

**Atascocita Methodist Church**  
**Safe Sanctuary Policy for All Church, Conference and District Events**  
**Effective October 20, 2022**

**Scope of Policy:**

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth who participate in any activities or events attended or sponsored by Atascocita Methodist Church. This policy shall be applicable at all activities involving children and youth.

**Definitions :**

- Childcare provider refers to staff employed by AMC for the purposes of childcare provided during church events. Childcare provider is someone who is at least 16 years of age.
- Leader refers to a volunteer who is 21 years of age or older.
- Assistant leader refers to a volunteer who is 18-20 years of ages with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader.
- Youth helper refers to a minor who is assisting a leader with supervision of younger children.
- Youth refers to a student participating in an activity designed for minors between the ages of 11 and 18 / 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Child refers to a student participating in an activity designed for minors between the ages of 6 weeks and 10 / up to completion of 5<sup>th</sup> grade

**Supervision:**

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy 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 leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all events.

**Supervision for Nursery/childcare:**

- There shall be a minimum of two non-related childcare providers per room supervising children, one of whom must be over 18 years of age.
- We recommend that whenever possible Texas State Childcare Minimum Standards be followed, particularly in relation to the number of childcare providers to child ratio.

**Supervision of children:**

- All events shall observe the "2 Person Rule" (2 supervisors per classroom, 2 supervisors within the line of sight when outdoors.)
- These 2 supervisors may be a combination of leaders and assistant leaders and youth helpers, with the requirement that one of the 2 people is over the age of 18 years of age.
- Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting shall be conducted in sight of another leader.
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one leader can be in contact with multiple children so long as they are in line sight of other leaders.

Supervision of youth:

- All events shall observe the "2 Person Rule" (2 supervisors per classroom, 2 supervisors within the line of sight when outdoors.)
- These 2 supervisors may be a combination of leaders and assistant leaders.

**Overnight Accommodations:**

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- We strongly recommend that at least 2 leaders be present in every room.
- When staying in a hotel, leaders shall sleep in a separate room; or if it is necessary to share a room, leaders shall sleep in separate beds.

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

**Definitions of Abuse:**

1. Verbal Abuse- Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.
2. Physical Abuse- Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, 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.
3. 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: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in church, conference or district activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another'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 Leaders, Assistant Leaders and Childcare Providers:**

1. Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader, assistant leader or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the event leader in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to the event leader, local congregation and/or Conference Safe Sanctuary Certification Authority to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
2. The AMC congregation is responsible for conducting references and screening.
3. The Pastor overseeing family ministries shall receive the completed forms and reports from the staff person, program leader, or event leader and review them. If any of the reports raise questions about the fitness of the applicant, the Pastor may disapprove the application and notify the staff person, program leader, or event leader. AMC reserves the right to turn away any persons for service.
4. 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 against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant.
5. Results of screens shall be kept confidential. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in the Pastor giving a negative recommendation shall be made by the Pastors in their sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which AMC may determine to be serious,

we offer the following examples as guidelines:

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the 5 years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
- Persons having a Criminal History of drug related conviction within 5 years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

**Training:**

Atascocita Methodist Church has developed training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership who work with children and youth at AMC and Conference or District events. Training shall include, but is not limited to appropriate discipline, appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, leader misconduct, and this policy. No person shall have any direct or indirect contact with children and /or youth until they have completed this training program. A review of this policy should be conducted at the beginning of each event. Leaders thus certified are entrusted with the title of "Certified Safe Sanctuary Worker with Children and Youth."

**Reporting of Incidents:**

1. When a leader of AMC, Conference or District program, 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 call 911 when needed and report the abuse to the appropriate local law enforcement agency and /or the Department of Family and Regulatory Services (800-252-5400). The leader shall contact the administrator or event leader immediately, and cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or child protective services.

2. Address any needs the child or youth may have, medical or otherwise. Report to the parents and or legal guardians.

3. 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 taken place. The matter shall remain confidential. If the event leader is the respondent, then the report should be made to that person's Conference supervisor.

4. Following the report of an incident, the event leader, or supervisor in charge shall document the report, and then speak with the alleged victim, being careful to use open-ended questions.

5. All such conversations shall be documented. Careful and confidential documentation is essential.

The documentation should include the following:

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

- B. The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth.
  - C. Any statement made by the alleged victim
  - D. Name of the respondent, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the respondent.
  - E. Any action taken, i.e. suspension of the respondent
  - F. Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to and content of that conversation and case number assigned.
  - G. Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
  - H. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
6. Notify the Pastor(s).
7. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current *Book of Doctrine and Discipline*, appropriate counseling referrals and continued pastoral visitation.
8. Confirmed reports of proven incidences of abuse shall be retained in a confidential file for future screening purposes.

**Media Response:**

The Global Methodist Church Eastern Texas Conference/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 spokesperson in the Conference Communications Office or as designated by the Bishop. Refer all inquiries to the spokesperson.

**Do not give out any information, simply state that all inquiries will be answered by our spokesperson.**