



# United Christian Church of Austin SafeConduct™ Policy & Procedures

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## I. Statement of Policy

As a community of Christian faith, United Christian Church of Austin (hereafter referred to in this document as “UCC”) 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 congregation of UCC supports principles of SafeConduct, which include individual responsibility to fulfill the highest standards of personal conduct toward others and to lead and guide the congregation in fulfillment of the standards set by our Christian faith. UCC strongly opposes and prohibits sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or any form of exploitation or abuse of others regardless of age, sex, sexual orientation, sexual identification or mental capacity. It is the intention of our congregation to affirmatively nurture good behavior, and to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, as necessary, discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Every member of the Congregation, whether “authorized clergy,” leader, lay staff, volunteer, 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 congregation 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.

*Note: This policy addresses behaviors and actions required to protect youth and vulnerable adults from abuse. It is separate from the church’s [Disruptive Behavior Policy](#), which outlines the handling of disruptive behavior, regardless of the individuals involved. Both policies are critical to the broader health and safety of our church.*

## II. General Definitions

1. Administrator includes Education Team Leader, Council Chair, or any person on Executive Committee of the Council.
2. Authorized Clergy includes any person who is admitted to ministry by United Church of Christ or Disciples of Christ, who serves the congregation in any capacity whether called as pastor or serving in a retired, emeritus, administrative, or volunteer capacity.
3. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the youth's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
4. Mandatory Reporters are those persons required by Texas law to report suspected abuse to police or youth/child welfare agencies, which includes Clergy.
5. A Minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as youth throughout policy).
6. Neglect is the failure to provide for a youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a youth from harm.
7. Physical abuse is injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a youth.
8. Program Director is the staff member in charge of the program (e.g. Director of Children's Ministry, Director of Youth Ministry.)
9. Sexual abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that occurs between a youth and an adult or between two youths. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or the other youth. It is not solely limited to physical contact.
10. A Vulnerable Adult is anyone aged 18 or over, who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

## 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.

UCC provides our youth and vulnerable adults with the highest quality services available. We are committed to creating an environment for youth and vulnerable adults 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 UCC. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior with youth and vulnerable adults or allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. UCC will fully cooperate with authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

The 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 identity, sexual orientation, age, or religion.
3. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined by UCC.
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 UCC.
6. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not stare at or comment on youth or vulnerable adults' bodies.
7. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not date, or become romantically involved with, youth or 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 or vulnerable adults.
9. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not have sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on UCC'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 UCC's policies regarding interactions with youth or vulnerable adults outside of our programs.
12. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not engage in inappropriate electronic communication with youth or vulnerable adults.
13. Clergy, employees, and volunteers are prohibited from working one-on-one with youth or vulnerable adults in a private setting. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will use common areas when working with individual youth or vulnerable adults.
14. Clergy, employees, and volunteers will not abuse youth or vulnerable adults in anyway including, but not limited to, the following:
  - a. *Physical abuse* - hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints;
  - b. *Verbal abuse* - degrading, threatening, cursing;
  - c. *Sexual abuse* - inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations;
  - d. *Mental abuse* - shaming, humiliation, cruelty; and
  - e. *Neglect*: withholding food, water, shelter

15. UCC will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult. In addition, UCC will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, UCC 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 someone another hurtful name.
- 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;
- 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; and/or
- 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 or does not take appropriate action, 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 Texas specific mandatory reporting requirements. 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 youth 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 youth abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by Texas mandated reporter laws; and
- 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 UCC's supervisor or Praesidium's Anonymous Helpline at 855-347-0751.

18. UCC 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 been convicted of youth or vulnerable adult abuse, indecency with a youth or vulnerable adult, or injury to a youth or vulnerable adult.

#### **IV. Policies for Working with Youth**

Policies define the bandwidth of acceptable behavior in an organization. Because offenders often violate policies to gain access to youths, when staff and volunteers 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**

UCC's physical contact policy promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting youths, Clergy, employees, and volunteers. UCC 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.

UCC's policies for appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are:

<b><i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Side hugs*</li> <li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple-to-temple” hugs*</li> <li>• Pats on the shoulder or back*</li> <li>• Handshakes*</li> <li>• High-fives and hand slapping*</li> <li>• Verbal praise*</li> <li>• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms*</li> <li>• Arms around shoulders*</li> <li>• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)*</li> <li>• Standard diaper changing in the presence of another trained adult</li> <li>• Holding an infant in arms in the presence of another trained adult</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>* verbal consent is needed from youth old enough to consent</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-frontal hugs</li> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>• Lap sitting, excluding infants/toddlers</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Piggyback rides</li> <li>• Tickling</li> <li>• Allowing a youth to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg</li> <li>• Any type of massage given by or to a youth</li> <li>• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth or the staff or volunteer</li> <li>• Compliments relating to physique or body development</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas, excluding diaper changing</li> </ul>

**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.

UCC's policies for appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions are:

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

### **C. One-on-One Interactions**

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. UCC aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by administrators.

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:

<b><i>Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.</li> <li>• Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit physical affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.</li> <li>• 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. If the meeting is of a confidential or highly sensitive nature, such as ministerial counseling, care should be taken to face the youth away from the open door for confidentiality purposes.</li> <li>• Inform other Clergy, employees, and volunteers that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly pass by for a brief observation, being sensitive to not disrupt ministerial counseling and respect confidentiality.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>



**Tutoring/ Private Coaching:**

One-on-one situations, such as tutoring and private coaching sessions, introduce additional risks for abuse and also 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 or private coaching sessions.
- b. Tutoring and coaching sessions with UCC’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. Off-site Contact**

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

UCC requires parental consent and groups of 2 or more youth for outside-of-regularly-scheduled activities. UCC has determined that the following forms of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate:

<b><i>Appropriate Outside Contact, with Parental Consent</i></b>	<b><i>Inappropriate Outside Contact</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking groups of youths on an outing</li> <li>• Attending public events such as sporting activities or performances with groups of youths</li> <li>• Attending functions at a home with groups of youth, with a parent present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents’ written permission</li> <li>• Visiting one youth in the youth’s home, without a parent present</li> <li>• Entertaining one youth in the home of staff or volunteers</li> <li>• A lone youth spending the night with staff or volunteers</li> </ul>

In addition, when outside contact is unavoidable, ensure that the following steps are followed:

1. Supervisors should identify for Clergy, employees, and volunteers what types of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate.
2. Ensure that staff or volunteers have the parents’ permission to engage in outside contact with the youth.

**E. Electronic Communication**

Any private electronic communication between staff and youths, 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:

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

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

### **Cell Phone Use:**

Internet use, text messaging, and/or electronically sending pictures when assigned to working with youths is limited to authorized church-related activities.

Authorized cell phone use during church related activities may include:

- Navigating using a map application when on field or mission trips;
- Sharing pictures and updates on the UCC in-house youth internet page or text group;
- A parent employee or volunteer needing to stay in occasional contact with family member(s) who are not present; and
- Emergency purposes.

Employees need to ensure that friends and family members are aware of this policy. Organization members and/or program participants using an electronic communication device for inappropriate reasons is in violation of this policy and is grounds for disciplinary action up to and/or including termination of employment.

### **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 should only give gifts to groups of youths, and only under the following circumstances:

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

## **V. Screening and Selection**

The process of screening and selecting employees and volunteers is an essential element of management due diligence. There are several elements required which serve a number of purposes. Criminal background checking by itself is inadequate simply because very few predators, or people who would become predators, have been through the penal system. A would-be predator requires three things: Access, Privacy & Control.

**Standing of "Authorized Clergy":** Each denomination served by the Insurance Board has a process of granting professional standing to clergy. Employment of clergy who do not fulfill denominational requirements may have an impact on insurance programs.

The following screening and selection procedures are strongly recommended for all Clergy, employees, and volunteers.

### **A. Standardized Application**

All applicants for employment should be expected to complete an application prior to working at UCC. The application should be reviewed by the Personnel Chair 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, UCC should endeavor to follow a consistent approach to applications missing information.

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

Volunteers must be active members of UCC for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs. There should be **no exceptions** to this policy, even when volunteer candidates come from another church with similar programs.

### **B. Interviews of Applicants for Employment**

All applicants should be interviewed during the selection process and prior to employment. 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.

The Personnel Chair and position supervisor should interview each candidate. Each shall employ behavioral interviewing techniques to assess suitability for working with youth and specifically discuss the church's commitment to protect youth and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

The Personnel Chair should 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 if the applicant is hired or selected.

### **C. Reference Checks for Employment**

Reference checks should be conducted for all applicants prior to employment. A minimum of three references is recommended, including two professional and one personal reference. The Personnel Chair will work with applicants to develop a good reference list. If the person responsible for screening the applicant does not believe the references are appropriate, they can ask for different ones. Reference checks should be conducted by telephone or video conference. The screener 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 screener 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 employment should 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 employed.

#### **D. Background Checks for Employment and Volunteers**

Criminal history and sexual offender registry checks should be conducted for all applicants for employment and all volunteers who will have access to a vulnerable population. The information should be obtained prior to employment of an applicant or volunteer assignment.

The background check(s) should include the following:

- National multi-state criminal records search;
- National sex offender registry search <https://www.nsopw.gov/en/Search/Results>;
- 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 prior to executing the check.

Applicants responsible for transportation should have a driver's license check performed to identify past driving concerns.

#### **E. Employment and Volunteer Decisions**

Two of the following individuals shall review each background check and agree that the applicant is eligible for employment/volunteer assignment: Personnel Chair, the position's supervisor, Council Chair, Vice Council Chair, or Church Administrator.

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 employment or volunteer work with youth:

- Violent crimes;
- Sexual assault;
- Sexual abuse or neglect of a youth; and/or
- 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 employment is made, screening managers involved in the Screening process should review all information obtained. The employment process should last a sufficient length of time to allow the Personnel Chair to carefully collect and evaluate 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, Personnel Chair and Supervisor 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 X 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 X and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is **not acceptable** for the position."*

Staff and volunteers who initially pass the background check will periodically complete additional background checks during their tenure in role to ensure their record is still acceptable. Staff and volunteers must inform the Personnel Chair within 48 hours if they are arrested, so that the situation can be assessed and appropriate action be taken prior to and/or after the final outcome of the case.

## VI. Training

The mission of UCC is first to prevent abuse of youth 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 those among us, our friends and family, would commit such acts willingly. Nevertheless, persons who have not been presented behavior standards and do not understand boundaries may unwittingly engage in behaviors that may be perceived as predatory. Their personal reputations and that of UCC are then at risk.

To fulfill our leadership obligation, each new employee and new volunteer shall complete a specific program of training within 30 days of assuming duties. Fulfillment of training requirements shall be documented by the Office Manager and respective Program Director (e.g. Children, Youth.)

Training shall be repeated annually. Records shall be maintained by the Office Manager and respective Program Directors. Training records shall be audited annually by the Council Chair or Council Vice Chair, as assigned.

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 youth 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/youth molesters.
  - Characteristics of abusers.
  - How child/youth molesters operate: access, privacy, and control.
  - Protecting oneself from false allegations.
  - Examples of youth-on-youth sexual abuse, even among young children.
  - Characteristics of youth more likely to act out sexually.
  - Characteristics of youth more likely to be abused.
  - High-risk activities and circumstances.
  - Specific monitoring and supervision activities to prevent youth-on-youth sexual activity.
  - How to respond to incidents of sexual activity between youth.

Program directors shall assure that each employee and volunteer has mastered requirements and provide additional supervision and guidance as required to assure required conduct.

## **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, the Education Chair must complete a site inspection checklist at least annually.

## **B. General Supervision**

General supervision procedures:

1. **Administrative and Supervisory Visits to Youth Programs-** Youth leader supervisor or assigned administrator will regularly visit all youth programs to ensure that activities are well managed and that youth policies are observed by all in attendance.
2. **Ratios-** Each program will follow the ratio requirements that are directly to the goals of the program and the design of the program area. The employee or volunteer-to-youth ratio should be adjusted for programs that serve youths with special needs. Refer to local licensing requirements and general best practice guidelines for establishing adult-to-youth ratios.
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**

Because UCC is responsible for all youths in the facility, we recommend implementing the following practices:

1. Require a parent or legal guardian to complete a membership application which includes identifying information, any special medical or behavioral circumstances, any legal indemnifications, the youth's date of birth, and emergency contact information. In addition, require all youths to sign-in AND to sign-out of the facilities so that the program has a record of the youth who are in the facility at all times.
2. Require youths to sign a Code of Conduct (when old enough to do so) that outlines the program's behavioral expectations and policies regarding appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This Code of Conduct should also 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, we recommend encouraging parents to attend an information session facilitated by a church staff member. This meeting will provide an opportunity to review expectations and requirements, and the chance to establish a relationship with the parents. This can be helpful if any problems arise in the future.



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 like basketball tournaments, swimming activities, arts and crafts, etc. These activities should have one or more staff and volunteers assigned to lead and supervise.
  - b. For indirect supervision, the program must designate certain building 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 and volunteers. Youths should know that they will be supervised by staff and volunteers at all times, and all staff and volunteers should know which areas are and are not authorized.
5. Develop supervision standards for the authorized areas. For example:
  - a. Determine how frequently authorized areas should be monitored by staff and volunteers.
  - b. Assign staff and volunteers specific supervision responsibilities over authorized areas.
  - c. Require staff and volunteers to monitor authorized areas: this may be accomplished by using checklists.
6. Ensure that youth know who is serving as staff and volunteers so they can easily recognize them throughout events.
7. Train all staff and volunteers:
  - a. To greet youths that enter the facility; to direct youths 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.)

Ultimately, all youth must be supervised at all times, regardless of age. The key to remember is that they can be supervised directly in structured activities and indirectly when they are in authorized areas.

## **D. Monitoring High Risk Activities**

### **Bathroom Activities**

Most incidents of youth-to-youth abuse occur in the bathrooms; therefore, the following supervision guidelines are recommended:

When supervising restroom use, the adult staff or volunteer should first quickly scan the bathroom before allowing youths to enter.

- a. For “Group Bathroom Breaks”:
  - Require staff or volunteer to 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 or volunteer.
  - 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.
  - Require staff or volunteer to stand outside the bathroom door but remain within earshot.
- b. For single use restrooms:
- Require youths to ask permission to use the bathroom.
  - Require that staff or volunteers frequently check bathrooms.
- c. Prohibit staff or volunteers from using the bathroom at the same time as youths.
- d. If assisting young youths in the stalls, the helper should keep the door to the stall and hallway open, and let another trained adult know that help is required.

### **Locker Room Activities (when available)**

The locker room procedures include:

- a. Requiring staff or volunteer to stand within earshot of the locker room when in use by youths.
- b. Requiring staff or volunteer to intermittently and briefly check inside the locker room so users know the locker room is monitored.
- c. Discouraging the use of locker rooms by youths of different ages at the same time.
- d. Prohibiting the use of locker room horseplay such as towel snapping.
- e. When possible, arrange lockers to minimize unnecessary privacy.

### **Shower Activities**

Staff/volunteers and youths must shower at different times. Create shower schedules that will permit supervision of the youths while staff/volunteers shower.

- a. While the youths shower, at least one staff or volunteer should be within earshot of the youths. Ensure that only one youth is in each shower. (Consider utilizing shower curtains that do not go all the way to the floor, so that staff or volunteer can easily see how many youths are in each shower stall.)

### **Transition Times and Free Times**

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

- a. Require youths to remain in line-of-site of staff or volunteer at all times;
- b. Specify the staff/volunteer-to-youth ratio;

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

### **Playground Activities**

The playground procedures require:

- a. Youths to remain in line-of-site of staff or volunteer 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 staff and volunteers are assigned specific areas to supervise (“zone monitoring”);
- e. Specific bathroom procedures;
- f. Staff and volunteers to conduct periodic roll calls for each age group; and
- g. Staff in charge of the event to conduct periodic check-ins and assessments of the activity period and of the entire activity area.

### **Transportation Activities**

Transporting youths may increase the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse because Clergy, employees, and volunteers may be alone with a youth or may make unauthorized stops with youths. In addition, transportation activities may provide a time for unsupervised youths to engage in youth-to-youth sexual activity.

The transportation guidelines:

- a. Require written parent permission from all youths on the trip. Staff take these permission forms and medical releases with them on the trip;
- b. Require staff in charge to have a list of the youths on the trip. The staff or volunteer takes roll when boarding a vehicle, when leaving a vehicle, periodically throughout the trip, and then again when boarding the vehicle;
- c. Specify staff/volunteer-to-youth ratios. When possible, do not count the driver in the supervision ratio;
- d. Require staff/volunteer 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 or volunteer;
- f. Prohibit drivers from making unauthorized stops;
- g. Where applicable (such as in mentoring programs,) require staff and volunteer to

document the beginning and ending time of the trip and the mileage, names of the youths being transported, and the destination; and

- h. Require documentation of any unusual occurrences.

When public transportation is used:

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

In situations where staff and volunteers transport youths in non-organization vehicles:

- a. Administrators must be notified of all transportation activities;
- b. Use the “rule of three” when transporting youths: 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.
- d. Youths must be transported directly to their destination. No unauthorized stops may be made;
- e. A staff member 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. Staff and volunteers must avoid unnecessary physical contact with youths while in vehicles; and
- g. Staff and volunteers should avoid engaging in sensitive conversations with youths.

### **Off-Site Activities**

The off-site procedures include:

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

## **Overnight Activities**

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

### Supervision Guidelines:

- a. All overnight activities must be documented in writing by the Program Director and approved by Administrators.
- b. Administrators may randomly observe overnight activities.
- c. A meeting with all staff and volunteers 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/volunteer-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, volunteer, or youth rooms.

### Overnights at a facility with large group sleeping areas:

- a. Physical boundaries within the organization must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.
- b. Assign each staff and volunteer to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each staff/volunteer should then maintain a roll sheet that lists all of the youths in their group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the evening and in the morning.
- c. Assign staff or volunteers to high risk areas in UCC's or other facility, such as the bathrooms, entrances and exits, hallways, etc. If it is not possible to assign specific staff or volunteers to these areas, assign specific staff or volunteer to conduct periodic facility "walk-throughs".
- d. With regards to sleeping arrangements, allow youth to select the group with which they will sleep (male or female.) Separate the groups into separate rooms or areas, assigning staff and volunteers to sleep at potential high-risk areas, such as at the entrances and exits to the rooms. If separate rooms are not feasible, separate the groups by as much space as possible.
- e. When performing room checks, staff/volunteers should always go in pairs.
- f. Communicate to youths where staff/volunteers are located if they are needed in the night.

### Overnights Away from the Facility:

- a. Overnight stays at private homes are prohibited unless approved by administrators.
- b. Physical boundaries at the off-site location must be clearly defined and explained to the youths.

- c. Assign each staff and volunteer to a specific group of youths to supervise. Each staff and volunteer should then maintain a role sheet that lists all of the youths in their group. Head counts and roll checks should be conducted routinely throughout the event.
- d. If in a cabin type setting, the staff and volunteers should be placed in bunks to maximize supervision around the cabin and in a way that decreases the chances of youths sneaking out (such as by the door.)
- e. In hotel or dorm rooms, assign youths to rooms based on their gender preference and age. There should be one youth per bed, and at least 2 youth in each room or suite, ideally 3+ if beds are available. Youth in a known romantic relationship cannot sleep in the same room.
- f. Staff/volunteers should have their own rooms. If staff/volunteers must share rooms with youths, they must have their own beds and never change clothes in front of youths.
- g. Staff and volunteers are to be on duty in the halls or cabins at night until lights out and all rooms are quiet.
- h. Communicate to youths where staff and volunteers are located if they are needed in the night. Adult rooms will be clearly marked so youth can easily locate them..

### **Youth Volunteer Programs**

Older youths who participate as youth volunteers are still youth participants and not staff or volunteers. Therefore, even though they are often given more responsibility, youth in the volunteer 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 youth volunteers are still youths and not their peers. Therefore, the following guidelines are recommended for youth volunteer programs:

- a. Create a screening process for teen leaders which includes
  - Completing a standard application.
  - Verifying they have been active members of UCC for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs.
  - Obtaining one or more recommendation(s) (from a member or staff of the church, teachers, counselors, family friends, etc.)
- b. Train 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.
  - 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. Create 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, lanyards, or other obvious identifier 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 supervisor(s).
- 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 and volunteers 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 and volunteers 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 and volunteers are complying with the established policies and procedures.
- **Observe Interactions.** Observe verbal and physical interactions between all participants, staff, and volunteers.

## 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.

Organizations must establish precise, unequivocal requirements for reporting to the authorities and for adhering to a serious-incident response plan.

## **A. Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors or Policy Violations**

Because UCC 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 observes 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 UCC, 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.

#### **i. Employee and Volunteer Response:**

If an employee or volunteer witnesses 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 a supervisor, Program Director, or other authority.
- If you are not comfortable making the report directly, make it anonymously.
- If the report is about a supervisor or administrator, contact the next level of leadership or the Council Chair.
- Document the report but do not conduct an investigation.
- Keep reporting until the appropriate action is taken.

#### **ii. Supervisor and Administrator Response:**

In the event that a supervisor or an administrator 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 employee or volunteer or volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the Texas Department of Family Protective Services and file a report. If there is threat of immediate harm, call 800-252-5400. Otherwise, file a report at [texasabusehotline.org](http://texasabusehotline.org).
- If appropriate, notify parents and/or guardians.
- 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. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- b. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Progressive Disciplinary Process outlined in this manual.
- c. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other Clergy, employees, and volunteers or youths.

**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

### i. Employee or Volunteer Response to Abuse:

As required by mandated reporting laws, Clergy, employees, and volunteers 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 specific Texas mandated reporting requirements for definitions of abuse and more specific reporting information.

In addition to reporting to Texas authorities, Clergy, employees, and volunteers are required to report any suspected or known abuse of youths perpetrated by employees or volunteers directly to leadership (defined below) 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 confidentially to the following leadership:

- a. Immediate supervisor
- b. Directors
- c. Administrators

#### ***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 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, or any circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse. State only the facts.
- It is not your job to investigate the incident to ensure integrity of the investigation and outcome, but it **IS** your job to report the incident to your supervisor or an administrator as soon as possible.
- Check back to make sure appropriate steps were taken. If not, report the incident to Council Chair.

## **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.
- If witness did not already do so, contact the Texas Department of Family Protective Services and file a report at [texasabusehotline.org](http://texasabusehotline.org). Make sure you get a case number.
- If the alleged abuse involves an employee or volunteer, notify Council Chair.
- Suspend the accused employee or volunteer until the investigation is completed.

## **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. UCC recognizes that the following interactions are high risk and should be prohibited:

### ***Prohibited Youth-to-Youth Interactions***

- Hazing
- Bullying or taunting
- Roughhousing
- Derogatory name-calling
- Games of Truth or Dare
- Singling out one youth 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.

#### **i. 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:

<b><i>Guidelines for Clergy, employees, and volunteers Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● If you observe sexual activity between youths, you should immediately separate them.</li><li>● Calmly explain that such interactions are not permitted.</li><li>● Notify your supervisor.</li><li>● Complete the necessary paperwork including what you observed and how you responded.</li><li>● Follow your supervisor's instructions regarding notifying the authorities and informing the parents of the youth involved.</li><li>● In some cases, if the problem is recurring, discipline may be required including not allowing one or both youths to return to the program.</li></ul>

**ii. Supervisors and Administrators Response:**

In the event that 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:

<b><i>Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Meet with the person who reported the sexual activity to gather information.</li><li>● Confirm that the youths involved have been separated and placed under increased supervision.</li><li>● Review the steps taken by the staff and volunteers on duty.</li><li>● Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.</li><li>● Meet with parents of the youths involved.</li><li>● Determine what actions should be taken to make sure there is no recurrence, including assessing the suitability of the program for the youth involved.</li><li>● Notify the proper authorities.</li><li>● Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident.</li></ul>

### iii. 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 recurrence, such as:

<b><i>Guidelines for Organizational Response</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Review the need for additional supervision.</li><li>● Review the need for revised policies or procedures.</li><li>● Review the need for additional training.</li><li>● Alert others in the organization.</li></ul>

### D. Responding to Victims

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of UCC 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 Board by a member of the Executive Committee. 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.

### E. Notification of Parents

A minor youth may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a youth is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a youth-on-youth 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 youth 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, the congregation and UCC. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Executive Committee to represent the church. No other person(s) may

speaking on behalf of the church. Unless designated differently by the Executive Committee in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the church shall be the Council Chair.

Prior to speaking to media, Council Chair shall contact and consult with Region (DOC) and Conference (UCC) Legal Counsel, to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

Council Chair shall give immediate consideration to 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. Congregational Awareness**

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the youth, 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 youth, the parents, the vulnerable adults, the guardians, and the Ministers.

This entire policy is posted on the UCC website. [www.uccaustin.org/safeconduct](http://www.uccaustin.org/safeconduct)

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

- An electronic copy of the UCC Standards of Conduct, or hard copy if requested. See [UCC Handbook](#).
- An electronic copy of the UCC Policies for Working with Youth, or hard copy if requested.
- A summary of the content of the [orientation](#) to be provided to youth 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 laws of the State of Texas. See link: [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact\\_us/report\\_abuse.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/report_abuse.asp)
- 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 Standards of Conduct);
- How to protect themselves from abuse; and
- How to report boundary violations or incidents of abuse.

The orientation shall be provided:

- Individually at the time a youth or “vulnerable adult” begins participation in a ministry of the church; or
- As a group at the opening of a school term, event or league; and
- Annually when a program, event or league is perpetual.

Parents and guardians shall be invited to receive the same “abuse prevention” training as provided to Clergy, Staff, and Volunteers.

Parents/guardians shall be encouraged to report violations of policy, boundaries, or suspected abuse to the Program Director of the respective ministry at which an incident has occurred. Alternatively, they may report incidents to the Council Chair. Anonymous reporting is permitted in the same manner and with the same precautions as reporting by Ministers or other observers.

If for any reason, 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 Council Chair to report those concerns.

## **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 congregation, 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 congregation 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 congregation with utmost care which shall include the following elements:

Document understanding of the statutory limitations applying in the State of Texas to the movement and activities of a sex offender, taking into account the programs of the church or the operations of tenants. (Examples: Sunday school, day care, pre-school, sports leagues, seasonal camps and associations which serve youth and/or “vulnerable adults.”)

Consider and understand the character of the crimes which have resulted in requiring an individual to register as a sex offender, the passage of time without repeated conduct or behavior and the risk and opportunity of re-offending that is presented by the particular programs of our congregation.

Document understanding of limitations and prohibitions placed upon the offender by courts and probation authorities. The opinion of a mental health professional regarding the suitability of the person to participate in the life of the church shall be obtained. In all cases where probation is in force, we shall obtain the explicit approval of and conditions of participation specified by the probation officer. A recommendation by law enforcement or mental health professionals to deny participation to an offender shall be honored in all cases.



Understanding that, with respect to a person who is an employee, volunteer or in a position of church leadership, who has previously been conviction for acts of sexual misconduct as defined by insurance contracts, knowledge by church leaders and managers of such prior conviction will have the effect of voiding coverage for the individual employee, volunteer, or church leader - which may result in a self-insurance scenario - and for the church for future acts of sexual misconduct by that person.

Given that criminal convictions are a matter of public record, there shall be no expectation of secrecy on the part of the offender. As a condition of participation in our faith community, the offender must agree that the leadership of the church shall make it known to the members, constituencies and customers of the church that we have accepted among us a registered sex offender. The conditions and limitations that apply to participation in the life of the church shall be known to all.

With the advice of legal counsel, and in all cases, the conditions of participation by a registered offender shall be defined by a "limited access agreement" executed by the offender and church. Such agreement shall be approved by probation authorities as may be necessary according to paragraph 3, above. The agreement shall be reviewed annually to validate ongoing eligibility. Violation of the agreement by the offender shall be considered as grounds for immediate cancellation of the agreement.

The following additional considerations shall apply:

**Victims in the congregation** – In such case as the victim of a RSO (registered sex offender) is a member of the congregation, employee or is a client of other services provided by the congregation, the RSO shall not be permitted to attend the church or church 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 congregation 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 of Texas, 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 (s)he performs his/her clerical duties.

**Designated Congregational Member** – Conditions of limited access for a RSO will commonly require that the offender have an designated congregational member escort while on the church premises or at church 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 Senior Pastor.

The Senior Pastor, 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 church. 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 Petitioners 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 Senior Pastor 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 application and screening process 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.

## **XI. Acknowledgment of SafeConduct Policy and Procedure**

I have read and agree to comply with my organization's policies regarding sexual abuse prevention.

Printed Name of Employee or Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Employee or Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by Church Representative Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Church Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

**XII. Appendices**

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## A. Application Form Links

[Employment Application](#)

[Volunteer Application](#)

## B. Reference Check Questions Link

[Reference Check Policy and Questions](#)

## C. Field Trip Preparation Checklist for Trip Coordinator

- Specific location of the off-site activity. (Example: The Children's Museum)
- Name of the primary contact at the off-site location (Example: Mary Smith, Director of Group Sales at the Children's Museum)
- Address and telephone number for the location.
- Parent permission sheet attached to this document for review.
- Name and cell phone number of the supervisor for the off-site activity.
- The employee to youth ratio for the trip and names of all who will be attending.
- Required attire for staff, volunteers, and youth during the off-site activity.
- Amount of time required for the off-site activity.
- Estimated departure time and estimated return time.
- Method of transportation.
- Completed seating chart for vehicles.
- Overall supervision guidelines for location (adults will be assigned groups of youth to monitor throughout the trip, employees will monitor youth in "zones," etc.).
- Location of restrooms/locker rooms at off-site location.
- Cost of the activity.

### *Last Minute Checklist:*

- All permission sheets returned and compiled for the off-site activity (youth cannot participate without a permission slip). Coordinator must take permission slips to the off-site activity to ensure access to correct parent contact information.
- Roll sheets printed and distributed to all employees for all youth attending the off-site activity.
- All required employees and volunteers present.
- All staff, volunteers, and youth are in approved attire.

**D: Monitoring Checklist (see Page 23 of policy for additional guidelines)**

**Supervisor/Administrator Monitoring Checklist**

- *Prepare to spend at least 30 minutes monitoring*
- *Prior to monitoring session, review "Guidelines for Employees/Volunteers Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations" on Page 24; be prepared to report any egregious policy violations immediately to Supervisor or Council Chair*
- *Complete form and turn in to supervisor no later than 1 week from completion, or as soon as possible if potential violations are witnessed*

Name/Role of Individual Completing Checklist: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle One: **Scheduled** or **Random**

Arrival Time(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Time(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe Activity Monitored: \_\_\_\_\_

Staff and Volunteers Present: \_\_\_\_\_

List Youth Present (or attach copy of check-in sheet):

- Are adult-to-youth ratios known by the lead staff member and are they being followed?
- Are youth in authorized areas only? (walk through the building and outdoor/playground area to observe, with special attention to high-risk areas)
- Do adults have line of sight and ability to supervise youth in the space?
- Are adults actively engaged and following the planned schedule of activities?
- Are bathroom use and related supervision guidelines followed? [  Check circle if no opportunity to observe]
- Are only proper physical and verbal interactions between adults and youths and between youths and other youths observed?

Comments based on observed interactions:

Complete within 1 week of Monitoring:

- Verify that participating volunteers acknowledged the SafeConduct Policy and Procedures and completed the required training

**E. Volunteer Driver**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs 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/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 unrelated to the trip while operating a vehicle for church activities, to include reading or initiating text messages. Any church trip-related calls must be handled using hands-free technology.

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:** \_\_\_\_\_



## F. Limited Access Agreement

### **This Limited Access Agreement is executed between:**

**United Christian Church of Austin**, referred to below as “we”, “the congregation” and “clergy”;  
And **(Petitioner Name)**, referred to below as “you” and “your”

United Christian Church of Austin (UCC,) is an “open and affirming congregation” 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 congregation. The following guidelines are designed to reduce the risk to both you and them of an incident or accusation. We welcome you to our congregation 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 congregation 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 congregation-sponsored events. This includes the following:

- Do not talk with children or youth.
- 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 Designated Congregational Member 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 them at all times, and depart with them.
- If a child or youth in the congregation 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 Designated Congregational Member 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 congregation, approved by the clergy, who know thoroughly your history and are willing to serve as your Designated Congregational Member. You will be welcome on church property and at church sponsored events but must be accompanied at all times by one of the Designated Congregational Members named below:

(Named Designated Congregational Member 1)

(Named Designated Congregational Member 2)

(Named Designated Congregational Member 3)

To engage your integration into the congregation 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 Designated Congregational Member 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 CONGREGATIONAL 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 certified 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 Executive Committee. The Executive 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 congregation.
- You, the clergy, and the Executive 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.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**SENIOR PASTOR - WITNESS FOR THE CHURCH:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **G. Acknowledgement Tracker Link**

[Safe Conduct Policy Acknowledgement Tracker](#)

## **H. Update Summaries**

- July 2022: References Disruptive Behavior Policy. Includes direction that, following a cleared background check, arrests must be reported to Personnel Chair for review. Clarifies that youth in known romantic relationships cannot room together in overnight accommodations.