

Salado United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Policy

I. Purpose

- a. The purpose of this policy is to make our church a safe place for children to be, and for members and visitors to feel that children are safe when they are left in their Sunday School classes, nurseries, or at other events. The scriptural basis for “Be Safe Feel Safe” is found in Matthew 18: 1-6:

"...The disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, 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.'"

- b. This policy serves to protect and inform volunteers who work with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.
- c. This policy serves as a minimum standard to be upheld by staff and volunteers for all ministries and activities at Salado UMC.
- d. The Central Texas Conference requires that Salado UMC provide adequate adult supervision at District and Conference Events and Ministries attended by Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

II. Policy: Abuse of a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult is prohibited on the grounds of Salado UMC and at any Salado UMC activity. This policy applies to all persons who have direct contact with and supervision of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

a. Exclusions

1. **Outside contractors** – including but not limited to: guest speakers, bus drivers of contracted bus lines, etc. – are not subject to this policy. Adult supervision as described below in section II-d-4 is required when children are with outside contractors.

b. Definitions

1. **Abuse:** Physical, emotional, mental, sexual, or other kinds of abuse directed at, or observed, or occurring with or to, a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult, including the definition of “abuse” set forth in Section 261.001 of the Texas Family Code.
2. **Adult:** Individuals that are eighteen years of age or older.
3. **Approved Adult Volunteer:** This phrase is used throughout the policy to describe individuals who have completed the screening process as outlined in section II-c.
4. **Background check:** The church will obtain an authorized release of information form, which 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 activity.
5. **Child, Children:** All persons from birth through twelve years of age.
6. **Conference:** Central Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.
7. **Stephen’s Ministry-**
8. **Congregational Care-**
8. **Event:** Any church-sponsored class, workshop, or social gathering including but not limited to Sunday School, Youth groups, M&M Kids, mission trips both local and out of town, seasonal workshops, and church camps.
9. **Local church:** Salado United Methodist Church, Salado, TX (Salado UMC)
10. **Staff:** Individuals that are compensated by any United Methodist Church entity or any entity sponsored by this local church and who performs specific services that are related to this local church.

11. Volunteer: A person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any local church event or ministry without compensation.
12. Vulnerable Adult: An adult who has one or more mental, physical or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without help.
13. Youth: Students from twelve years of age through seventeen years of age. For the purposes of this policy, a person becomes an adult when they attain the age of eighteen, regardless of their grade level at the time.

c. Screening Procedures

1. Adults are deemed eligible to serve as a volunteer in ministry to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults after documented attendance at Salado UMC and satisfactory completion of the screening process. If questions arise regarding "regular attendance," eligibility will be at the discretion of the Youth Director, Director of Outreach, Director of Witness, or the Director of Nurture.
2. All Staff and Volunteers must complete the following screening process:
 - i. Complete the approved training. Training sessions will be provided periodically for new volunteers.
 - ii. Sign an "Authorization for Release of Information".
 - iii. Complete a written "Member Profile Form" including references. 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 will be required to wear an approved nametag that must be worn when serving as a volunteer for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

d. Adult Conduct Procedures

1. Wear Nametag: Adult volunteers will always wear approved nametags while working with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults. Individuals are responsible for bringing their nametags.
2. Always Visible: At no time should an adult be hidden from view with a student.
3. Never Alone: A minimum of two approved adult volunteers is required with every group of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults at all Salado UMC activities. (Stephen's Ministry and Congregational Care may minister in a one on one situation if they so choose as they have additional appropriate conduct safeguards and procedures in place.)
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, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults.
6. Age Difference: Except in the case of events involving Vulnerable Adults, the youngest approved adult volunteer must be at least two (2) years older than the oldest supervised participant. Youth and children volunteers may assist the two approved adult volunteers or staff, but may not be alone with children or youth.
7. Adult Supervision Ratios:
 - i. The supervision ratio for children is ten (10) children to one (1) adult.
 - ii. Youth supervision ratios will be determined by the youth leadership according to the needs of the event.
8. Travel:
 - i. Overnight Coed activities require both male and female approved adult volunteers and/or staff without exception.

ii. Approved adult volunteers and/or staff who drive children, youth, or vulnerable adults to events must: 1) have a current driver's license, and 2) have valid auto insurance.

iii. A single approved adult volunteer and/or staff must be in each vehicle, as long as at least two children are in the vehicle. Exception: Parents may be alone in the vehicle with their own child.

9. Nursery Policies:

i. Caregivers

- a. All caregivers that are hired to work in the nursery have completed the screening process and have undergone a personal interview. They are also closely observed by the Nursery Director and the Director of Nurture while working with the children.
- b. Caregivers wear a nametag and a smock so they are easily identified.
- c. Access to the child while in the care of the nursery is limited to nursery personnel only.
- d. No one under the age of 18 is allowed to pick-up a child from the nursery (this includes siblings). (Parents under the age of 18 may pick up their own child from the nursery.)

ii. Nursery Rooms

- a. Children are signed into their room on a sign-in sheet that includes the following information: child's name, age, parents name, adult to pick up, time in and time out.
 - b. All rooms are equipped with "Dutch doors" and "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 the parents can be easily located. Parents will be asked to leave their phone number so they can be paged in case they are needed.

e. **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 abuse is encountered in progress and the situation allows for an individual 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, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult must immediately report the abuse (orally or in writing) to the Pastor. The pastor will take immediate action.

ii. A written report will be made.

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).

f. **Follow-Up Procedures**

1. Responsible staff members 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 and their families.

- ii. Pastoral care will be available to both groups in the time of crisis.
- iii. Convicted and/or registered sex offenders who wish to be a part of Salado UMC should expect to have considerations placed upon his/her participation within the church. Convicted and/or registered sex offenders wishing to be involved in church life will need to meet with the Pastor to discuss his/her participation.

III. Policy Disclosure and Maintenance

- a. Disclosure
 - 1. Any program guide, new member packet, or handbook related to Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults and new members of Salado UMC will include a copy of this policy.
 - 2. A link to this policy shall be available in each edition of the weekly email.
 - 3. A copy of the policy will be available on the church website, on the information table, 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 published in the weekly email and newsletter. This policy will be maintained and updated by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.