

# Safe Sanctuary Policy for Sachse First United Methodist Church

Adopted: September 14, 2009

## Introduction:

Our calling and our mandate is to ensure a safe sanctuary for God's people. Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9; Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary – a safe and nurturing place in which to reside and grow.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony. As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at events sponsored by this church. Sachse FUMC recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place:

- \*to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth; and,

- \*to help protect workers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

## Scope of Policy:

This policy and its provisions shall to all persons including all paid and unpaid adults, whether lay or clergy who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Sachse First UMC.

## Supervision:

An adult is defined as anyone 18 years of age or older.

A youth assistant is anyone under the age of 18 who may work with children and youth only when supervised by at least two adults over the age of 18. Youth assistants cannot be in charge of, nor left alone with, children and youth. Background checks on youth under the age of 18 are inaccessible, so every effort will be made to choose youth assistants with great care.

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To achieve compliance with Safe Sanctuary policy and procedures, it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.” It is also strongly encouraged that there be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR.

Observation of all activities in rooms is essential, whether it is done by windows, open doors, glass doors, electronic technology, etc.

All persons seeking to work with children and/or youth shall have at least 6 months membership in this church; or provide a written recommendation from the Senior Pastor of the church most recently attended; or provide a written recommendation from two current members of Sachse FUMC who have been members at least one year.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare:

There shall be a minimum of two (2) adults per room or within line of sight.

Whenever possible, State Childcare Minimum Standards must be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth:

The ‘2 Adult Rule’ shall be observed (2 adults per classroom, 2 adults within line of sight).

Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another adult.

Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with multiple youth (6-12<sup>th</sup> grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other adults.

Overnight Accommodations:

At events that require overnight accommodations:

We strongly recommend that at least two (2) adults are present in every room.

When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one child/youth.

Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall NOT be alone with any one child/youth.

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## Definitions of Abuse:

*Verbal Abuse* -- Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.

*Physical Abuse* – An act of omission or an act that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of physical abuse to a child or youth, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to physical health of a child or youth.

*Sexual Abuse* – Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: incest; rape; prostitution; romantic involvement with any participant; any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of and individual enrolled as a child or youth in sponsored activities of Sachse FUMC; sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content (2000 Book of Discipline, Para. 161I; 2000 Book of Resolutions, pp. 135-7; 2004 Book of Discipline, Para 162J; 2004 Book of Resolutions, pp. 223-225). Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual commentary or innuendo about one’s own or another person’s body, touching another person’s body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse.

## Screening for Adults:

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

Prior to employment or acceptance as a paid worker or unpaid worker/volunteer, the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete a consent form which allows Sachse FUMC to contact any references and perform any necessary background checks to complete a review.

Sachse FUMC is responsible for conducting a criminal background screening. All persons, both paid and/or unpaid, shall be screened every two years. Screenings are conducted by the Senior Pastor and the information contained therein is considered confidential.

If any of the reports raise questions about fitness of the applicant, Sachse FUMC will not approve the application and reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.

If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant immediately and irrevocably.

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The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in Sachse FUMC giving a negative recommendation shall be made by the Senior Pastor. Without any way of limiting those crimes which may be determined to be serious, the following will be used as guidelines:

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry at Sachse FUMC which involves children and/or youth:

Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or child neglect;

Violent offenses including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.;

Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or SWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application at the church shall not be allowed to act as a driver for any event;

Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in any event;

## Training:

Sachse FUMC shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons (including youth assistants) who work with children and youth. Training shall include this policy, and instructions on appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and identifying leader misconduct as described in this policy. No person shall, after this policy becomes effective, have any direct or indirect contact with children and/or youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that at the beginning of each event, a review of this policy be conducted.

## Reporting of Incidents:

Notify the Senior Pastor immediately. If the said complaint is against the Senior Pastor, then Staff-Parish Relations Chair must be notified along with and in the presence of the Senior Pastor.

When an adult leader of an event or activity suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall the Senior Pastor, who, with the adult leader, is obligated by law to report the suspected abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The adult leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, should this apply, and all shall cooperate fully with any investigation which may be conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise and report to the parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

The person suspected of abuse shall, for the safety and well being of the children or youth, be removed with dignity from further contact with the children and youth until an appropriate investigation has

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taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the event leader is the one accused, then the report should be made to that person's supervisor and the Senior Pastor.

Following the report of an incident, the Senior Pastor along with the adult event leader or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended, not accusatory questions.

All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential. The documentation should include the following:

The name of the adult leader observing or receive the disclosure of alleged abuse, including the date, time and place of any action taken by this person.

The alleged victim's name, age and date of birth.

Any statement made by the alleged victim.

Name of the accused/respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.

Any action taken, i.e., suspension of the respondent, etc.

Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker of said agency spoken to, content of that conversation and case number assigned.

Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to, and content of that conversation.

Date and time of any other contacts made regarding the alleged incident.

It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the alleged victim and the alleged accused/respondent, and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions in the current *Book of Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral care.

Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file by the Senior Pastor for future screening purposes.

Media Response:

The Senior Pastor, District Superintendent, Conference Treasurer, the PACT Service Center, Carrier and the Bishop shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations or allegations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a designated church

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spokesperson or a spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. All inquiries are to be referred to the appointed spokesperson.

**\*\*\*DO NOT GIVE OUT ANY INFORMATION; SIMPLY STATE THAT ALL INQUIRIES WILL BE ANSWERED BY CONFERENCE SPOKESPERSON**

## Appropriate Discipline:

Children and youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders do not work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, designated event adult leaders should handle it. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of 'time out' for children or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping safe sanctuary guidelines in mind.

Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child or youth home immediately. Parents and leaders will help make proper arrangements.

Behavioral covenants are encouraged for all youth activities.

## Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries:

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Persons working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate, whereas an older child or youth sitting in an adult's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to an adult are entirely different than same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the adult to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk, or talk that might be misconstrued as inappropriate. When an adult recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, great space should be allowed to come between them and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem, then the event leadership should address the issue.

## Leader Misconduct:

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It is a privilege to work with children and youth. Great responsibility is required. Those who violate this policy shall immediately be removed from contact with children and youth and appropriate authorities shall be notified immediately.

## Spiritual Boundaries for Safe Sanctuary:

As we seek to lead young people in the development of their faith story, it is essential that we guide them and do not manipulate their emotions. This is especially true at longer children/youth events. The attendees may be exhausted by longer and more active days than they are accustomed to and thereby more susceptible to emotional manipulation. It is therefore necessary that, as we present the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the opportunity to follow Jesus in a life-long journey, we present the invitation with 'no strings attached.' We must allow each person involved to make their own decisions without stigma, coercion, or pressure in any form. As we do this faithfully, we will see more fruitful commitments in the lives of all our participants.

## SUMMARY:

All adults shall complete a consent form giving permission to have references checked and a criminal background screening completed by the appropriate authority at Sachse FUMC.

All volunteers must attend local church Safe Sanctuary training.

## Reporting of Incidents:

If an adult worker/volunteer observes or suspects a violation of the Safe Sanctuary policy, these steps must be taken immediately:

Report concern to Senior Pastor (or SPRC Chair in presence of Senior Pastor).

Address any immediate needs of the child or youth.

Cooperate with leadership and authorities throughout process to address the issue.

If an adult suspects that abuse or any suspected violation of the Texas Penal Code is taking or has taken place, he or she shall call 911 when needed and appropriate and report the abuse to the appointed local law enforcement agency and/or the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400).