

Safe Haven Policies

Atonement Lutheran Church, Denver, Colorado

Approved by Church Council October 2016

I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Matthew 18:6

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." Psalm 91:2

PURPOSE

The purpose of these Policies is to ensure the safety of all God's children, youth, vulnerable individuals and everyone who participates in activities at Atonement Lutheran Church (Church). We do not implement these policies out of any lack of trust in volunteers, leaders, employees or participants; rather our intent is to lift up, protect and welcome all God's children with love and respect, and care for those in our midst regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation or ability. We strive to do everything we can to maintain the safety of everyone who enters our Church, and to serve as positive role models for all.

SCOPE

We intend these Policies to affect all Church activities whether or not conducted on Church property, and apply to all involved with those activities.

OBJECTIVES

By creating, implementing and performing these policies we intend to:

- Provide a safe environment and setting for all Church activities.
- Treat each individual with love and dignity and respect.
- Increase awareness and vigilance of all involved in Church activities, especially activities and events in which children, youth and vulnerable individuals participate;
- Ensure appropriate reporting of any detected unsafe conditions, including abuse, bullying and other inappropriate conduct;
- Comply with, and help enforce all regulations and laws associated with the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable individuals;
- Provide appropriate instruction, training and screening for all involved with Church activities to ensure effective and just implementation and administration of these policies.

I. DEFINITIONS

Child means anyone under the age of 12 years.

Youth means anyone between the ages of 12 and 18. Also may mean an individual who is 18 or older, but still in high school.

Vulnerable Individual means any person who is at risk of abuse or harm, whether physically, mentally or emotionally.

Leader means anyone directly responsible for supervising a specific Church related function, event, or activity.

Participant means any individual participating in, observing or present at a Church-related function, event, or activity.

Volunteers include any person who enters into or offers him or herself for a church related service, or who assists with or performs a service, whether or not they have been selected or assigned to do so.

Personnel/employees/staff are defined as those who are employed by the Church. These include interns or field education students, etc. assigned to Atonement Lutheran Church.

Abuse means intentional mental, emotional or physical harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of any individual.

Bullying means the act of verbally or physically intimidating a person to make them do something or to feel bad. Bullying is considered to be abuse.

Sexual Abuse includes molestation, sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. This includes the dissemination, exhibition or display of sexually explicit material to an individual whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the individual.

Sexual Contact means the intentional touching of the intimate parts or clothing covering such areas of any individual.

Sexual Exploitation means 1) allowing, permitting, or encouraging an individual to engage in prostitution or in photographing, filming, or creation of any images depicting an individual engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct; or 2) development of, or the attempt to develop, a sexual relationship between any individual and any child.

II. POLICIES

Best Practices & General Requirements

- To the extent possible, volunteers, leaders, and participants shall never leave children and youth unsupervised, nor be alone in a room with a child or youth.
- If a volunteer, leader, employee or participant is in a room alone with a child or youth, the doors shall remain open at all times or they shall place themselves in view of a window or door.
- All volunteers, leaders and church personnel will respond to children, youth and adults with respect and equal treatment regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture or socioeconomic status.
- One-on-one counseling with children or youth will be done as needed in an open environment and with written permission from the parent/guardian whenever possible.
- No person will be allowed work unsupervised with children, youth or other vulnerable individuals until that person has been known to the clergy and/or the appropriate members of the congregation.
- All volunteers, leaders and personnel should be alert for strangers in the vicinity, and should ask them who they are and why they are here.
- Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms when their children participate in church activities. These should contain a statement that they have received and agreed to abide by the **Safe Haven Policies**.
- Programs for children and vulnerable individuals should have procedures to ensure that they are released only to their parents or legal guardians or to those designated by them.
- Personal information regarding children, youth, participants, volunteers, staff or incidents at the church is to remain confidential. This information is only given out on a need to know basis or with the individual's permission or that of their parents/guardians.

Appropriate forms of Affection

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are:

- Brief hugs, preferred are side-to-side, one-arm or A-frame hugs
- Pats on the shoulders or back
- Handshakes, high-fives or hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children, or holding hands during prayer
- Holding a child under the age of 4 on the lap

Inappropriate Forms of Affection between unrelated individuals include but are not limited to:

- Lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children 4 years or older on the lap
- Any sexualized touching; touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Any form of unwanted or aggressive affection or physical contact.
- Private meals, meetings, emails or written communication with a child or youth without the parent/guardian's knowledge and express written permission.
- Inappropriate comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development.

Bullying and Abuse

- Abuse or bullying of any individual is prohibited at any Church or Church related activity.
- Any volunteer, leader, staff or individual participating in any Church related activity who observes bullying or suspects that bullying has occurred shall attempt to safely neutralize the situation as practicable and must IMMEDIATELY report their observations to a leader and the parents/guardians if indicated.

Reporting

- Any volunteer, leader, staff or participant who observes or suspects abuse or observes any inappropriate behaviors which are inconsistent with these policies must IMMEDIATELY report their observations to a leader, and, if significant to the pastor and executive/personnel committee.
- All reports of inappropriate behavior with children, youth, or other individuals should be taken seriously, and treated with confidentiality.
- Suicide threats or casual remarks about suicide should always be taken seriously. Report all suicide threats IMMEDIATELY to the pastor or a member of the executive/personnel committee and to the parent/guardians.
- The **Confidential Notice of Concern or Exception Granted, Form 4**, is used 1) to report inappropriate behavior, or 2) if there is a possible risk of abuse, or 3) to report policy and procedures violations, or 4) to document when exceptions to policies are granted.
- The **Confidential Report of Suspected Child Abuse, Form 5**, is used in more serious instances, where abuse is observed or may be suspected.
- Any reports which do not receive an immediate or almost immediate response should be followed up by the person who made the report to be sure the appropriate party has received the report.
- All parties shall be sensitive to and respect any alleged victim and his or her family, as well as to the accused. The Church shall make pastoral care available to all when indicated.

Technology

Volunteers, leaders or personnel/staff who choose to use electronic communications to contact children and youth should first obtain written permission from parents or guardians. (Use the **Confidential Notice of Concern or Exception Granted, Form 4** for this.) Whenever possible, copies of the communications should also be sent to the parents or guardians.

Discipline

No individual shall be subject to corporal punishment, ridicule, or abusive language.

Drugs and Alcohol Use

No participant, volunteer, leader or staff member may use, possess, distribute or be under the influence of alcohol, marijuana or illegal drugs, while participating in or assisting with programs or activities for children and youth.

III. PROCEDURES

Background Screening

The Church will require a criminal background check of any person who works with children, youth or other vulnerable individuals.

- Background checks are conducted for all employees, leaders and for all adult volunteers over age 18 Governmental certifications which entail acceptable background checks and that are current may replace background checks.
- Background checks are again required every four years for volunteers, leaders and personnel/staff.
- Background checks may also be conducted at any time at the option of the Church.
- Reference checks may also be indicated at the discretion of the church.

Supervision

- All individuals involved with programming and activities for youth shall meet the standards identified above.
- Two Adult Rule – Dual Supervision: A minimum of two adults should be present during all church activities involving children or youth.

Overnight or Off-Site Events

- Two adult leaders must be present for overnight stays. For groups of both sexes, one leader must be male and one female.
- Overnight housing or sleeping events shall be gender segregated. Adults and youth shall never share a bed or be housed together alone in a room. An exception may be made for parent/guardian and child.

Instruction and Training

All volunteers, leaders and personnel who work with children, youth, or other vulnerable individuals must be trained in abuse awareness, and must agree to abide by the Safe Haven Policies.

Transportation

- Transportation using private vehicles shall be consistent with any applicable Church vehicle use policies.
- The driver of such vehicle must maintain a current driver's license and proper vehicle insurance which provides appropriate bodily injury and other insurance in at least the amounts required by Colorado law. Evidence of such policies must be provided to the Church.

Documentation

- **Releases, Waivers, Parental Permission.** All parents/guardians shall sign a release, waiver, and/or parental permission form appropriate for the activity in which they or their children are participating. Examples of such forms which may be changed by Church staff from time to time as necessary
- **Reporting** All incidents of injury, abuse or bullying shall be reported to supervisors or group leaders, who shall use their discretion as to whether to advance such report to Church staff or the pastor or personnel/executive committee. When Safe Haven policies are not followed, they must be reported to Church staff or the pastor or personnel/executive committee. Any and all incidents involving bodily injury shall be reported in writing. Incidents which require mandatory reporting, must be reported to the appropriate state or local authorities immediately. They must also be reported to the pastor and personnel/executive committee.