

St. John's Episcopal Church
YOUTH POLICY
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I. Adherence to Policies of Diocese of Arkansas

As a congregation of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Arkansas, the membership of St. John's Episcopal Church, Fort Smith are initially bound to adhere to the policies established in the document "To Respect the Dignity of Every Human Being" (revised July 30, 2008) and to any revisions made thereafter. Secondary to these are the additional policies deemed necessary at the local level at St. John's Episcopal Church, Fort Smith.

II. Purpose, Rationale, and Scope

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and are central to the life of the church. Relationships in ministry should always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or allow harm to occur. St. John's Episcopal Church is committed to creating and promoting positive, nurturing environments for our ministries -- environments that especially protect children and youth from abuse, our adult sponsors from misunderstandings, and the Church's reputation in the world.

Policies, standards and codes of conduct are meant to assist in defining healthy and safe relationships as well as behaviors and practices that allow the church to demonstrate love and compassion to children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships. These standards and practical applications, approved by Vestry in June 2009, are guidelines for creating and maintaining safe environments at all church events and activities.

All adults ministering to children and youth at parish and/or diocesan events and activities are required to review and agree to adhere to these Standards before serving St. John's Episcopal Church in any ministry with children or youth.

These Standards and Practical Applications cover four areas:

IV. Appropriate expressions of affection, V. Inter-actions with children and youth, VI. Screening of employees and volunteers, and VII. Monitoring events and activities. All four areas are key components of creating the safest possible environment for ministry with children and youth and are not intended to be "all inclusive" for every situation.

III. Definition of Terms

The following are included as definitions for the purposes of this policy:

Child - A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.

Youth - Anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in High School.

Incapacitated Adult - is a person of at least 18 years old who by virtue of physical or mental impairment is responsible to others for their care and safety.

Physical Abuse - is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child, youth or incapacitated adult.

Sexual abuse - is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child, youth or incapacitated adult and an adult. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child, youth, or incapacitated adult.

Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.

Emotional Abuse - is mental or emotional injury to a child, youth or incapacitated adult that results in an observable and material impairment in the growth, development or psychological functioning.

Neglect - is the failure to provide for a child, youth or incapacitated adult's basic needs or the failure to protect a child, youth or incapacitated adult from harm.

IV. Appropriate Expressions

A. Boundaries

1. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.
2. When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to establish what expressions of affection are appropriate and what are inappropriate. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows those who minister with children and youth to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth. These standards are based, in large part, on the knowledge of what behaviors child molesters are known to use to groom children or youth and their parents or guardians for future abuse as well as behaviors that can be, in and of themselves, abuse.

B. Standards

Standards of positive and appropriate forms of affection and inappropriate forms of affection will be covered in training and are to be carefully followed by all adults working around or with children or youth.

V. Interactions with Children and Youth

A. Overview

1. Guidelines for interacting with children and youth, just like and in addition to, the standards for appropriate expressions of affection, help children and adults feel confident and safe in ministry settings and increase the likelihood that someone who does not have good intentions will be detected.
2. At all times, there will be at least 2 adults (not related to each other) present with any children or youth. (Note: High school youth may be undergo said training to serve as assistants with younger children (i.e. Nursery Workers) and serve as second Volunteer in Sunday Nursery ministry)
3. Ratio of Adults to Children and Youth must be maintained throughout every event and/or gathering, using the following standards:
 - a) Infant to 5 years of age: min. 2 adults up to 8 children; 1 more for every additional 4 children
 - b) 6-18 years of age: 2 adults up to 10; 1 additional adult for every 5 children/youth over 10 children / youth.
 - c) Sack Lunch worker teams (if minors) must be 16 years of age and a supervising adult MUST be on the St. John's campus (can be a staff member).

B. Standards for Adult Leadership

1. Adults are defined as 18 years of age or older and must be at least one full year past high school graduation.
2. All adult leaders working with youth and children will be required to complete training session on "Safeguarding our Children."
3. Whenever possible an older adult leader should be placed in a group with older youth participants.
4. In an overnight event, where there are male and female participants, both male and female leaders must be present. (See below for more standards regarding overnight events.)
5. There will be no situation in which a child or youth must be alone with an adult. If a youth meets with the YMC in the YMC office, the window blinds are to remain open. At events or activities, the

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- child or youth and adult will remain within the sight of another adult leader who has been asked to stand by. No adult shall ever meet with a child or youth in a secret or unplanned way.
6. Adult leaders are expected to model appropriate behaviors and positive nurturing relationships to children and youth. Adult leaders are expected to abide by the same covenant as children and youth participants. Adult leaders are encouraged to use the "Standards for Appropriate Affection" to talk about touch boundaries at all events and gatherings, establishing principles of respectful behavior and learning and/or reinforcing appropriate touch.
 7. Physical punishment or discipline, harsh language, degrading punishment is never be used. Hazing activities, of any kind, are not permitted.
 8. Adult leaders shall never, under any circumstances:
 - a. consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs at any children's or youth event
 - b. be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or have misused legal drugs at any children's or youth event
 - c. engage in illegal behavior or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior
 - d. provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs, or pornography
 - e. engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth,
 - f. discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth.
 - g. be alone with any child or youth that is not their own child or youth.
 9. Adults will not dress, undress, bathe or shower in the presence of youth and shall not be in a room where youth dress, undress, bathe or shower. If a child or youth needs to undress (for example, to get into a costume or for first aid) another adult of the same gender as the child shall be called to be nearby.
 10. For those participants who need assistance for trips to the bathroom, a safe practice must be worked out ahead of time.
 11. All employees and volunteers attending church events and activities are reporters and are required to report abuse or suspected abuse immediately to event/activity leader who report to the Youth Ministries Coordinator and Rector.

C. Standards for Overnight Activities and Events:

1. Sleeping in a Parish Hall, Gymnasium, or other large room:
 - a. Male and female participants must have separate areas for sleeping.
 - b. Male leader must be present with the male group and female leader must be present with the female group.
2. Sleeping in a Hotel, Conference Center, or tent/camper setting:
 - a. In a hotel, choose one that has rooms open to the interior of the building rather than to the outside.
 - b. Whenever possible, an adult sleeping room should be between two youth sleeping rooms; however, there shall be no sharing of adjoining or connecting bathrooms.
3. Each youth must have a separate bed, bedding and/or sleeping bag.
4. Adult leaders will sleep in modest attire and at least in outer-wear shorts and a tee shirt.
5. Adult leaders shall schedule monitoring to take place periodically throughout the night.
6. A rooming list shall be maintained, providing the location where each child, youth, and adult is rooming. The rooming list shall be made available to all participants, but in no way to the general public.
7. No males, at any time, may enter the room(s) where the females are sleeping and females may not, at any time, enter the room(s) where the males are sleeping.

D. Transportation

1. Parents or guardians must be notified in advance and give written permission for transportation of their child or youth to and/or from an activity or event.

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2. Prior to transporting children or youth, a form must be completed by the driver and the driver must be screened by a Motor Vehicle Records search for Driving While Intoxicated or any reckless citation (*as provided for in the Van Policies' requirements for "approved drivers"*).
3. At the conclusion of an activity or event, two adult leaders will stay with children and youth until every child and youth has been picked-up. No child or youth will ever be left alone waiting for a ride.
4. Situations in which any adult leader drives a child or youth home alone should be avoided.
5. If children or youth attending an activity or event are to be picked up by someone other than their parent or guardian, or dropped off somewhere other than their home, the parent or guardian must indicate that person's name and phone number on the permission form for the activity or event; or phone permission given to the leader who documents this.
6. Use of rental, personal, and/or church vehicles,
 - a. Church Van Policy exists as a separate policy document.
 - b. *Need to develop/include here" rental and personal vehicle" policy.*

E. Offsite & Outdoor Activities

Appropriate adult supervision to activity must be present (i.e. Lifeguards, repelling/climbing, fire safety, etc.)

F. Other Considerations

1. If a participant in any church activity or event arrives intoxicated (from either drugs or alcohol), arrangements to have the person taken home shall be made and the event coordinator will be consulted regarding any further intervention.
2. Firearms and concealed weapons are prohibited at any child or youth event or activity, with the exception that with prior permission from the event coordinator, off-duty police officers and/or others required to carry firearms may be allowed to do so.
3. All paid children and/or youth ministry staff must have current CPR and First Aid certifications.

VI. Screening of Employees and Volunteers

Screening of all employees and volunteers is an essential element in keeping children and youth safe. Screening is an opportunity to prevent a molester from ever having contact with children and youth in the program. With screening as standard practice, molesters will likely choose to try to become part of a program elsewhere.

- A. Adults are defined as 18 years of age or older and must be at least one full year past high school graduation. Whenever possible older leaders should be placed in a group with older youth participants.
- B. All those working with children and/or youth on an ongoing regular basis must complete and sign an application form which specifically includes a request for personal references, information concerning any prior adjudication in regard to sexual misconduct and acknowledgement of the church's right to conduct a confidential background check.
- C. All screening records are filed in the church office.
- D. All adult leaders attending an overnight activity or event must have completed the safe church training required by the Diocese of Arkansas with a certificate of completion on file with the Safe Church Administer of their congregation who must sign off on the adult's registration form.
- E. Adult leaders are encouraged to undergo training that raises awareness of potentially harmful situations and life circumstances.

VII. Monitoring of Events and Activities

Monitoring is another essential for keeping children and youth safe. It allows detection of any problems before they turn into an incident of abuse. When monitoring is standard practice, it raises awareness and minimizes the potential for abuse.

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- A.** All youth events, programs, activities for children/youth will be coordinated through the office of the Youth Ministries Coordinator
- B.** The youth worker(s) must meet on a monthly basis with their Clergy supervisor (or in their absence the Senior Warden) for the purpose of cohesive and consistent ministry development and vision, pastoral support, and communication touch-stones between ministries.
- C.** All youth events are to function with an open door policy. ALL Clergy, staff, parents, church members have a right to observe any youth activity.
- D.** All participants must submit a completed and signed permission form to attend an activity or event.
- E.** Parents and guardians will be given, in advance, information about the activity or event and be provided emergency contact information.
- F.** A Youth Information sheet will be completed/updated each year by parents for each child participating in programs to include:
 - i. General information including current insurance information and medical release. Specific Permission Slips with activity or event details are required for all trips off the main event site.
 - ii. A media release must be signed for pictures to be displayed on the Web Site, in the newsletter, or any flyer or publication of St. John's Episcopal Church. Names of minors are never to be used with photographs.
- G.** A list of participants with parental contact information and travel route will be filed in the church office prior to an event off site.
- H.** All medications, including prescription and over the counter, must be in the original container with clear instructions and the participants' name. Medications are collected from participants upon arrival at an activity or event and returned at the end of the activity or event. Medications will be locked in a lock box and administered by a designated adult leader.
- I.** All activities will take place in rooms that are visible through glass doors or doors will be left open.
- J.** Any pattern of private meetings or activities occurring between any adult leader or volunteer and a particular child or youth will not be allowed and any attempt should be discussed with the leader of the program or event.
- K.** Movies or videos should be used with caution. Show only age appropriate videos and movies. Appropriate means the movie or video is reviewed and screened for sexual content, language and violence. G rated films may be shown. PG rated movies videos should be reviewed by an adult prior to showing it to youth. PG and PG13 videos and movies should not be shown to anyone under the age of 13. Parents must be made aware and approve of any PG13 videos or movies prior to it being shown.

VIII. Tiers of Leadership Level of leadership and requirements for position:

- a. Hired/Staff – Complete Application; References provided and checked; National Background Check by State Police Department through office of Youth Ministries Coordinator; Receive/sign off on Policies; sign Covenant; Complete "Safe Guarding our Children" training with 4 weeks of hire.
- b. Leadership (members of congregation placed in charge of program areas) – Complete application; National Background check; Receive/sign off on Policies; sign Covenant; Complete "Safe Guarding our Children" training
- c. Volunteers (assist in program implementation) - Receive/sign off on Policies; sign Covenant

IX. Reporting Procedures

- a. ALL infractions are to be reported to the Supervising Leadership of the event/program at the time of infraction. If the Supervising Leader is the one observed in infraction, report to the Rector.
- b. Leadership will report ALL incidents to Youth Ministries Coordinator and/or Rector.
- c. WRITTEN dated documentation will be provided as determined necessary by the rector and/or Youth Ministries Coordinator and filed appropriately.
- d. Rector and Youth Ministries Coordinator will determine appropriate follow-up required.

X. Discipline Guidelines

- a. Development of healthy, interactive social skills and abilities is the goal for all programs and activities.
- b. NO physical disciplinary action will be used.

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- c. **First incident:** An adult shall separate the youth/child from activity when necessary within eye-sight of other adults and discuss inappropriate behavior. FIRST WARNING
- d. **Second incident** will warrant the youth/child being removed from the activity with an adult to supervise
- e. **Third incident** – Parent will be called (if not on premises) to pick up youth/child
- f. Leadership will visit with the youth in presence of the parent about incident.
- g. Plan of action to be developed and used by all event/program leadership for special needs.
- h. Probationary participation may result with repeated infractions.