

Safe Sanctuaries
Abuse Prevention and Reporting Policies for the Desert Southwest Conference
Revised and Re-adopted, 2019¹

INTRODUCTION

The Desert Southwest Conference (DSC) is committed to ensuring safe places for all in our care. We especially recognize the importance of ensuring the well-being of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. To ensure the health and safety of these groups, we will operate under the following policy guidelines.

The goals of these policies are threefold.

1. to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults that participate in conference and church activities;
2. to protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from unfounded and/or malicious allegations of abuse through a comprehensive plan that includes: screening, training, supervision, reporting procedures, and a response plan;
3. to enable staff and volunteers to recognize and report suspected abuse.

There is no one thing that we can do to prevent the abuse of the children and youth in our care. A multi-pronged approach that includes annual training and continual practice will provide the best results. The DSC uses *Safe Gatherings* as a way to enable our churches, camps, clergy, staff, and affiliated groups to meet their screening and training responsibilities for those who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

This policy shall be applicable to all Conference and District activities or events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults within ministry settings of the Desert Southwest Conference.

DEFINITIONS

Adult means a person 18 years old or older.

Vulnerable Adults means any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

Youth means any person from 12 years old to 18 years old.

Child means any person from infancy to 11 years old.

Minor means any person under the age of 18 years old.

Abuse as used in this policy may refer to any of the following:

1. ***Physical Abuse***: It is a deliberate, non-accidental, and intentional act of bodily harm.
2. ***Emotional Abuse***: Spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty, which conveys a message that one is worthless, bad, unloved, or undeserving of love and care.
3. ***Neglect***: A minor or vulnerable adult who is in endangerment of their health, safety, or welfare through negligence. This may include the failure of a parent or guardian to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision.

¹ This policy was drafted by a subgroup of the Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries, and subsequently adopted for Camp and Retreat Ministries by the Board on April 5, 2019.

4. **Sexual Abuse:** It is sexual contact between a minor and an adult, or non-consensual contact between two youth or between two adults.
5. **Ritual Abuse:** Physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a minor or vulnerable adult that are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for their welfare. The abuser may appeal to a higher authority or power to justify the abuse.

Activities mean any activity or program in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Conference or **DSC** means the Desert Southwest Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

“Duty of Care”: A requirement that a person act toward others and the public with the watchfulness, attention, caution, and prudence that a reasonable person in the circumstances would use.

Supervision: The task of supervision is limited to adult staff/volunteers who are responsible for offering direction for activities and/or accepting a “duty of care” for a group of minors, in accordance with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Staff person means any person employed by the Conference who is responsible for activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Volunteer means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of a staff person.

We means the Desert Southwest Annual Conference.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but provides some assurance that the most reliable, committed, and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The following shall be MINIMUM standards:

All adults volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to pre-register no less than 72 hours prior to an event, and will complete an application that includes:

- Standard contact information.
- Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal activity.
- Listing of 3 non-related references with complete contact information for all references.
- A signed release and waiver form allowing the Conference to perform a background check.
- Confirmation of involvement in a local church, or experience with DSC Camp and Retreat Ministries, with corresponding reference, for a minimum of 1 year.

The policy shall be implemented in the following manner:

- All staff persons and volunteers, who have regular and direct contact with children, will submit to the screening procedures as outlined by this policy.
- All new applicants, persons having a break in service at conference events of two or more years, and those persons who have not been screened in three years since their last background check shall submit to the screening procedures again.
- Screening procedures may be contracted through *Safe Gatherings*. All resulting records are confidential and will be maintained by the Annual Conference, but results of screening through *Safe Gatherings* may be shared between the conference and a participating local church or vice versa.
- The staff person in charge of the event and/or their designee is responsible for review and approving each application before a person's service begins. A criminal conviction for a sexual offense disqualifies an applicant from working with youth/children. Other automatic disqualifiers usually are convictions for incest, rape, assaults involving minors, murder, kidnapping, child pornography, domestic violence to the other guardian, and physical abuse. Note that other criminal offenses that are not voluntarily disclosed by staff or volunteer may also be considered disqualifiers.
- When the Conference is hosting an event in which the local church is requested to bring adult chaperones, we expect that all brochures and other communications specify these procedures as requirements for all adults serving as chaperones at the event.

TRAINING

Training is required for all persons having direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in Conference activities and shall consist of the following as MINIMUM standards:

- **Online Training in Policy and Procedures:** In coordination with background screening, an online module for training in these policies and related procedures will be made available through *Safe Gatherings*.
- **Annual orientation:** Even if a staff/volunteer person's screening is in good standing (e.g. within the 3 year window), all volunteers will participate annually in a review of policy and procedures, likely via an online module. The minimum standard for annual orientation shall include information about this Policy, training in the supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and training in the identification and reporting of abuse.
- **Event Training:** Immediately prior to any event, all staff/volunteers shall go through a basic review of policy and procedures with that event's leaders.

BASIC PROCEDURES FOR SAFETY

- Communications and Expectations
 1. **Parental Notice:** Guardians shall be given advance notice and full information regarding Conference events and meetings to which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are invited. These notices will include:
 - Registration materials for activities in which participants are outside the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed permission forms.
 - Medical/Health forms which shall accompany the adult coordinator(s) of the event, which shall include permission to treat participants in the event they are

injured or become sick during an event and include a waiver of liability in favor of the Conference.

2. **Behavior Covenants:** It is recommended that participants agree to a behavior agreement prior to, or at the start of, any event. Such a covenant can be in the form of clear, posted rules that are explained to the participants at the outset of the event.

- Supervision

Competent and trained adults are important to any event. The procedures described below are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations. The following are MINIMUM standards, and each event may adopt more stringent requirements and procedures as deemed necessary.

1. **Two adult rule.** The two adult rule requires that there will always be two unrelated adults providing supervision to groups of children and youth.
2. **Age Rule:** In the case of children and youth, no person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is AT LEAST 5 years older than the children or youth with whom they are working with.
3. **Group of Three Rule:** With best intentions, a minor should not be alone with another unrelated adult or another minor at any time for any reason while they are in the care of a DSC ministry event without the parents' or legal guardians' presence. Everything should be done in groups of at least three: two adults and one minor or two minors and one adult. Groups of three youth students will be allowed, but an adult should make checks on them. The goal is to have at least two unrelated adults supervise minors at all times.
4. **Bathroom Use:** The "Group of Three Rule" applies to bathroom use. If an adult has to accompany a group to the bathroom, they should stand near the door, within earshot and/or with the door slightly open to adequately monitor activity and ensure safety of minors.
5. **Open Space:** Conference events shall employ an open space rule. The open space rule relates to greater visibility, and requires that all activities shall occur in open view. Ministry activities should be open to ensure the safety of participants and prevent isolation or secrecy. If meeting in a room for an activity with less than two adults present, the door should have a window in it, or the door must remain open. If a staff or volunteer is meeting one-on-one with a minor for counseling, other adults must be present nearby (within earshot and/or eyesight), in the building, and they must know that the counseling is taking place, and should be encouraged to "drop by" to check on the activity. A door must never be locked while a volunteer or staff member is with another person.
6. **Certified Instructors:** Some activities will require the presence of an experienced and/or certified guide or instructor, including but not limited to: horseback riding, rock climbing, ropes course, river rafting. If the activity is contracted to an outside party, then the contractor shall also be properly insured with a certificate of liability providing a minimum of one million dollars liability coverage limits.

7. **First Aid & Health:** There shall be a first aid kit accompanying a qualified adult at all Conference events. Every conference event shall have, as a MINIMUM², an identified staff or volunteer certified in first aid and CPR who can:
 - administer first aid;
 - dispense medication as needed, and who are capable of determining whether additional medical attention is necessary;
 - keep records of emergent medicine dispensed and treatments administered;
 - be responsible for reporting all incidents to event and Conference leadership using the appropriate Accident Report Form.

For all events that primarily target minors, all medicine including supplements will be given to the first aid staff or responsible adult at the beginning of the event and it will then be distributed as appropriate by first aid staff.

8. **Visitors:** Any adult on site but not registered for an event is required to check in and out with the event director. With the possible exception of outside contractors, adults remaining on site during an event are required to go through the same background screening process as outlined above.

9. **Provisional Youth Worker:**

A provisional youth worker is an adult, either paid or volunteer, whose role is defined by a local church as central to youth ministry but whose age does not conform to the five year rule in Conference supervision guidelines. At the discretion of Conference or Camp staff relating to the ministry, this can be allowed. The following conditions shall apply:

- The local church pastor is required to give consent and explanation of the need.
- The provisional youth worker shall not be a part of established adult-to-youth ratios and shall not be defined as an adult chaperone when it comes to certain supervisory guidelines such as sleeping.
- The status and limited responsibility of the provisional youth worker at the event should be clear to other adults.
- The provisional youth worker shall otherwise follow all these policies and procedures for screening, training, and safety/supervision.
- Conference and/or Camp staff persons reserve the right to add other conditions as they deem necessary.

- **Appropriate Touch**

While we cannot underestimate the potential positive impact of a safe touch, neither can we ignore the possibility of lasting detriment to any individual as a result of inappropriate physical contact. With this in mind, we adopt the following as guidelines for physical touch to be followed by anyone working with minors or vulnerable adults:

- Touch should generally be initiated by the minor or vulnerable adult. The adult should respond to the individual's need for comfort and encouragement and not base touching on their own emotional needs.
- Appropriate touch between an adult and a minor or vulnerable adult may include:
 - holding hands as part of a group activity;
 - touching another's shoulders, upper arm, or back;

² FYI: This conference minimum is lower than the minimum we set for CRMinistries in our Health Policy.

- open (e.g. “side-on” or “A-frame”) hugs
- Physical touch between an adult and a child/youth shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
- A minor’s or vulnerable adult’s preference not to be touched should be respected by staff/volunteers and other participants. This includes physical contact between minors and other minors.
- Adult should not allow an unrelated minor to sit on their lap.
- Never pick up a child or give “piggy-back” rides. If a child is in need of medical attention, do not pick them up to move them; bring medical personnel to them.
- Games involving potentially undesired touch, such as sitting on another’s lap, shall not be allowed.

- **Appropriate Communications**

Cyber Safety: Interacting directly with minors or vulnerable adults through the internet, social networking, and email should be as open and public as possible, and with knowledge of the minor’s legal guardians. Posting of information about ministry activities should only be done with approval of event and conference staff, and should not include information about minors or vulnerable adults, including their names. Photos posted anywhere on the internet may not include images of minors, unless written permission from legal guardians has been acquired. Volunteers and staff should be aware of their own “web presence” and maintain appropriate boundaries with minors.

Communication: Volunteers and Staff should not communicate with minors or vulnerable adults without the prior knowledge of their parents or legal guardian. This includes written and electronic communication, including but not limited to telephone, text, email, and social network messaging. When such communication does occur, it is the volunteer/staff person’s responsibility to make sure that the guardian is included in such information (for instance, including them on texts or emails).

- **Overnight Events**

1. Boys and girls may not sleep in the same room unless there is no other option as a result of shortages of chaperones or because of the nature of the space. If they are in the same room and there is a divider available, it shall be used to separate the genders. Where there are no dividers, it is recommended adult chaperones be between genders. In addition, it is recommended individuals be three feet apart.
2. There shall be at least one adult of the same gender in the sleeping quarter. If less than three youth/children of a gender are present, there shall be two adults in the sleeping quarter with them.
3. At overnight events, a minimum of eight consecutive hours of sleep shall be scheduled per night. These hours begin with lights out and quiet time and end at least one half hour

prior to breakfast. Limited exceptions may be made for programmatic purposes (e.g. stargazing, eclipse viewing, etc).

4. The following shall be followed to ensure the safety and privacy of all:
 - a. Beds: An adult should not sit on a minor's bed, nor should any minor sit on an adult's bed.
 - b. Showers: As far as safety and facilities allow, individuals should be provided as much privacy for showering as possible. Adults and minors should not shower in the same room at the same time.
 - c. Dressing: As far as safety and facilities allow, no individual should be in any state of undress in any public room. Changes of clothes should occur in as private a manner as possible.
- Staff/Volunteer Code of Behavior
 1. Adults engaged in Conference events or activities with youth minors or vulnerable adults should never engage in sexually suggestive behavior or inappropriate touching.
 2. Any sexual or sexually suggestive or aggressive behavior by an adult toward any fellow staff/volunteer or event participant at a Conference event where an imbalance of power exists between the acting adult and the other person constitutes an abuse of power. Consent is not a defense to an abuse of power.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance, physical or verbal demand, or sexually suggestive behavior which is perceived as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Prohibited behavior includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual or coercive overtones, including any written, verbal, physical, or visual contact.
 3. Any time an adult thinks that their own or another adult's behavior toward a minor or vulnerable adult, either touching or verbal, may have been perceived as inappropriate, that adult shall report the behavior to the event's leader.
 4. To the extent that safety allows, adults shall respect the privacy of minors and vulnerable adults when changing clothing or showering.
 5. There will be absolutely no drinking of alcohol or use of illegal drugs at or during Conference events. Any such activity, including use of an unprescribed controlled substance, will lead to immediate suspension and removal from the event. Smoking or vaping by legal age adults may be allowed, with the approval of event leaders, in designated areas only.
 6. Recreational use of marijuana is prohibited. The legal use of marijuana by a participant for medical purposes as prescribed by a doctor may be permitted under the direction of medical personnel at the event. The legal use of marijuana by a staff or volunteer for medical purposes as prescribed by a doctor may be permitted under the direction of medical personnel at the event, pending the evaluation of the potential for impairment of the staff/volunteer.
 7. Possession of firearms is prohibited. The possession of knives is discouraged and must be approved by the event coordinator.

8. All adults working with minors or vulnerable adults shall abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

- Cultural Differences

Acknowledging that cultural differences may exist between these established policies and particular ethnic or racial groups, modifications of these policies or procedures may be warranted. In such circumstances, event coordinators will be in contact in advance of any events with the staff of the Desert Southwest Conference to document such intentional variances.

- Vulnerable Adults

Ministering with/to vulnerable adults is similar in safety concerns to that of the minors. Some additional things to note are:

- The five-year-older policy does not apply for volunteers or staff.
- Certain ministries require one on one visitation. The open space rule means such situations ought to be in an area where others can see you or provide accountability where someone knows you are there.
- Vulnerable adults may experience financial abuse in addition to other types of abuse.
- Every state does have elderly and child abuse reporting statutes.
- Training is necessary to teach appropriate interpersonal boundaries, appropriate relationships, and teaching any specific skills needed for a specific kind of ministry.

AFFIRMATION OF INCLUSIVITY

The Desert Southwest Conference affirms all persons as individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, race, ability, marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to be protected against intimidation or abuse.

We respect the rights of all participants to self-identify their place in gender alignment and roles. Under certain circumstances, reasonable efforts to create appropriate personal, overnight accommodations should be made for the safety and comfort of all participants.

REPORTING

Reporting suspected abuse is both an ethical priority and a requirement by Arizona and Nevada law for all staff and volunteers. If you have reasonable cause, suspicion or belief based on your observations that a minor or vulnerable adult has been a victim of abuse, you are expected to follow responsible steps to report your suspicion within 24 hours. If you have a second adult to witness with you, that is even better. A guideline of steps is listed below.

1. In the event that suspected abuse of the participant of a DSC event is reasonably believed to have occurred at the event itself, ensure the immediate safety of the abused party and call the authorities (see #3 below). Immediately alert the event's coordinator, or the nearest district superintendent if the coordinator is suspected to be involved, to the situation. Alleged perpetrators of abuse will be removed from and required to refrain from all events involving minors and vulnerable adults until the incident is resolved. Care must be taken to handle the removal of a person from any activities in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted.

2. For all other suspicions of abuse, notify the event coordinator, head of staff, or other person-in-charge as soon as possible. If a ministry activity is currently happening, together ensure the immediate safety of any potential victims involved.
3. Have as much of the following information as possible ready before making your call. Our Camp and Retreat Ministries have a form for the reporting of abuse that should be completed as part of the process (but may be filed after making a call to authorities).
 - a. The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
 - b. The name and address of the alleged victim's parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
 - c. The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
 - d. Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
 - e. The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
 - f. Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.
4. Call or otherwise contact one of the following: local police, State Department of Child Safety (DCS), or Adult Protective Services (APS) immediately. The event leader mentioned in #2 above, or an event's medical personnel, may assist in filing an abuse report, but it is required by state law the individual with suspicion of abuse make such a report.

4-1) Local Police

- Emergency (life endangerment) call 9-1-1
- Non-emergency reports:
 - Prescott Valley Police (Mingus Mountain Events): (928) 772-9261
 - Las Vegas Police (Potosi Pines Events): Call 3-1-1 or (702) 828-3111

4-2) State Agencies for Child Welfare

- **Arizona** Department of Child Safety
(888) SOS-CHILD (888-767-2445)
<https://dcs.az.gov>
- **Nevada** Child Protective Services
(833) 803-1183
or Clark County: (702) 399-0081
<http://dcfs.nv.gov/Programs/CWS/CPS/CPS/>

4-3) State Agencies for Adult Welfare

- **Arizona** Adult Protective Services (APS)
(877) SOS-ADULT (or, alternatively 877-767-2385)
<https://des.az.gov/reporting-arizona-adult-abuse-neglect-and-exploitation>
- **Nevada** Adult Protective Services (APS)
Las Vegas/Clark County: (702) 486-6930
Statewide/All other areas: (888) 729-0571
http://adsd.nv.gov/Contact/Contact_ReportAbuse/

5. Complete an official written report within 24 hours. Camp and Retreat Ministries has a report form, but if it is unavailable then write or type your observations as soon as possible. If you have an adult witness, then have them sign also.
6. For the safety of all involved, keep all aspects of suspected abuse and its reporting confidential.
7. If approached by non-involved persons and/or the media, please refer them to the Desert Southwest Communications office.
8. Proper authorities will conduct and complete the investigation.

RESPONSE PLAN

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

The Conference Director of Communications, or his/her designee, is the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Director of Communications:

- (602) 266-6956 ext. 225 or
- (800) 229-8622 ext. 225

Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of Conference staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.

If the allegation is against a Conference staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a Conference activity, the staff person in charge of the activity, the Superintendent of the District in which the activity occurred, and the Conference Treasurer shall be contacted immediately. The Conference Treasurer will advise the Conference's insurance carrier.

In either case, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.