

POLICY OF FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST), LONGVIEW FOR THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Name of Policy:

This policy is a collaboration of resources¹; this policy hereafter shall be referred to as “Safe Sanctuary.”

Statement of Purpose:

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.”² Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. As Christians, we must take our responsibility to children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our church. This policy attempts to do just that for our church.

The purpose of this policy is to protect all persons that come to First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview, Texas, to protect both our staff and volunteers from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of the church.

It is difficult to think that there are individuals who wish to do people harm especially in a church, nevertheless, it is the duty of the congregation to do everything in its power to ensure a safe environment for some of the most vulnerable people in our congregation.

Section 1: Requirements for Working with Children and Youth

The following requirements will be for any person regardless of age, paid or volunteer, who will be working with children or youth (defined hereafter as anyone Ages 0- High School Grade 12).

- All persons must complete and pass a criminal background check prior to working with children or youth.³
 - Persons having a criminal history of any of the following offenses **shall not** be allowed to serve in any ministry
 - Child Abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglectful
 - Violent Offenses
 - Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
 - A background check must be completed every two (2) years.

¹ Adapted from policy adopted by Bear Creek United Methodist Church, Houston, Texas as well as the guiding principles of *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton (Discipleship Resources, 2004)

² Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16

³ The preferred method is to have First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview, Texas run the background check. FCC is using protectmyministry.com and having all person’s background checks in one place will help in the administration of the policy.

- A background check from an employer that is less than two (2) years old shall be accepted as long as First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview has a copy **prior** to the volunteer beginning work with children/youth.
- All persons must complete an annual training of the policies and procedures regarding working with children and youth contained in this document and if needed additional requirements for the activity in which the worker is participating.⁴ This is to ensure that all workers are “on the same page” with regards to the policies of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview. The training will be led by the leadership of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview.
- Training will include (but not limited to)⁵
 - The need for a Safe Sanctuary policy including
 - Understanding the scope of the problem
 - Statistics of the rise of awareness of abuse in the church
 - An overview of the policy
 - Appropriate behavior with children/youth
 - Responsibilities of those who are trained
 - Reporting procedures
 - Completion of all necessary forms and documents stated in this policy

Volunteers who are not members of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or live away from Longview, Texas but want to serve in any capacity (e.g. Day Camp) shall be held the standards that are listed in this section.

Section 2: Behavior of Workers (paid and volunteer)

The following behaviors are prohibited for Workers:

- Threatening or intentionally inflicting emotional or physical injury
- Committing any sexual offense or engaging in any sexual contact
- Making any kind of sexual advance or making a request for sexual favors
- Engaging in verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, i.e. back rubs, massages, kissing or similar contact
- Physical discipline, such as spanking
 - Appendix A contains suggested age-appropriate disciplining methods

Touching to comfort or affirm a protected person in an age-appropriate manner is permitted.

Side-by-side hugs are suggested instead of full-body contact. Appropriate touching need not be completely avoided but is acceptable only in public. Workers shall be aware of how it looks and

⁴ While the basis of the Safe Sanctuary policies are spelled out in this document there might be additional guidelines for different activities such as Day Camp. This policy provides the basis from which additional safety measures may be implemented.

⁵ Resources are available in *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, pgs. 125-129.

how the person being contacted may interpret the contact.

The following are unacceptable and will not be tolerated at any ministry:

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Illegal drugs
- Foul or offensive language

All workers will be given a copy of this policy. All workers must sign **Appendix D** before beginning work in any ministry.

Section 3: Staffing

A minimum of two (2) background checked and trained workers shall be present in any room or area where protected persons are participating. Married couples are defined as one (1) person in this policy.

No family members of a worker (paid or volunteer) shall be in a room with children unless they have completed the requirements set forth in Section 1.

Exceptions to the above rule include:

- Escorting protected persons between on-campus buildings or in hallways
- Monitoring the arrival or departure of protected persons
- In cases of emergency care
- Line of sight exists within the field of vision of another certified adult

Workers should not ever be “one on one” with a child or youth.

- If a child requests to speak to a worker privately this is permissible only if another trained adult can have a line of sight to where the conversation is taking place.
- A worker shall not be in a room without windows or with the doors locked.
- Regarding transportation, being one on one with a child can arise due to lack of participation, illness, etc. If this situation occurs, then the worker shall contact the parents/guardians of the child to inform them of the situation. If permission is granted, then this information must be relayed to the Senior Minister/Associate Minister. If the parents/guardians, children/youth as well as the leadership of the church are all in agreement, then it would be permitted. Communication with the parents/guardians of the child/youth and leadership needs to take place when leaving and arriving at the given destination.

No workers under 18 can be a leader or “in charge”; youth under 18 who have completed all requirements in Section 1 prior to the event can assist the leader but they themselves cannot be the leader.

Section 4: Reporting and Investigating of Allegations of Misconduct or Abuse

Notifications Requirements

1. Workers shall immediately notify the Children's Director/Associate Minister for Family Life **and** Senior Minister of any incident or abuse or violation of the above policies.
2. After the leadership has been notified, then the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child(ren) involved in the situation shall be contacted.
3. Information will be gathered from all parties (reporter, parent/guardian, accused, the victim, worker [paid or volunteer]) involved and appropriate authorities if necessary will be contacted

Reporting Procedure

1. All workers are **required** to notify whoever is in charge of the activity as well as the Senior Minister if a child/youth makes an outcry of abuse either at home, church or during an activity sponsored by the church.
 - a. Allegations shall be taken seriously, and no pre-judgments shall be made.
 - b. The Senior Minister shall evaluate the situation and make the appropriate contacts to civil authorities as directed by the laws and ordinances of the State of Texas.⁶
2. **ALL** situations shall be handled confidentially with due respect for the privacy of the alleged victim and others involved in the incident.
3. The person making the report shall provide the facts known with respect to the incident.

Section 5: Policy Locations

1. A copy of this policy shall be given to all paid and regular volunteer workers after the completion of the Safe Sanctuary training and the return of a background check that adheres to the terms set out in Section 1.
2. A copy of this policy will also be in every room/classroom where children or youth events are held for easy access and reference.
 - a. All Day Camp counselors will be given a copy of this policy to have with them while they are out at the campsites away from First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) campus.
3. A copy of this policy will also be kept in the church office.

AMENDMENT TO POLICY

This policy may be amended as approved by The General Board of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the director/minister of children and youth ministries.

⁶ This information is found in Appendix C

APPENDIX A

Age-Appropriate Discipline Methods

Our goal is to ensure that every child who participates in a Ministry is offered a safe environment where God is the center of all that we do and say.

To do this, we need the children to follow these basic rules:

1. Treat everyone with kindness and respect.
2. Follow directions given by the teacher or leader of a ministry.
3. Stay in the classroom at all times unless escorted by a teacher or leader.
4. Remember, there is no fighting, name calling or rude behavior.
5. Use all equipment properly. Treat property with respect and clean-up after yourself (remember this is God's House)

As parents and teachers, we realize that children are filled with energy. However, should a child's behavior become disruptive to the class or any ministry, the following actions shall be taken.

Pre-School:

1. The teacher/leader shall redirect the child's focus to an activity.
2. A verbal warning and separation from the source of disruption.
Ex: separate children, put the toy away, etc.
3. Time-out in the classroom. Use this time to explain to the child why it is important to exercise proper behavior.
4. As a last resort, the parent/guardian shall be located and asked to sit with the child or remove them from the activity for that day.

Elementary:

1. The teacher/leader shall redirect the child's focus to an activity.
Ex: ask the child to help.
2. A verbal warning and separation from the source of disruption.
Ex: separate children, put the toy away, etc.
3. Time-out in the classroom. Use this time to explain to the child why it is important to exercise proper behavior.
4. As a last resort, the parent/guardian shall be located and asked to sit with the child or remove them from the activity for that day.

Youth (Grades 6-12):

1. The teacher/leader shall redirect the student's focus to an activity.
Ex: ask the student to help.
2. A verbal warning and separation from the source of disruption.

Ex: separate students
3. As a last resort, the parent/guardian shall be located and asked to sit with the student or remove them from the activity for that day.

Policy approved by the General Board of First Christian Church (DOC) February 2018

4. If a student becomes a danger to themselves or others, the student will be removed immediately by the worker and the parents/legal guardian and the applicable director shall be promptly notified.

Appendix B

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview, TX Waiver and Release Form

This waiver and release form is to allow the parent or guardian to release First Christian Church, Longview, Texas, from total compliance of the Safe Sanctuary Policy in the event that the policy cannot be followed for a church event.

I _____, give my permission for _____ to
(Parent/Guardian) **(Ministry Area)**

care for my child _____ on this date _____, knowing that it does not meet all Safe Sanctuary requirements.

The reason for this waiver on this date is:

Parent/Guardian name and contact number (Print)

Parent/Guardian signature

Name of FCC Employee during this event

APPENDIX C
Texas Family Code

TITLE 5 – THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND THE SUIT AFFECTING THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Subtitle E – Protection of the Child

Chapter 261 – Investigations of Report of Child Abuse or Neglect

Subchapter A – General Provisions

Sec.261-001, Definitions,

In this chapter:

- (1) “Abuse” includes the following acts or omissions by a person:
 - (A) mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child’s growth, development, or psychological functioning;
 - (B) causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child’s growth, development, or psychological functioning;
 - (C) physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm;
 - (D) failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child;
 - (E) sexual conduct harmful to a child’s mental, emotional, or physical welfare;
 - (F) failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child;
 - (G) compelling or encouraging the child to engage in **sexual conduct** as defined in Section 43.25 (see page 7), Penal code; or
 - (H) causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is **obscene** as defined in Section 43.21 (see page 7), Penal Code, or pornographic.
- (2) “Department” means the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.
- (3) “Designated Agency” means the agency designated by the court as responsible for the protection of children.
- (4) “Neglect” includes:
 - (A) the leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and the
 - (B) which a license or certification is required, has direct contact with children. The term includes teachers, nurses, doctors, and day-care employees.
 - (C) The requirement to report under this section applies without exception to an individual whose personal communications may otherwise be privileged, including an attorney, a member of the clergy, a medical practitioner, a social worker, and a mental health professional.
 - (D) The identity of an individual making a report under this chapter is confidential and may be disclosed only on the order of a court or to a law enforcement officer for the purposes of conducting a criminal investigation of the report.

Sec. 261.102 Matters to be Reported

A report should reflect the reporter's belief that a child has been or may be abused or may be abused or neglected or has died of abuse or neglect.

Sec. 261.103 Reports Made to Appropriate Agency

A report shall be made to:

- (1) any local or state law enforcement agency;
- (2) the department if the alleged or suspected abuse involves a person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child;
- (3) the state agency that operates, licenses, certifies, or registers the facility in which the alleged abuse or neglect occurred; or
- (4) the agency designated by the court to be responsible for the protection of children.

Sec. 261.104 Contents of Report

The person making a report shall identify, if known:

- (1) the name and address of the child
- (2) the name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child: and
- (3) any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.

Sec. 261.106 Immunities

- (a) a person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of alleged child abuse or neglect or who testifies or otherwise participates in a judicial proceeding arising from a report, petition, or investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect is immune from civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed.

Texas Penal Code – Section 43.21, and 43.25

Sec. 43.21 Definitions

- (a) in this chapter:
 - (1) “**Obscene**” means material or a performance that:
 - (A) the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest in sex;
 - (B) depicts or describes:
 - (i) patently offensive representations or descriptions of ultimate sexual intercourse, sodomy, and sexual bestiality; or
 - (ii) patently offensive representations or descriptions of masturbation, excretory functions, sadism, masochism, lewd exhibition of the genitals, the male or female genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal, covered male genitals in a discernibly turgid state or a device designed and marketed as useful primarily for stimulation of the human genital organs; and
 - (C) taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, and scientific value.

Sec. 43.25 Sexual Performance by a Child

- (2) “**Sexual conduct**” means actual or simulated sexual intercourse, deviate sexual intercourse, sexual bestiality, masturbation, sado-masochistic abuse, or lewd exhibition of the genitals.

Texas Family Code – Chapter 71

Sec. 71.01 Definitions

- (3) “**Family**” includes individuals related by consanguinity or affinity, as determined under Sections 573.022 and 573.024, Government Code, individuals who are former spouses of each other, individuals who are the biological parents of the same child, without regard to marriage, and a foster child and foster parent, whether or not those individuals reside together.

Safe Sanctuary Committee
February 2018

Rev. Evan M. Dolive, Associate Minister

Rev. Dr. Richard Emerson, Senior Minister

Lyn Blount, Children's Director

Beth Grant, Childcare Coordinator

George Terrell, Facilities Coordinator

Donna McFarland

Vicky Green

Seth Warren

Alex Alvatroni

Steve Hickerson

Policy Approved by the General Board Feb 2018.

More information can be found at fcclongview.org/safesanctuary or email safesanctuary@fcclongview.org

APPENDIX D
Covenant of Conduct– Workers and Staff

Our Goal

We at First Christian Church strive to model and share the sacrificial and unconditional love of Christ with each child and youth who enters our doors through our speech, teaching, and behavior. We work to create a safe and loving environment for all who are in our care.

This means we are:

- Intentional with our interactions with students and other adults, both in person and through social media, texting, email, etc.
- Disciplined in our own personal study of scripture and worship
- Thoughtful in how we present ourselves as representatives of the body of Christ

At these events, I agree to:

- treat all persons, regardless of race, religion, and culture, with respect and consideration
- respect the facility we are using
- portray a positive role model for others by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, tact and maturity

At these events, I agree to not:

- use profanity
- purchase or participate in the use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- participate in inappropriate displays of affection or sexual activity
- conduct myself recklessly such that I cause injury to myself or others
- make terroristic threats that would indicate an intent to do bodily harm to self or others
- participate in criminal mischief, reckless damage or destruction of property, structures, equipment, or vehicles, and theft
- bring or use fireworks, pornographic materials or any other inappropriate items
- abuse others; physically (e.g. strike, spank, shake, slap), verbally (e.g. humiliate, degrade, threaten), sexually (e.g. inappropriate touching, exposure or comments), mentally (e.g. inconsistent standards, communicating one behavior and rewarding the opposite), or spiritually.
- use cell phones, iPods, tablets, or other electronic devices without the permission of the applicable director or the adult in charge of the event. While using an electronic device, I will uphold the values of the First Christian Church as outlined in this Covenant of Conduct.

I understand that:

- any damage that should occur because of my negligence, I am financially responsible.
- all penalties are left up to the discretion of the applicable director and pastoral staff.
- The First Christian Worker and Staff Covenant of Conduct does not cover all situations. In the event that something arises that is not mentioned, the applicable director, or his/her representative, reserves the right to make all necessary decisions.

I have read the “Covenant of Conduct” and fully agree with the conditions. I understand that I will be excused from participating in children or youth sponsored activities if I violate any conditions of this covenant.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

APPENDIX E

Staff/Volunteer Agreement to Policy Form

This is to confirm that I have received and read a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policies of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Longview, Texas.

Worker Name: (please print) _____

Worker Signature: _____

Date: _____

