

**First Methodist Church
Amarillo, Canyon, Online**

Safe Sanctuary Policy

Throughout the gospels, Jesus teaches on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable Kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As followers of Christ, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child.... welcome me." (Matthew 18:5) Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) Our Christian faith directs us to offer both hospitality and protection to the children.

Mission of the Safe Sanctuary Policy

First Methodist Church, as a Christian community of faith and a Global Methodist congregation, pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all who work with children and youth.

We as a congregation are committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ, so each individual will be "...surrounded by steadfast love, ...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our children, youth workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.

Definitions for Supervision

- An **Adult** is anyone over the age of eighteen (18), not in high school, who has had a background check run by the church, been through Safe Sanctuary Training, and been approved by leadership to work with Youth or Children at First Methodist Church
- A **Youth** is anyone from the 7th grade to the 12th grade in school.
- A **Child** is anyone from birth, to the end of the 6th grade in school.
- The **“Two-Adult Rule”** refers to no fewer than two **unrelated** adults (18 yrs. or older) being present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth.
- The **“Buddy-System”**-group of 2 or more children or youth

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.” There should be present at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all church events which include children or youth.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare:

- There shall be a minimum of two (2) **adults** per room.
- We recommend that whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of adults to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth:

- All events shall observe the “2 Adult Rule” (2 adults per classroom or 2 adults within line of sight when outdoors.) at all times. Exceptions can be handled on a case-by-case basis.
- There should be at least one adult who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at any event where a youth or child will be participating in activities.
- Any one-to-one mentoring, consulting, or individual prayer with youth shall not be conducted “behind closed doors” or in an isolated or private area out of sight of another adult.
 - If you are asked by a child or youth to keep a secret, you must inform them that we don’t keep secrets. It is our practice to do what is best for the child, including informing family or authorities if there is potential harm.
- No one-on-ones with a youth of the opposite gender
(ask another adult to join the conversation; preferably the same gender as the child)
- No one-on-ones with a child (6th grade or younger)
- Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one adult can be in contact with groups of three or more youth (7th-12th grade) as long as they are in the line of sight of other adults.
- If both boys and girls are participating in an event, then the adults shall also include both men and women
- Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain at youth events.
- Children fourth grade and younger will not be allowed to leave a designated event or room unless a parent or guardian accompanies them as they leave.

- Any 5th or 6th graders who wish to leave an activity unaccompanied by a parent, must have a signed permission slip from their parent or legal guardian on file.
- Youth participants in an event will not be allowed to leave a designated event early without the permission of a parent or guardian.
- All paid staff, who work with children or youth regularly, must be CPR certified within 3 months of hire.
- **No Adult will be allowed to have a dating relationship with a youth or child.**

Supervision for Offsite and Overnight Children or Youth Activities

- At least two (2) Adults, who are not related, must be present with every group.
- If both girls and boys are present on the trip, then the adults on the trip must include men and women (at least 2 of each gender)
- Male and Females must sleep in separate spaces. (Gender is defined by biological birth)
- Adults, children, and/or youth will not share sleeping spaces (bed, blankets, sleeping bags, etc.)

Driving for Children or Youth Activities

- The driver must be **25 or older for the bus, 21 or older for a van** and accompanied by another **adult**.
 - o Two drivers (25 yrs. or older) preferred at all times, required for out-of-town trips.
- The drivers must provide a copy of their driver's license and insurance to the Church Administrator
- They must have a clean driving record.
- Any trip needs to include at least one adult that is CPR/First Aid trained

Procedure for becoming a Volunteer in Ministry with Children/Youth

The following forms must be filled out completely and signed:

- o Consent to Criminal History Background Check Form
- o Signed agreement to Follow Safe Sanctuary Policy
- o Completed online Safe Sanctuary Training Course

*See following page for instructions on how to complete the required online Safe Sanctuary Training

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses will not be allowed to serve with Children or Youth Ministry:

- 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 ten (10) years immediately prior to application will not be allowed to act as a driver.

- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application will not be allowed to serve with Youth or Children related activities at FMC.

First Methodist Church will observe the **“6 Month Rule”**. This rule states that in order to be an adult holding a leadership position, you must be an active participant at First Methodist Church or the West Texas A&M Wesley Foundation for at least six (6) months prior to holding a position.

Definitions of Abuse

- **Verbal Abuse** is any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens a Child or Youth.
- **Physical Abuse** is any act or omission that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of physical abuse of a Child or Youth, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s parent, guardian, leader, or caregiver. Physical abuse may include but is not limited to any non-accidental injury to a child under the age of 18 and may include: beatings, bruises, welts, shaking, burns, bites, strangulation, or broken bones.
- **Sexual Abuse** is the sexual exploitation or use of a Child or Youth for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes but is not limited to: intercourse, sodomy, oral-genital stimulation, verbal stimulation, exhibitionism, fondling, rape, prostitution. Behavior that communicates sexual interest is also not acceptable. Types of this behavior may include social networking, email, displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendos, touching another person’s body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing or the act of sexual intercourse.
- **Emotional Abuse/Neglect** is the failure of a parent, leader, or caregiver to provide the appropriate support, attention and affection necessary for a child to develop intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

Actions Taken to Report Suspected Abuse/Neglect

- Any adult who witnesses or suspects abuse or neglect is required by law to report it to the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400
- Notify our **Campus Pastor** or **Lead Pastor** of any suspected abuse or neglect.
- Appropriate church leaders, law enforcement, and agencies will be notified as well as the parents involved.

Any knowledge of registered sex offenders needs to be brought to the attention of Campus Pastor or Lead Pastor.

First Methodist Church Canyon and Amarillo
Safe Sanctuary Policy Signature Page

I _____ acknowledge that I have read and understood the Safe Sanctuary Policy of First Methodist Church Canyon and Amarillo. I agree to follow these policies and to report any suspicious behavior to the appropriate parties. I further agree to complete my online Safe Sanctuary Training within 10 days of signing this form.

Authorized Signature: _____ Date: _____

***Please fill out all required paperwork, as well as this signature page and turn in to either the Youth Pastor, Children's Pastor, or Nursery Coordinator, depending on the area you will be serving.**