

Wesley United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuaries:

An Overview of Guidelines and Safety Standards For Adult Service with Children and Youth

A. DEFINITIONS

- a. Those directly supervising or leading children and/or youth are here referred to as “leaders” or “volunteers” or “directors.”
 - i. A director is understood as the head of a particular program or ministry (paid or unpaid) who reports directly to the Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
 - ii. A volunteer is always an unpaid person who gives of his/her time freely for a particular ministry or department. Volunteers report to the Director or, in the absence of a Director, the Pastor.
 - iii. A leader is understood as a general use term for all servants involved (paid or unpaid, youth or adult) in ministries with children and youth.
- b. “Youth” is anyone between the ages of 11 and 18 (if, at 18, the person in question is still in high school). Youth may serve as a leader or volunteer at the discretion of the director. Youth are not required to complete the Background Screening process.
- c. “Child/Children” are those between the ages of birth and 10. Children shall not serve as a leader, director, or volunteer (except in rare circumstances, the director may use older children for volunteer purposes). Children are not required to complete the Background Screening process.
- d. “Adult” is a term referring to persons 18 years of age or older and who are out of high school.
- e. A “Small Group” consists of a gathering of children and/or youth numbering between 2 and 15 persons (not counting adults)
- f. A “Large Group” consists of a gathering of children and/or youth numbering over 16 persons (not counting adults).
- g. “Background Screening” is a process required of all leaders, directors, key and volunteers.
- h. Church Administration Responsibilities
 - i. Receiving and maintaining Background Screening records
 - ii. Initiating and maintaining confidential criminal background check reports
 - iii. Receiving and maintaining confidential event performance evaluations (when applicable)
 - iv. Maintaining confidentiality in all correspondences

B. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR APPROVAL AS A CHILDREN OR YOUTH LEADER OR VOLUNTEER

- a. All Wesley Staff shall be trained at least quadrennially on policies and procedures regarding children and youth
- b. Every person serving as a leader shall be at least 18 years of age, out of high school, and at least 4 years older than the oldest child or youth in the group assigned to that leader.
- c. All directors, leaders, and volunteers shall read and sign the Children and Youth Service Covenant.
- d. All directors, leaders, and key volunteers shall complete the Background Screening process.
- e. All directors shall serve only with the approval of the Pastor in consultation with the Staff Parish Relations Committee. Other leaders and volunteers shall serve only when approved by the Director and Pastor (or, in the absence of a Director, simply the Pastor).

C. RATIOS

- a. These minimum leader to children and youth ratios must reflect in both small group experiences and large group events.
 - i. Birth to age 4 1 leader to 4 children
 - ii. Ages 5 to 10 1 leader to 5 children
 - iii. Ages 11 to 18 1 leader to 10 youth
- b. No adult (anyone 18 years of age or older and out of high school) shall ever be found in a 1 on 1 private meeting with a child or a youth (i.e. behind closed doors without the possibility of another adult seeing or observing)
- c. In every situation, whether in a small group or a large group setting, there will be at least one director, leader, and/or key volunteer who is properly background screened to monitor other volunteers (who may not be screened) for maintaining safety standards. Never is there to be an adult **in charge** of children or youth - or given leadership over a segment of children or youth (i.e. a VBS Station, serving stations at a fundraiser lunch, etc.) – who is not properly Background screened.

D. SUPERVISORY GUIDELINES FOR EVENTS

- a. Adults ages 18 to 21, if less than 4 years older than the oldest child or youth in the group assigned, may serve only as volunteers.
- b. Volunteers working with youth in Junior High/Middle School shall be at least 18 years old and out of High School
- c. An up to date list of all leaders and volunteers shall be provided to the Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee at least twice a year for their review

E. BACKGROUND SCREENING PROCESS

- a. Wesley United Methodist Church is responsible for providing a safe environment for children and youth. Following the best practices as outlined in this policy, children and youth programs shall be:
 - i. Safe from potential physical harm
 - ii. Spiritually and developmentally appropriate
 - iii. Free from abuse between participants and/or by leaders, directors, or volunteers.
- b. Intentional screening is one way to help prevent abuse. Screening requires a review of information (through interviews, written information, personal contacts, references, and criminal background checks) in search of persons who can provide services for children and youth in a safe environment.
- c. The Background Screening process includes the following:
 - i. Background Screening Form (completed online)
 - ii. Statement of Disclosure: a criminal activity declaration made by the applicant.
 - iii. Leader Reference Form: evaluation forms sent to personal acquaintances and local church personnel (sent as a link when the online form is completed).
 - iv. Signed copy of Children and Youth Leader Covenant
- d. All directors, leaders, and key volunteers shall complete the Background Screening process.
- e. Those desiring to serve in relation to children and/or youth shall inquire first at the Church Office to begin the Background Screening process
- f. No person is guaranteed approval for service with children and/or youth even with an acceptable return on the Background Screening.