

Safe Gatherings Guidelines

“Best Practices” for Children’s Ministry Guidelines—Children, Age 0 thru Grade 5

Security Guidelines:

- Minimum of two unrelated care providers at all times. Care providers should not be alone with a child. At least one of the care providers must be Safe Gatherings certified.
- Care providers should always have supervision or a witness present when with a child of same or opposite sex for a sustained period of time.
- Churches may want to set a system of “claiming” children following the conclusion of an activity, such as
- the worship service. This ensures the child is released to the proper family member.

Discipline Guidelines

- Corporal punishment of any kind is never appropriate.
- Nor is any words that could cause feelings of condemnation or shame about any aspect of their person - including degrading references to anything physical, emotional, mental, or position (or station) in life, such as saying, “Are you a strong boy? Strong boys don’t cry.” or “Shame on you”.
- Use a firm, gentle voice addressing and redirecting the behavior (i.e., “you are running; walk, please”). Any words or tone that would cause a child to think he/she is a “problem”, rather than a specific behavior being addressed (i.e., screaming at a child).

Physical Contact Guidelines

Appropriate physical contact consists of: non-demanding, gentle touch of shoulders, hands, arms, head or back. If the individual is a child, sitting child on leg (appropriate only at preschool or kindergarten age level); “high fives” or shaking hands, if gentle.

Inappropriate physical contact consists of but is not limited to: kissing; demanding hugs and kisses; touching chest, genital region, upper legs, buttocks, waist, stomach. If the individual is a child, sitting child in the center of your lap; sitting child between legs; sitting child above age 6 on one or both legs; piggy back rides; seductiveness or suggestive contact.

Physical contact of any kind which is done for the pleasure or satisfaction of a volunteer or staff member is never appropriate.

Any touching used to express power or control over an individual is not permitted.

Bathroom Procedures

At any age, it is inappropriate to be alone with a child, especially in the bathroom.

Infant: Diapering should be done in the Nursery by a parent/legal guardian or by a paid staff member only. Diapering in a secluded area or without the presence of other care providers; bathroom closed is not appropriate.

Toddler-Potty Training: If a toddler has an “accident” in underwear/clothing, only the parent/legal guardian should change the clothing.

Two to Five Year Old: Permission is granted to use the bathroom unless special help is required. After the care provider has ensured that the bathroom is clear, the care provider should wait outside the bathroom door, which will remain slightly open. Children may require some assistance. Care providers should never be in a closed door situation with a child or help without a request for assistance from the child.

Kindergarten Age or Older: Permission granted to use facility; unless special help (if a child has temporary physical limitations (i.e. broken arm, crutches, etc.) is required. After the care provider has ensured that the bathroom is clear. The care provider should wait outside the bathroom door, which will remain slightly open. Caregivers should never be in a closed door situation with a child or accompany a child inside the bathroom when special help is not required.

“Best Practices” for Youth Ministry

Guidelines, Policies and Procures—Youth, Grades 6-12

Meeting with Youth ministry participants

- All meetings, gatherings, and events associated with the Youth Ministry will adhere to a two unrelated adult minimum rule. At least one of the adults must be Safe Gatherings certified.
- On the occasion when a youth worker/sponsor needs to meet individually with a youth ministry participant of the same gender outside of regularly scheduled programs, parental consent should first be obtained. All meetings must occur in a public place where other people are present. Some examples of public places where other people are gathered include restaurants and coffee shops. Youth ministry participants and youth workers/sponsors will meet at the public place and depart from the public place separately. If a meeting occurs during regularly scheduled program time, it must be in a common, visible area in a place where other people are present. Under no circumstances should any youth worker/sponsor meet privately with an individual youth ministry participant of the opposite gender.
- When providing rides to youth ministry participants, youth workers/sponsors should have a third person in the car. Although situations may require the driver to be alone in the car with a youth ministry participant of the same gender (e.g. picking up the first youth ministry participant), this should be the exception rather than the norm and parental consent must be obtained. Care should be taken to plan ahead to avoid finding oneself in these situations. Under no circumstances should any youth worker/sponsor be alone in a car with an individual youth ministry participant of the opposite gender.
- As a rule, youth workers/sponsors shall not be alone in a home or building with an individual youth ministry participant. If the situation becomes unavoidable (e.g. a youth ministry participant is the first to arrive or last to be picked up), the adults shall wait with the youth ministry participant outside the home or building. In bad weather, when

meeting off site, the adult may leave the main entry or front door open and remain inside with the youth ministry participant in the front room or entryway.

- In group sleeping arrangements (e.g. camp cabins, ski trips, mission trips) two unrelated adults must be present with any number of youth ministry participants during the stated “lights out” time. At least one of the sponsors must be Safe Gatherings certified. Under no circumstances shall any worker/sponsor share a bed with a youth ministry participant. Sleeping arrangements should be separated by gender. Male workers/sponsors will supervise male youth ministry participants; female workers/sponsors will supervise female youth ministry participants. In dorm or hotel settings, youth ministry participants and adults will sleep in separate rooms. Room checks should be performed at stated lights out time. A suggested minimum worker/sponsor to youth ministry participant ratio of 1:8 should be observed on any overnight event.
- Any leader/sponsor who is a minor, must be under direct Safe Gatherings certified adults supervision at all times. A leader/sponsor who is a minor must be at least five years older than the youth ministry participants participating in the event in order to be considered a leader.

Physical Touch

Although physical affection can have an appropriate place in ministry, workers/sponsors shall use discretion as to the frequency and type of physical affection they provide to youth ministry participants of either gender. Specifically, youth workers/sponsors should refrain from giving or receiving massages of any type. Whenever possible, front-to-front hugs should be avoided. Workers/sponsors should never have youth ministry participants sit on their laps or vice-versa. Kissing of any sort is inappropriate. Touching should be in response to the need of the youth ministry participant and not the need of the adults. It should generally be in response to a youth ministry participant's initiative. A worker/sponsor shall never touch a youth ministry participant's breasts, buttocks, or groin.

Corporal punishment is never permissible. Physical restraint should be used only in order to protect the health and welfare of the youth ministry participant, other youth ministry participants, volunteers or staff.

Social Media

Social Media Guidelines for Youth Ministry Social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most of our youth ministry participants. They offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of youth ministry work. But their improper use can produce serious consequences. The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Be mindful that our calling is to meet youth ministry participants where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for youth ministry participants safely.

Employee and volunteer youth workers who want to communicate with minors using text messaging, email, social networking websites or other forms of electronic media must agree to follow the guidelines set forth by their church Youth Ministry.

Ministry youth workers/sponsors may not transmit any content that is illicit, unsavory, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry activities.

Except in an emergency, youth workers/sponsors may not transmit any personal information pertaining to a minor without the youth ministry participant and his or her parents or guardians signing consent forms. This applies to group texting, group e-mail, or any other public method of electronic communication. Personal information may include such things as a minor's name, phone number, e-mail address, or photograph.

Youth workers/sponsors should use prudent judgment in the time they contact students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with youth ministry participants at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.

Implement privacy settings and personal boundaries

Creating separate private and professional profiles on networking sites

Applying privacy settings that are consistent with all youth ministry participants, across all Platforms.

Reviewing accessible content and photos frequently.

If a youth ministry participant texts a youth worker/sponsor after hours and it's not an emergency

– wait until morning to reply

If a youth worker/sponsor chooses to utilize any social networking site to communicate with youth ministry participants associated with the youth group, invite other youth workers/sponsors to view and respond to the content. Parents of youth ministry participants should be aware of and

how:

All information, images, or videos shared electronically through public ministry communications channels aren't considered confidential.

When possible, communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas - not in private messages – this includes images

When ongoing pastoral communication are private (ie: Emails, FB Messages, Texting, etc) – who they are with and their frequency should be disclosed to the parent or a supervisor

Consistency with all youth ministry participants on all platforms is of the utmost importance

Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:

appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior

who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
content that can be posted/published on the site or page who, how and when photos may be
tagged (ie: did guardians give you permission to post
pictures of their youth ministry participant) mandatory reporting laws will be followed
consequences for breaking the covenant Any inappropriate material posted in online groups
should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.

Video Chatting with youth ministry participants is strongly discouraged – if you must, be aware
of what you're wearing and of your surroundings.

Emails and texts should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of a received email
or text from a youth ministry participant raises concerns or questions, share it with a member of
the staff, Pastoral team, or supervisor.

Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication,
when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies
There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes.
Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image
Include a media release statement on a signed consent form
It is strongly discouraged to attach youth ministry participant names with their image
(ie: captions, tagging on Facebook)
Youth workers/sponsors driving on ministry business are to avoid cell phone use—even
handsfree—when transporting children, while driving in heavy traffic, during hazardous weather
conditions, or when it violates local law.
Youth workers/sponsors are never to send or read text messages while driving.

“Best Practices” for Elders Ministry Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Security Guidelines

- Minimum of two unrelated visitors participating in a visitation ministry to nursing home residents or members hospitalized. At least one of the visitors should be Safe Gatherings certified.
- Leaving door of the resident's/patient's room open while visiting
- Visit during normal visiting hours; check in at visitor's desk upon arrival and departure
- When visiting the homebound, visitors should be two unrelated individuals. At least one should be SafeGatherings certified.
- Home visits should be scheduled in advance.
- Notify family members of scheduled and completed home visits, if possible.
- Keep a list of visits—dates, times, persons visited and where nursing home, hospital and/or home visits took place.

“Best Practices” for Developmentally Disabled Ministry Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

General Approach

Below are some general principles to keep in mind when ministering to the special needs population.

Security Guidelines:

Minimum of two unrelated volunteers or staff members at all times. Volunteers or staff members should not be alone with an individual. At least one of the volunteers or staff members must be Safe Gatherings certified.

Volunteers or staff members should always have supervision or a witness present when with an individual of same or opposite sex for a sustained period of time.

Physical Contact Guidelines

Appropriate physical contact consists of: non-demanding, gentle touch of shoulders, hands, arms, head or back. If the individual is a child, sitting child on leg (appropriate only at preschool or kindergarten age level); “high fives” or shaking hands, if gentle.

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Physical contact of any kind which is done for the pleasure or satisfaction of a volunteer or staff member is never appropriate.

Any touching used to express power or control over an individual is not permitted.

Bathroom Procedures

At any age, it is inappropriate to be alone with an individual, especially in the bathroom.

After the volunteer or staff member has ensured that the bathroom is clear, the volunteer or staff members should wait outside the bathroom door. If the individual is a child, some assistance may be required. Volunteers or staff members should never be in a closed door situation with an individual or help without a request for assistance from the individual.

Working with Survivors of a Disaster

Adapted from The 2013 United Methodist Committee on Relief

General Board of Global Ministries

The United Methodist Church

Early Response Team Training Handbook

In working with survivors—all Emergency Response Team members are required to be Safe Gatherings certified.

An Emergency Response Team should always introduce itself first and state what it can do to help. Volunteers may ask the survivors what they need done.

Volunteers need to be aware of the following:

The four tasks in healing from disaster -

(all people go through these tasks but at different times and at different speeds. Some may even bounce back and forth between tasks).

1. Accept the reality of the situation - “I can’t believe it happened!”
2. Experience the pain. It’s okay to hurt.

3. Accept that a new situation is required.
4. Withdraw the emotional investment in the past and transfer it to the new.

People evolve at their own pace and their own way through these tasks. Sometimes good intentions will impede that process. Never tell someone not to cry and that everything will be fine. Remember - DO NO HARM.

Enable Recovery

Early responders will often find people at Task 1 and/or 2 and often in extreme denial. Sometimes “parenting techniques” are appropriate when the shock is still in place. Helping the family make small choices might help them get moving towards appropriate action. Sometimes volunteers will fail to see the shock and expect rationality when it doesn’t exist. Utilize selected forced choices to engage and empower survivors.

Three symptoms of depression

Volunteers do not diagnose depression, but may want to refer local officials to a need they sense in a family.

1. Rage
2. Self-pity
3. Sense of loss of control (which goes against the American sense of individual freedom).

Volunteers must realize that they are invading the privacy of the survivors and must respond in a sensitive and caring manner. Often volunteers are meeting their own issues of need through creating artificial dependence by survivors in an inappropriate manner.

Early Response Teams can and should be very flexible so that they may be able to respond to any disasters that may occur in the local setting.

A good resource for this topic is www.communityarise.com/

Six Important Things to Know

About Disaster Spiritual and Emotional Care

Tips for Early Response Teams

1. Early response team members are guests in the homes of those they help
Team members represent Christ’s church and agree to uphold the highest standards of Christian witness and the trust placed in the United Methodist Church.
Team members behave as they would when invited to anyone’s home.
Remember the cultural and regional customs differ.
2. Be very aware of your own behavior, including the volume of your speech or laughter.
Laughter or loud talk may seem appropriate for the conversations you are having in one part of the site but very inappropriate for others at the site who are hurting and may hear you.
3. Confidentiality is vital to providing a sense of emotional and spiritual safety for survivors.
By agreeing to volunteer on an ERTeam, volunteers agree to hold the stories about disaster survivors with complete respect for the survivors. While this means that some of the most

compelling stories volunteers encounter must be held in confidence, we must not re-victimize survivors by sharing sensitive information or information that will identify the survivors. An exception may be made if survivors offer specific permission to tell their stories but those stories must still be handled with care. If volunteers tell a story, it is important to state that the survivors asked you to share their story.

It can be very difficult for people to ask for help. You may know people and families that you help.

Golden rule: how would you want to be treated if you were asking for help?

You may see behavior that is upsetting or disturbing. At an appropriate time, volunteers may be invited to debrief their experiences in a formal, closed and confidential setting endorsed by the disaster response coordinator.

Important exception: if volunteers encounter someone who threatens to harm themselves or someone else or if the volunteer suspects a child, youth or vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected, the volunteer is required to report those incidents to the proper officials. Volunteers are still required to refrain from telling this information to others in the community.

4. When in doubt - refer

If volunteers are concerned about someone's behavior or emotional state, contact the mental health resources designated by the conference disaster response officials. Volunteers should know who to contact before entering the site.

5. Early Response ministry is primarily a ministry of presence.

Survivors will know we are Christians by our love. Religious or faith talk is appropriate if the survivor initiates the conversation.

Volunteers should be aware that they may encounter people from other faiths. Volunteers should ask themselves, "Would I want someone of another faith to try to impose their beliefs upon me -especially if I had just been severely traumatized?"

6. "Things to Say" and "Things NOT to Say"

Know that survivors may say things that are disturbing. The volunteers job at this time is to support survivors by listening, accepting intense emotions and validating feelings (validating feelings isn't the same as agreeing with them). It is not the volunteers' job to correct or give advice.

Don't criticize expressions of grief; there is no such thing as an abnormal expression of grief. Survivors may blame themselves when there doesn't appear to be any reason to do so, but imposing our values on others by chastising them for the way they feel will not help.

Things to say when working with disaster survivors

"I am so very sorry" or "I'm so sorry this happened to you."

“My heart is with you.”

“You will be in my prayers” or “My prayers are with you.”

“I can see this is hard for you.”

“I can see how you might feel that way.”

Things NOT to say when working with disaster survivors

“It’ll take time, but you’ll get over it.”

“Try to be strong for your children.”

“It was God’s will”, or “This was meant to happen”, or “There was a reason for this”.

You’re lucky it wasn’t worse’< or “It could have been worse”, or “It was just stuff that you lost.”

“You can always have another child.”

“You’re still young - you’ll find someone else.”

“This will make you stronger”, or “Don’t cry”.

“Try not to think about it.”

“You should hear what happened to me.”

“God needed them more than we did.”

“It’s time to move on.”

“You shouldn’t feel this way.”

“I know how you feel.”

(Don’t try to tell the survivor that you understand or that you know how they feel. You do not. Even if you have been a disaster victim yourself, each person’s loss is unique).