

Recommended Standards of Behavior

Expectations of Volunteers and Staff

As a volunteer or staff member working with youth in your church, you are expected to:

- teach the good news of the gospel
- set an example
- mentor
- be a role model for youth
- organize meaningful experiences

Your roles will vary with your different responsibilities and may even vary at different times of the year!

In addition to the expectations already listed, the Synod Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention has developed recommended Standards of Behavior for all individuals working with children and youth in our church. These standards are designed to protect youth, adults, families, and the church.

A. Open Door Policy

Work with youth in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter—not behind closed or locked doors. Always welcome and encourage parents and guardians to attend classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, and events.

B. Dual Leadership

Two adult leaders should be present at all activities involving children or youth. An exception is a Sunday school class held in a room with an observation window or an open door. Private consultations between an adult and a minor should occur when another adult is in the general area. Counseling should be as confidential as possible without sacrificing safety. Planned individual contact outside the church building should occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and consent of the parent or guardian.

C. Transportation

Transportation to and from events should be the responsibility of the families. During events, drivers should avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult, unless prior approval has been obtained by the parent or guardian.

D. Respect of Privacy

Adult leaders and staff need to respect the privacy of minors and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Situations requiring privacy include using rest rooms, changing clothes and taking showers. Adults need to protect their own privacy in similar situations. Adult leaders and staff also should wear pajamas or similar clothing when sleeping and swimming suits when swimming.

E. Separate Accommodations

A minimum of two adult leaders should be present at an overnight activity. If youth participants include males and females, the adult leaders should be males and females. If this condition cannot be met, the event should be canceled. Minor(s) should not sleep alone in a tent, bedroom, or hotel room with an adult(s). When minors and adults share a tent, bedroom or hotel room, there should be at least two adults and two minors per room. An adult should not occupy the same bed as a minor.

Males and females should sleep in separate rooms at events and have separate access to bathroom facilities. When separate shower facilities are not available, separate shower schedules for males and females should be established.

F. Housing

When private homes are used for overnight events, the program staff member will make final approval of all adults involved as hosts, hostesses, and chaperones. At least two youth should be assigned to each home.

G. Secret Activities

Secret activities and organizations should not be allowed in the church. All aspects of the church program should be open to observation by parents and congregational leaders. Church workers should not conduct secret activities or ask that activities be kept secret.

H. Constructive Discipline

Discipline used in church activities should be constructive, respectful and reflect Christian values. Physical, sexual or emotional punishment should never be permitted. Never deny basic necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter, or medical care. Be alert to the physical and emotional health of the children and youth with whom you work.

I. Hazing and Harassment

Physical or verbal hazing, harassment, and initiations should be prohibited at any church activity. This includes the use of put-downs and excessive teasing.

J. Dating

Adult leaders or staff should not date or be romantically involved with children or youth in the congregation.

K. Sexual Activity

No sexual contact should be permitted between adults and minors. Sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual material, the exposure of sexual parts of the minor's body and/or the adult's body or other sexually abusive behaviors should be prohibited.

L. Nursery

The church nursery should have an identification system that links each child and his/her parent(s) in such a way that no unauthorized person may take the child. The nursery is encouraged to have two adult leaders or staff on duty at all times of operation.

Reporting

Reporting Violations of Congregational Standards

If an adult volunteer or staff person is suspected of inappropriate behavior while working with children or youth, action needs to be taken. This is the procedure to evaluate the impact of this behavior on the adult's suitability to work with children and youth.

1. An allegation should be made in writing and submitted to the youth task force.
2. The youth task force reviews the allegation to determine if it substantially relates to youth safety and/or the work the individual is performing. Use the standards of behavior in this handbook and the Wisconsin statutes (see pages 10-11) as a basis for evaluation.
3. If the behavior does not put children or youth at risk or raise safety concerns, have a conversation with the individual about steps to resolve the problem.

OR

4. If the behavior raises children and youth safety concerns, suspend the individual until the circumstances surrounding the allegation are reviewed by the youth task force.
5. Notify people on a need-to-know basis of the suspension.
6. The youth task force reviews the evidence and removes the individual if evidence shows there are youth safety concerns.
7. Notify people on a need-to-know basis of the resolution.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

According to Section 48.981 of the Wisconsin Statutes, those having cause to suspect that a minor, seen in the course of professional responsibility, has or will be the victim of abuse or neglect, must report the case immediately (not more than 24 hours after cause) by telephone or personal visit to the local county child social service agency, the office of the county sheriff, or the city police department.

Those required to report include: physicians, coroners, physical/occupational/speech therapists, nurses, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, paramedics, ambulance staff, child care workers, alcohol and drug counselors, social and public assistance workers, school administrators and counselors, teachers, and law enforcement officers. All leaders and staff, even those who are not mandated reporters, can view reporting suspected abuse as a moral responsibility to help assure children and youth a safe environment.

Concern for the alleged victim, good judgment and open communication are the standards surrounding the reporting of an alleged case of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Any person who reports an incident in good faith is immune from either civil or criminal liability and may not be discharged from employment for doing so. All reports are treated with confidentiality by the authorities.

Suspicious of child abuse occurring during an event should be reported to the event coordinator and local authorities. The alleged perpetrator should be separated from children and supervised until the proper authorities arrive on the scene. Keep calm, stay with the child and know that you do not have to deal with the victim or information alone. Do not try to investigate or interrogate either the child or the alleged perpetrator.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or a child has confided in you that he/she has been abused, consider the following steps:

- Stay calm, listen respectfully to the child. How you respond sends critical messages to the child. If the child suspects shock, panic, disgust or other negative reactions, the child may not talk about the abuse, may deny the abuse, or may think that the abuse is his or her fault.
- Is the child in immediate danger? Can the child return to the parent or caretaker? Is there immediate fear of harm?

- If you suspect that there is abuse occurring with a child with whom you work, is there another volunteer or staff member who could support or identify this abuse along with you?
- Do not try to investigate what has happened or what you believe may have happened. The reporter's job is only to report; others will handle investigation and judgments.
- Please note that reporting child abuse is not mandated for volunteers working with children and youth. Your reporting of child abuse is viewed as a moral responsibility to assure a safe environment for the child.
- Anyone who has reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, and has reported this in good faith, is immune from civil or criminal liability.
- Non-emergency reporting (child not in immediate danger) is handled through the county Department of Social/Human Services. Insert their phone number here: _____
You will first talk with a social worker who will take the report from you.
- Be prepared to give the child's name, address, parent's names, sibling's names, schools attended, and any other factual family background that you know. (But a name alone is sufficient. You are not the investigator.)
- It is strongly encouraged that you give your name (even first name only) and your phone number; all information is legally kept confidential.
- Your report is given to a social worker who investigates the case. Giving your name and phone number allows the social worker to call you and ask for further information; in most cases you would be called only once.
- In emergency situations (child is in immediate danger), you are asked to contact local law enforcement (sheriff or police) which in most counties is now a 9-1-1 call. Your report will be taken by their staff.
- Once a report is filed, an investigation must begin within 24 hours and must be completed within 60 days. You, as the reporting person, may request a letter to confirm that an investigation will be done. Results of the investigation will not be sent to you unless you are a mandated reporting party.
- After the investigation has been completed and if any abuse has been substantiated, the county may require the following actions to be taken by the family: parenting classes, AODA counseling, parent time outs from children, removal of the child from the home, counseling for the child, as well as other options. The person who allegedly abused the child may be charged with child abuse in either criminal court or juvenile court.