

# Safe Sanctuary Policy for Kingswood UMC Amarillo, Texas

**Effective January 2009**

## **Our Calling and our mandate is to ensure safe sanctuary for God's People.**

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people. 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. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of everyone at events sponsored by Kingswood United Methodist Church. We recognize the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place.

### **I. Purpose:**

- a. The purpose of this policy is to make our church a safe place for everyone. To help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and the appearance of abuse, and to help protect workers from false accusations and suspicions.
- b. This policy serves to protect and inform volunteers who work with Children and Youth.
- c. This policy serves as a minimum standard to be upheld by staff and volunteers for all ministries and activities at Kingswood UMC, Amarillo, Texas.
- d. The Northwest Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church requires that Kingswood UMC have a Safe Sanctuary Policy in place and functioning to protect the church, staff, volunteers, youth and children from harm.

### **II. Scope of Policy:**

For protection and well being, this policy and its provisions shall apply to all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with children or youth at Kingswood UMC sponsored activities or events. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following: Sunday school, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, Outreach events, Youth activities and trips, Camps, Nursery and Child Care.

#### **a. Exclusions**

1. The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) occasionally utilize the facilities at Kingswood. The BSA operates under BSA leadership policies, which meet or exceed the policies set forth herein.
2. Outside youth groups: Occasionally youth groups from other churches may use Kingswood facilities for overnight lodging while traveling. These groups are subject to the policies of their home churches and Kingswood Church is not responsible for supervising these groups.

#### **b. Definitions**

1. Abuse: Physical, emotional, mental, sexual, or other kinds of abuse directed at, or observed, or occurring with or to, a Child or Youth, including the definition of "abuse" set forth in Section 261.001 of the Texas Family Code Subtitle E. Protection of the Child.
2. Adult: Individuals that are eighteen years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent.
3. Approved Leader or Volunteer: Individuals either staff or laity who are 19 years of age or older and at least 5 years older than the oldest person in the group they are leading. They have also completed the screening process as outlined in section II-c.
4. Activity or Event: Any church-sponsored class, workshop, or social gathering including but not limited to; Sunday school, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, Outreach events, Youth activities and trips, Camps, Nursery and Child Care.
5. Background check: The church will obtain an authorized release of information form, this will be used by a qualified risk assessment service to evaluate the criminal history and other relevant background information of Staff and Volunteers for local church activities and events.
6. Child: All persons from birth through fifth grade.

7. Child Care Provider: An individual who is 18 year of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent. Who has completed the screening process as outlined in section II-c.
8. Conference: Northwest Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.
9. Staff: Individuals who are compensated by Kingswood UMC who perform specific services that are related to this local church.
10. Youth: Students from sixth grade through seniors in high school. For the purposes of this policy, a person becomes an adult when they receive a high school diploma or equivalent and are age 18.

**c. Screening Procedures**

1. Adults are deemed eligible to serve as a volunteer in ministry to Children and Youth after regular, documented attendance at Kingswood UMC Amarillo for six (6) months and have satisfactorily completed the screening process. If questions arise regarding "regular attendance," eligibility will be at the discretion of the Children's Pastor and Youth Pastor.
2. All Staff and Volunteers must complete the following screening process:
  - i. Attend periodic Safe Sanctuary training sessions.
  - ii. Sign an "Authorization for Release of Information" in order for the church to perform a background check.
  - iii. Complete an application to volunteer, including references and a Kingswood Covenant Agreement. References may include, but are not limited to, persons within the church. These records will be kept confidential.
3. After completion of training and receipt of a satisfactory background and reference check, volunteers are issued an approved nametag that will be worn when deemed necessary when serving as a volunteer for Children and Youth.
4. Should reports raise questions about the fitness of an applicant, the application will be disapproved, and the event Leader will be notified. Kingswood UMC reserves the right to turn away any person for service.
5. If the applicant (paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited anyone; the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction for a crime against a minor Child or Youth shall disqualify an applicant. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in Kingswood United Methodist Church giving a negative recommendation shall be made by Kingswood UMC in its sole discretion. Without in any way limiting those crimes which Kingswood may determine to be serious, persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry dealing 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 ten years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as driver.
  - Persons having a Criminal History of a drug-related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in the event.

**d. Training**

1. The Kingswood UMC Safe Sanctuary Task Force shall develop and implement training and orientation procedures for all persons in leadership (paid or unpaid) who work with Children and/or Youth. 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 or Youth until they have completed this training program. We recommend that the beginning of each event, (not necessary for regular ongoing activities) a review of this policy be conducted. Periodic training show be provided during the year.
2. The Kingswood UMC Safe Sanctuary Task Force will include: The Director of Youth Ministries, the Directory of Children's Ministries, a nursery staff person, and two to four parents of Children or Youth.

**e. Adult Conduct Procedures**

1. Wear Nametag: Adult volunteers will wear approved nametags when deemed necessary while working with Children and Youth. Individuals are responsible for

- bringing their nametags.
2. Always Visible: All attempts will be made that at no time should an adult be hidden from view with a student.
  3. Never Alone: It is the intent of Kingswood UMC that a minimum of two approved adult volunteers will be with every group of Children or Youth at all Kingswood UMC activities.
  4. Touch Safely: At no time should an adult touch a child in an unsafe or inappropriate manner.
  5. Alcohol Policy: At no time should alcoholic beverages be consumed or distributed during events involving Children or Youth.
  6. Age Difference: The youngest approved staff or adult volunteer must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest supervised participant. Youth and children volunteers may assist the approved adult volunteers, but may not be alone with children or youth.
  7. Adult Supervision Ratios:
    - i. We recommend that whenever possible State Child Care Minimum Standard shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of Child Care Providers to child ratio.
    - ii. Youth supervision ratios will be determined by the youth leadership according to the needs of the event.
    - iii. It is the intent of Kingswood to have at least one Leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all events involving children and or youth. All Nursery or Child Care workers are to be CPR and First Aid certified.
    - iv. Any one-to-one mentoring or consulting of Children or Youth shall not be conducted "behind closed doors" unless there is a window in the door or in an isolated area out of sight of another Leader.
    - v. Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain at activities or events.
  8. Overnight accommodations
    - i. Overnight Coed activities require both male and female approved adult volunteers without exception
    - ii. It is strongly advised that in camp or dormitory type settings there be at least two Leaders present with every group of Children or Youth.
    - iii. When staying in a hotel, Leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from Children and Youth; or if necessary for Children or Youth to share a room with a Leader, Leaders shall sleep in separate beds from Children and Youth so long as any one Leader shall not be alone with any one Child or Youth unless it is their own child.
  9. Travel:
    - i. Approved adult volunteers who drive the Kingswood vans must be in compliance with the requirements of Kingswood's auto insurance policy
    - ii. A single approved adult volunteer may be in each vehicle, as long as at least two children or youth are in the vehicle. Kingswood UMC realizes that there will be occasions when two adult volunteers are not available or in the case of picking up and dropping off children and youth there will be occasions when one adult will be with one child or youth. Kingswood UMC will make every attempt to enforce this policy. Exception: Parents may be alone in the vehicle with their own child.
- f. Nursery Policies:**
1. Nursery & Child Care Workers:
    - i. All caregivers hired to work in the nursery have completed the screening process as outlined in II-c., and have undergone a personal interview. They will be supervised by the Director of Children's Ministry.
    - ii. Child Care workers will wear a Kingswood shirt with their name so they are easily identified.
    - iii. Access to a child while in the care of the nursery is limited to nursery personnel or their parents.
    - iv. No one is allowed to pick-up a child from the nursery unless they have the nursery claim ticket for that child.
  2. Nursery Rooms:
    - i. Children are signed into their room on a sign-in sheet that includes the following information: child's name, age, parents name, adults location in the church, time in, time out and a place for special notes. Each family is issued a claim ticket with their children's names listed.
    - ii. All rooms are equipped with "Dutch doors" or "window doors" to allow parents

visual access to their child at all times.

- iii. **Paging:** The nursery uses a paging system that is campus wide so parents can be easily called to the nursery. Parents will be provided with a pager when they leave their child in the nursery if requested.

**g. Definitions of Abuse:**

1. **Verbal Abuse:** Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens any Child or Youth.
2. **Physical Abuse:** 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, or other caregivers. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly aggressive or inappropriate considering the individual's age and/or physical or mental condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that poses a serious danger to the physical health of a Child or Youth.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Child or Youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of a Child or Youth for the satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Incest
  - Rape
  - Prostitution
  - Romantic involvement with any participant
  - Any sexual intercourse or sexual contact with an individual
  - Behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content
 Examples are not limited to: Communicating sexual interest via an internet chat room, my space/face book-type accounts, or e-mail; displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body; touching another person's body, hair, or clothing; touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse.

**h. Reporting Procedures:** The reporting requirements of this policy and the State of Texas must be complied with.

1. **Reporting Noncompliance:** Report noncompliance (i.e. an individual not following policy) to the nearest staff member, who will take the appropriate action.
2. **Reporting Abuse:**

If you encounter abuse in progress and the situation allows you to safely bring the situation to an end, do so immediately.

  - i. Any person who observes or suspects that abuse has occurred concerning a child or youth must immediately report the abuse (orally or in writing) to the nearest Kingswood staff person or the on-site volunteer leading the event, who will immediately notify the Pastoral Staff. They will take immediate action.
  - ii. A written report will be made by Pastoral Staff.
  - iii. If abuse is suspected or observed, it will be reported to the State of Texas Family Services hotline phone number 1-800-252-5400 (available 24 hours a day, seven days a week).

**i. Follow-Up Procedures**

1. **Confidentiality:** Responsible staff persons will make appropriate follow-up measures and keep a confidential written record of the incident.
2. **Pastoral Care:**
  - i. All parties need to be sensitive to the alleged victim of abuse and their families. The same sensitivity will be extended to the accused.
  - ii. Pastoral care will be available to both groups in the time of crisis.

**III. Policy Disclosure and Maintenance**

**a. Disclosure:**

1. Any program guide, new member packet, or handbook related to Children or Youth will include a copy of this policy. All staff, adult volunteers, members of Kingswood with children or youth will have access to the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
2. A copy of the policy will be available on the church website, in the brochure racks, in the Church Office or the office of the Youth and Children's Pastors during regular office hours.

**b. Maintenance:** Any changes made to the policy will be dated and posted on the web-site.

1. This policy was updated Nov. 20, 2008