

Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children and Youth

I. Code of Conduct

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and as such are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through policies and codes of conduct is not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Relationships in ministry should always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or to allow harm to occur. This Code of Conduct has been adopted by the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas to help the church create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them. All Church Personnel are asked to carefully consider each statement in the Code of Conduct before agreeing to abide by them and continuing in service to the church.

Persons who cannot agree to adhere to these policies are not allowed to serve in ministry to children and youth.

The Code of Conduct for Protection of Children and Youth

- Church Personnel agree to do their best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
- Church Personnel agree to not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
- Church Personnel agree to comply with *The Policies for General Conduct with Children and Youth* as defined in **The Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse.**
- Church Personnel agree to comply with The Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth.
- Church Personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.
- In the event that Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth, Church Personnel agree to immediately report their observations as outlined in this policy.
- Church Personnel understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.

II. General Definitions

A. Church Personnel

For the purpose of this policy, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the church.

1. **All clergy**, whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, canonically resident in this Diocese, licensed in this Diocese, or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. **All paid personnel**, whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by the Diocese, its congregations, schools or other agencies.
3. **Those who contract their services** to the Diocese, its congregations, schools or other agencies. (This could be accomplished by the agency sending a list of those individuals who would be sent to us, along with proof of background check, *Safeguarding God's Children* training and reference checks.)
4. **Volunteers** in activities for children and youth, including any person who enters into or offers himself or herself for a church related service, or who actually assists with or performs a service.

B. Age Categories

1. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.
2. A **youth** is defined as 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 or older, but still in high school.
3. A **vulnerable adult** is defined as anyone 18 years or older who has special needs of a physical, age-related or mental nature and participates in activities for children and youth.
4. An **adult** for the purposes of this policy is defined as anyone who is 18 years or older.

C. Definitions

1. **“Regularly”** Work With or Around Children or Youth – For the purposes of this policy, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel who “Regularly Work With or Around Children or Youth.”

These individuals must receive three hours of training:

- a. **All clergy**, whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, canonically resident in the Diocese, licensed in the Diocese or otherwise engaged in ministry or service to the church, regardless of their duties.
- b. **All paid Church Personnel**, whether full time or part time, regardless whether they work with children or youth.
- c. **All volunteers** serving in staff positions, whether full time or part time, regardless whether they work with children or youth.
- d. **All volunteers** whose work routinely takes them throughout the facility or grounds (examples: volunteer sextons, groundskeepers, etc.)
- e. **All persons who supervise or assist** with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities.
- f. **All persons who provide transportation** to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle.
- g. **Any person whose living quarters are on the grounds of the church**, school or other related agency.
- h. **Parents who assist more than six (6) times per year** with a program in which their child is enrolled, including transportation.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Children’s or youth choir directors
- Sunday School teachers and staff
- Vacation Bible School teachers and staff
- Organists who work with children or youth
- Lay Youth Ministers
- Directors of Religious (Christian) Education
- Volunteer Youth Directors
- Church Personnel who work or assist in the nursery
- All Staff, whether volunteer or paid, at church camps
- Teacher, substitute teachers, and staff in parochial schools
- Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth

2. **“Occasionally”** Work With or Around Children or Youth – For the purpose of this policy, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel who “Occasionally Work With or Around Children or Youth”.

These individuals must receive at least 1 hour of training.

- a. Persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities infrequently, generally no more than three times a year or for one program or activity other than overnight activity.
- b. Persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle, infrequently, generally no more than three times a year.

Exception: Parents who assist no more than six times a year with a program in which their child is enrolled, including providing transportation, are exempt from these background checks and training requirements.

D. Types of Abuse

1. **Physical Abuse** is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.
2. **Sexual Abuse** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and an adult. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth.
3. **Emotional Abuse** is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
4. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child's or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

III Safeguards for Children and Youth

A. Screening and Selection

Any and all Church Personnel who "Regularly" or "Occasionally" Work With or Around Children or Youth shall be screened and selected utilizing at least the following tools listed below. (Exception: Parents who assist *no more than six (6) times a year* with a program in which their child is enrolled, including providing transportation, are exempt from these background check and training requirements.)

1. A **Standard Application** completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks.
2. **Criminal Records Check**
3. **Sexual Offender Registry Check**
4. Individual **Interview** with the applicant
5. **Reference checks** with persons who know, but are not related to the applicant.
6. **Driving or motor vehicle records check.**
7. **Credit check** for persons with financial responsibility.
8. **Federal records check** for employees in greater positions of authority (Clergy, Head of School, etc.)

The congregation or institution must obtain the background and reference checks independently and may not accept such checks obtained by others. Questions regarding The Diocesan Policy on Background Screenings should contact the Bishop's office.

All information gathered about an applicant will be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination of whether the person is appropriate to work with children or youth. The Canon to the Ordinary shall be consulted if there is any uncertainty.

1. Background checks and proof of training in child abuse prevention is required for all individuals before they begin their ministry with children or youth and must be done within one (1) month of hire or start date. In the interim, anyone lacking training or a completed background check must be supervised at all times by a fully trained and background checked worker.
2. Church Personnel who work with or around children or youth must have a personnel file that is kept in a locked file cabinet in the church office. This file should contain the items listed in #1 above.
3. Criminal Records checks and sexual offender registry checks must be updated every five (5) years for Church Personnel who "Regularly" or "Occasionally" work with or around children or youth.
4. No person will be permitted to supervise an immediate family member when working with or around children or youth unless an unrelated adult is present. An immediate family member is defined as the spouse, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, partner or co-habitant. This also applies to in-law and step family relationships.

5. Background checks must have been done within five (5) years and must be updated every five (5) years. **Camp Capers staff and session counselors must be done annually.**
6. Church Personnel who transfer within the Diocese of West Texas and apply for, who are asked, or do undertake positions working with or around children or youth are required to undergo the same screening and selection process. This requirement may be met through the transfer of a copy of the personnel file to the new congregation, school, agency, or program together with completions of:
 - A new application
 - Individual interview
 - Reference checks with the congregations, schools, agencies or other programs for which the applicant has worked with or around children or youth since the screening was last done as shown in the applicant's personnel file.
7. Church Personnel who transfer from Episcopal congregations outside the Diocese of West Texas may transfer Safeguarding God's Children training certificates. Reference checks and background checks must be performed on all personnel coming in from outside the diocese.

B. Education and Training Requirements

1. Child abuse prevention education and training is required for all individuals before they start their work with children or youth. If this is not possible, education and training must be completed within one month; in the interim, individuals who have not completed the required training must always be supervised by a person who is fully trained and background checked.

This training shall be the program *Safeguarding God's Children* and the training must be administered by a diocesan certified trainer, who must register the training with the Bishop Jones Center.

No other training is acceptable, and there are no exceptions.

2. Those who work "Regularly" with children or youth must receive three (3) hours of training using the ***Safeguarding God's Children*** videos entitled "For Parents and Congregations" and "For Ministries."
3. Those who "Occasionally" work with children or youth must receive one (1) hour of training using the ***Safeguarding God's Children*** video "For Parents and Congregations."
4. Individuals who change categories from "Occasional" to "Regular" and who have received the one (1) hour training must receive an additional two (2) hours of training using the ***Safeguarding God's Children*** video "For Ministries."
5. Training must be repeated every five (5) years. Camp staff and session counselors must be trained annually.

There are thirty trainers diocesan wide from our churches, schools, and diocesan staff. Most of our trainers train only in the location where they are employed. When a trainer schedules a workshop with the diocese that is to be "Open" to all churches and schools, it will be posted on the diocesan website calendar. Anyone can participate at any location. Diocesan trainers will travel to churches that are willing to host a workshop. To secure a trainer, have at least 15 people who need to attend a workshop and be willing to open the workshop to all congregations. If you prefer to have a "Closed" workshop (your group only), the fee for a diocesan trainer is \$150.00 plus mileage to and from your location. All workshops are to be scheduled through the diocesan office (888 or 210) 824-5387.