

Best Practices for Safe Gatherings

Guidelines, Policies and Procedures for the purpose of maintaining transparency, accountability, and integrity in ministry with children, youth, and/or the developmentally disabled.

Following are church-established best practices for all ministry areas. In some instances it may be impossible to adhere to them, so allow common sense and grace to prevail. These practices pertain to those serving consistently in direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It is recommended for all leaders to be Safe Gatherings certified. Recertification should be done every 3 years.

General Best Practices for all Congregations

- Adults serving in ministry areas with children and youth shall have been active participants in the congregation for six months before beginning their ministry assignment and have completed a background check that demonstrates that have never been convicted of any form of child abuse.
- Adult ministry workers with children and youth shall observe the “two adult rule” at all times so that no adult is left alone with children or youth on a routine basis. In unavoidable circumstances where only one adult is present, the door must be open or all present be in a space where they can be observed. It is never appropriate for an adult to be alone with an individual child at any age.
- Ministry workers in all areas should wear lanyards and nametags identifying them as the designated ministry worker and there should be some sort of check in process with name tags for infants/toddlers and children for the nursery and children’s programming.
- If the situation arises when two adult persons cannot be present in a nursery setting, the ministry worker should recruit another person to join them, or, at minimum, invite someone to serve as a “rover” to be readily accessible to assist in any classroom situation.
- When the pastor is alone and a congregant arrives seeking spiritual care, the pastor should meet with the person where there is a space with a window and/or leave the door open to the room where the communication is occurring. Other options include asking the person to meet at a public space. If it is not a crisis, tell the congregant you are obligated by church policies to schedule the appointment when other people are in the building. If it is a crisis, call another church leader to be in the building where you meet.
- When a youth leader is asked to provide transportation to a student for a youth event, and knows that they will be alone in the car with the student, the leader will always obtain parental permission before giving a ride. It is always best that a leader is not alone in a car with a student.

“BEST PRACTICES” FOR CHILDREN’S MINISTRY Guidelines, Policies and Procedures Children, Age 0 – Grade 5

During all children’s programming and events caregivers should wear the appropriate lanyard/nametag. Remember guidelines also apply to your own child while you are in your ministerial role.

Security Guidelines:

- Minimum of two unrelated care providers at all times. Care providers should not be alone with a child.
- 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.
- Release only (birth-2nd grade) to a person with a proper pick up form. In cases of lost pickup form or any problems, the child may be released by a staff member. For those in 3rd to 5th grade, if parent designates, perhaps an older sibling can be allowed to pick up child.

Discipline Guidelines:

- Establish and post expectations and guidelines, and provide to care providers and parents.
- Praising specific behaviors you want to see in your group (i.e., “good listening”, “thank you for waiting”).
- Corporal punishment of any kind is never appropriate.
- 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).
- 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.”
- Confidential parental discussion when necessary, involve church staff as appropriate.
- Age appropriate “time outs” or withdrawal from activity. Help child rejoin the group when he/she is ready using encouraging language and methods.
- Communicate through verbal and nonverbal messages that you have faith in the child’s ability to practice self-control and (after they’ve calmed) encourage him/her to explore possible solutions to the situation.

Physical Contact Guidelines:

- Appropriate physical contact: non-demanding, gentle touch of shoulders, hands, arms, head or back; sitting child on leg (appropriate only at preschool or kindergarten age level); “high fives” or shaking hands, if gentle.
- Inappropriate physical contact: kissing; demanding hugs and kisses; touching chest, genital region, upper legs, buttocks, waist, stomach; sitting child in center of your lap; sitting child between legs; sitting child above age 6 on one or both legs; opposite sex piggy back rides; seductiveness or suggestive contact.
- Physical contact of any kind which is done for the pleasure or satisfaction of care providers is never appropriate.
- Any touching used to express power or control over a child 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, a ministry supervisor or paid staff person only. Diapering in a secluded area or without the presence of other care providers; bathroom doors closed is never permitted.

Toddler-Potty Training: If a toddler has an “accident” in underwear/clothing, only the parent/legal guardian may change the clothing. Ministry workers are not to change underwear/clothing after an “accident”.

2 to 5 year old: Permission is granted to use 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. Child 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. Care giver should never be in a closed door situation with a child or accompany a child inside the bathroom when special help is not required.

Special Needs: Diapers or spoiled clothes should be change by a family member or an adult (preferably a staff member) with another adult as a helper.

“BEST PRACTICES” FOR YOUTH MINISTRY Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Youth, Grades 6-12

Youth ministry has a profound moral and legal obligation to reduce the possibility of abuse from ever occurring. These best practices have been formed with that obligation in mind. Abuse causes deep and sometimes lifelong psychological damage to its victims and their families. Furthermore, when abuse occurs in the context of a Christian organization, the reputations of the organization, its staff and other ministry workers are jeopardized. Thank you for your support and partnership in adhering to what is outlined in these pages so that students for years to come can grow in Christ in a safe and trustworthy environment.

Guidelines for Conduct with Students Meeting with Students :

- All meetings, gatherings, and events associated with Youth Ministry will adhere to a two unrelated adult minimum rule.
- On the occasion when a worker needs to meet individually with a student outside of regularly scheduled programs, a parental consent must first be obtained. All meetings must occur in a public place where other people are present (restaurants, coffee shops). Students and workers 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.
- When providing rides to students, youth workers should have a third person in the car. Although situations may require the driver to be alone in the car with a student of the same gender (e.g. picking up the first student) 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 shall any worker be alone in a car with an individual student of the opposite gender.
- As a rule, youth workers shall not be alone in a home or building with an individual student. If the situation becomes unavoidable (e.g. a student is the first to arrive or last to be picked up), the adult shall wait with the student 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 student in the front room or entryway. If this situation occurs, please report it to a staff member in charge of that program as soon as possible.
- In group sleeping arrangements (e.g. camp cabins, ski trips, mission trips) two unrelated adults must be present with any number of students during the stated “lights out” time. Under no circumstances shall any ministry worker share a bed with a student. In dorm or hotel settings, students and adults should sleep in separate rooms (connecting rooms are acceptable). Room checks will be performed at stated lights out time. There should be separate sleeping areas for males and females. Any leader who is a minor must be under direct adult supervision at all times. A leader who is a minor must be at least five years older than the students participating in the event in order to be considered a leader. When college-aged counselors are used, an adult 23 years or older must be the second adult where there are senior high youth present.

Physical Touch

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

Modesty

You are an example to students in every way. For that reason strive that your dress, behavior, and body language be of the highest standard. Please be conscious of what your appearance will speak to both genders.

Disciplinary Action

- If at any time your behavior towards students becomes questionable or specific expectations outlined here are violated, the steps below will be taken by the appropriate ministry leader, staff and/or SPRC team. A meeting will be scheduled with the person(s) overseeing the program in which you are leading. The action in question will be discussed and the guidelines in these best practices will be reviewed.
- If it is determined that questionable behavior has occurred, other appropriate staff members and SPRC representatives will be contacted and will become involved. If questionable behavior continues after the meeting, a temporary or permanent removal from your ministry worker position will follow. If behavior warrants immediate removal from ministry worker position, the church reserves the right to enforce disciplinary action as needed. In all situations, we will communicate our purpose in discipline and keep it in confidence within the church guidelines. If you become aware of other ministry workers violating these guidelines, report the situation immediately to a staff member or the SPRC team.

Camping & Mission Trips with Youth

Camping & mission trips, regardless of location, are unique experiences where persons of all ages are general outside their comfort zones. Thus, persons on these trips are more vulnerable because of the new situation, away from familiar surroundings, close proximity of others and sharing experiences that are often life-changing.

- It is highly recommended that adult team leaders have completed Safe Gatherings training/certification <http://www.minnesotaumc.org/safe-gatherings>.
- When a single youth is part of a group, the youth should either have a room of their own or two adults (not related to one another) in the room.
- If open showers are the only facilities, separate shower times for youth and adults should be designated, Youth and adults should not shower together. There should be shower monitors, and swim suits may be required for showers in some instances.
- Adults should be sensitive to privacy concerns of children and youth, such as dressing and undressing in public spaces.
- Two adults should be present at the work site at all times.
- When travelling to different areas of the camp/mission site, there must always be at least three people (two counselors & 1 camper, 2 campers and 1 counselor).
- When counseling or talking with a camper about a personal/private matter, you must do so in an open space where anyone can walk by and see what is happening.
- No youth will be allowed to be alone with an adult from a host mission.
- Mission/Camp team members are not to be alone with a youth from the host mission/camp.
- The same boundary best practices apply to youth from host teams consistent with those for mission team members.
- Recommended Ratio of Adults to Youth

Retreats/rallies/meetings
One adult: ten youth

Offsite camps/mission trips
One adult: eight youth

Whenever smaller ratios are required, the stricter requirements will be communicated to all participants, parents and sponsors prior to the event.

“BEST PRACTICES” FOR DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED Guidelines, Policies and Procedures Children, Youth and Adults with Special Needs

General Approach

For years, people with disability were segregated from the rest of society. Because of federal legislation, persons with disability are being integrated into the mainstream of education, employment, and community activities. The present generation is growing up in situations where people with disability are a natural part of school, church and community life. Below are some general principles to keep in mind when working with the special needs population.

- A person with a special need may be slower physically or mentally, but take time to get to know them. People with disabilities need to practice meeting the standards of the “normal” world while they are growing up so they can gain confidence and independence.
- People with a disability do not need to be pitied. If you perceive a person with a disability as someone to be pitied, someone from whom little should be expected or demanded, probably little will come. If, on the other hand, you expect the person to succeed and grow, to learn to act independently, then chances are good that the person will grow to become successful and independent.
- Help a person with special needs only when help is needed. A person with a special need may take longer to complete a certain task, but you may be surprised by what he or she can do. Too much help can become a hindrance if it robs the person of opportunities to learn and practice independence. Do not assume that a task cannot be done, and do not redo work that is not perfect. Ask if help is wanted before providing it.
- With special considerations, communicate with a special needs person like you would any other person. One impairment that some ministry workers have trouble with involves speech and language. Whether the communication impairment results from a physical disability such as cerebral palsy or a speech disability such as stuttering, the listener tends to anticipate what the disabled person is trying to say and not allow that person the time he or she needs to communicate. This should be avoided. Be patient, and remember that a person with a speech impairment has had to communicate with people other than you. Whenever possible, speak directly to persons with disability, using their name. Do not limit your conversation only to the parent or companion. Speak clearly and slowly, not necessarily loudly. A person with a speech impairment is not necessarily hearing impaired.
- Remember that a warm smile and friendly greeting are very reassuring. There are special considerations for people with special disabilities. For example, keep in mind that people who have visual impairments depend upon what they hear and touch to bring them information about their surroundings. Provide opportunities for the visually impaired person to handle things that those with normal vision can simply look at. It is also helpful to describe new people, things, and events as they come into the person’s environment. Allow time for the person to ask what is going on.
- People with hearing impairments must depend on sight for most of their knowledge. Make sure the hearing impaired person can see the face of whoever is speaking; many cues are picked up through lip-reading and facial expression. Arrange for seating near the teacher or leader. Do not assume that a person understands you just because you have his or her attention. Ask whether you have been understood. People with mental impairments can get along better when directions are short and clearly stated. Break down tasks into a series of steps that can be completed in sequence. Maintain a routine, teach new procedures, and give time for practice.

EXPECTATIONS OF MINISTRY WORKERS

- Meet and greet your child/student and family. Welcome them and check for any last minute instructions or information that we might need.
- Participate. All leaders and participants are expected to participate, as much as possible, in the activities of the day. Stay together. Talk with them, encourage them and include them in whatever is happening in the programming or class.
- Bathroom breaks with a child. Need two unrelated ministry workers to accompany the child to the bathroom. If the participant can’t go alone, simply wait for them, at the door of the bathroom.
- Help with snacks/meals. Some of our participants will need help carrying things, cutting food into manageable pieces and cleaning up after themselves.
- Have fun! This ministry is a great experience for those who attend.