherwise, that decision is left to each individual. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows Church Personnel to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth. These guidelines are based, in large part, on avoiding behaviors known to be used by child molesters to groom children or youth and their parents for future abuse. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church Personnel working around or with children or youth.

- 1) Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.

Some **positive** and **appropriate** forms of affection are listed below:

- ❖ Brief hugs.
- ❖ Pats on the shoulder and back.
- ❖ Handshakes
- ❖ "High-fives" and hand slapping.
- ❖ "Fist bumps".
- ❖ Verbal praise.
- ❖ Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth.
- ❖ Arms around shoulders.
- ❖ Holding hands while walking with small children.
- ❖ Sitting beside small children.
- ❖ Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children.
- ❖ Holding hands during prayer.
- ❖ Pats on the head when culturally appropriate.

- 2) The following forms of affection are considered **inappropriate** with children and youth in a ministry setting because many of them are the behaviors that child molesters use to groom children or youth and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves, sexual abuse.

- ❖ Inappropriate or lengthy embraces.
- ❖ Kisses in the mouth.
- ❖ Holding children over three years old on the lap.
- ❖ Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants or toddlers.

- ❖ Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms.
- ❖ Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- ❖ Wrestling with children or youth.
- ❖ Any form of unwanted affection.
- ❖ Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- ❖ Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing.

1. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Training shall be appropriate to each person’s function according to the *Screening and training Protocols* ([Appendix A](#)).

All Leaders shall have Universal Training that fosters a culture of safety and inclusion for all people and covers a broad overview of issues of vulnerability, power, and, and healthy boundaries. Universal training is designed to equip all people to live out their Baptismal Covenant. All members of the Episcopal Church shall have access to this training.

In addition to Universal Training, all Supervisors and those with oversight responsibilities for ministry programs and/or other adults who engage in ministry with children and youth shall have Specialized Training that is tailored to their role and ministry function.

Depending on role and responsibility, Specialized training should include:

- Prevention, identification, and response to all forms of abuse and neglect;
- Vulnerability within the pastoral relationship;
- An introduction to gender non-binary;
- The needs of LGBTQ+ children and youth;
- The ways that children and youth can engage in in self-advocacy; and
- The needs of differently-abled children and youth.

Certification of training shall be renewed every five years.

Diocese, congregations, and other organizations with responsibility for programs with services or ministries to children and youth shall keep records sufficient to evidence compliance with this policy.

Appendix B: Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Social Media and Electronic Communications for Children and Youth

Social media shapes the lives of young people and has the potential to empower ministry. Behavior in the digital sphere is never private. Posted content may be used out of context and out of the control of the originating individuals and organizations, putting them at risk. In addition, these powerfully connective tools are subject to the same dynamic of unequal power and potential for abuse that present a risk in all ministry relationships. Churches face the challenge of identifying and proactively addressing areas of potential risk in social media use in the midst of rapidly evolving technology. The following recommended practices and guidelines are designed to be a flexible template for developing policies and covenants governing the safe use of social media and digital communications in ministry settings.

General Information about Digital Communications

- All communications sent digitally (email, social networking sites or platforms, notes, texts, or posts, etc.) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL and can be shared or reposted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent; that is, occurring in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality, and expectations for relationships.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children or youth apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. Check your local applicable laws.

Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Church and Organizations:

- Establish a policy that outlines professional and institutional standards for profiles and interactions on social networking sites and platforms.
- Establish a policy of transparency regarding social media accounts. The best practice is to have the diocese, congregation, or organization create and “own” the social media accounts representing the diocese, congregation, or organization respectively and have multiple administrators and/or supervisors with access. If personal accounts are used, a system of monitoring should be established.
- Establish a policy regarding the identification or “tagging” of individuals in online photos or videos. For example, on Facebook, “tagging someone in a photo or video creates a hyperlink to that person’s profile page that can be clicked by anyone. The best practice is for the diocese, congregation, or organization not to identify or “tag” individuals.

The “tagging” of children and youth should be prohibited. When written permission is provided by a parent/guardian, the caption of photos or videos of minors may be permitted, the caption should not include the minor’s full name, nor should it create a clickable link to someone’s personal profile. A policy of whether an individual can “self-tag” in a diocese, congregation, or organization’s online photo or video should also be established.

- A diocese, congregation, or organization does not have a responsibility to review or monitor the personal pages or groups that are not sponsored by that diocese, congregation, or organization, except as described in #2 above. The preceding statement should be included in the diocese, congregation, or organization’s Social Media Policy.
- Email can be a good method of communication, and it also has the opportunity to be misunderstood. Having a clear understanding and procedure for responding to digital communication that raises concern is prudent for all. Best practices can include not responding immediately and sharing the communications with a supervisor before responding. Phone and face-to-face meetings are preferred when responding to emotionally driven communications or pastoral emergencies.
- When using photos and videos for ministry purposes, obtain a media release for each person and only post images that respect the dignity of every person depicted.
- Dioceses, congregations, or organizations must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space. Signs should be posted that indicate a service or activity will be broadcast when worship services or activities are streamed or distributed on the web or via other broadcast media.

Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Children and Youth:

- Prudent judgement should be used in the time of day a child or youth is contacted through social media. Under normal circumstances, refrain from contact or exchanging texts, chats, or emails before 8:00 am or after 10:00 pm, unless it’s an emergency.
- Privacy settings and personal boundaries should be implemented.
 - Create and use profiles on social networking sites that meet professional and institutional standards.
 - Do not submit connection requests (such as friend requests on Facebook or “add Me” on Snapchat) to children or youth for personal interactions. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be “friends”, and adults should discern the nature of contact appropriate for healthy ministry.
 - Apply privacy settings that are consistent with all children and youth, across all social networking sites and platforms. Avoid playing favorites or the appearance of playing favorites.
 - Establish a regular ongoing and consistent system of review that focuses on settings, accessible content, photos, and videos to ensure compliance with professional and institutional standards.

- Inform parents of children and youth of social networking sites and platforms used within the ministry.
 - When possible, send communications (1) to entire groups, (2) on an individual's "wall," or (3) in public areas, rather than in private messages. This includes photos, images, and videos.
 - When sending emails to a child or youth that contain personal or private information regarding that child or youth, a copy should be sent to the parents or guardians as well. Examples of these types of emails include: payment due information, specific medical request or questions, etc. Mass emails sent to an entire group are not required to be copied to parents or guardians.
 - Disclose **ongoing** digital pastoral communications (ie: e-mails, Facebook messages, texting, etc) with children and youth to a parent and/or a supervisor to determine when a referral to a professional provider or resource is needed.
- Create covenants to govern digital groups, which include:
 - Appropriate and inappropriate behavior of members (bullying, pictures that depict abuse, violence, illegal activities, sexual acts, etc.) and the consequences for inappropriate behavior.
 - Who may join and/or view group activity, when participants should leave the group and when/if they group will be disbanded.
 - Description of content that can be posted or published on the site or page;
 - A prohibition of "tagging" photos and videos of children and youth. However, the captioning of photos and videos is permissible with written permission from a parent or guardian.
 - Notification that mandatory reporting laws will be followed; and
 - Consequences for breaking the covenant.
 - Delete inappropriate material posted in digital groups, address the behavior and report it, if necessary, in accordance with legal and institutional requirements.

