



## **Policies for a Safe Community for All**

*Camp and Retreat Ministries*

*New England Conference of the United Methodist Church*

### **Scriptural Theological Grounding**

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and as such are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through policies and codes of conduct is not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

### **Each Camp and Retreat Ministry has the responsibility to develop its own policies and procedures**

Policies and procedures that are implemented greatly deter offenders. Though such policies and procedures will not prevent 100% of abuse it will dramatically reduce occurrences. Predators look for access within organizations and settings where procedures are nonexistent, lax or inconsistent

### **Definitions**

1. **Abuse** is the bodily injury, sexual abuse, emotional damage, or spiritual harm of another person.
2. **Physical abuse** is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.
3. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and an adult. This includes any activity, which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth.
4. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.
5. **Emotional abuse** is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
6. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

7. **Economic exploitation** is the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth's belongings or money

8. **Children and youth** are anyone under 18 or who have not yet graduated from high school.

9. **Vulnerable adults** are individuals with mental or physical disabilities or special needs.

### **Screening and Selection**

1. Any and all staff who regularly work with or may come into contact with children or youth shall be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:

- a. A standard application completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks.
- b. Criminal records check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years, and other states, if any, as determined by the CRM site.
- c. National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) check.
- d. Individual interview with the applicant.
- e. Reference checks of persons outside the camp or retreat ministry who know the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant works with children.
- f. Driving or motor vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.

All information gathered about an applicant shall be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination, in consultation with others as necessary, of whether or not the person is appropriate to work with children or youth.

A background check is required for all camp and retreat leaders who have supervisory roles with children, youth or vulnerable adults. Background checks are repeated annually for seasonal staff and every 5 years for year-round (ACA HR.4) or whenever red flags warrant additional checks. Each staff person and volunteer signs an agreement for a background check to be done before starting their service.

### **Preventing Isolation**

- Adults and Counselors in Training should not be alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult. All adults and CITs should use the Rule of 3 (all adults and CITs should only interact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the presence of at least one other adult, CIT, child, youth, or vulnerable adult)
- Relatives should not be supervising and working alone with a specific group of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Private conversations should take place in public settings where others can observe but not hear

- It is crucial that supervision takes place 24 hours/day and that children, youth and vulnerable adults are not left unsupervised so they cannot be isolated and harm done – children and youth should never be left alone or alone with one adult.
- Windows and open doors whenever feasible also can deter isolation and enhance observation of what is happening.
- Two adults should be present in sleeping rooms whenever possible and when that is not feasible, adults should never sleep in the same bed with a child, youth or vulnerable adult at any time. At no time should an adult be alone with one child, youth or vulnerable adult including in a cabin or sleeping area.
- On trip camps and outings at least 2 adults should accompany the group going. It is very important that children, youth and vulnerable adults not be left alone in public settings. This includes managing restroom stops, etc.
- When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants or children, staff and volunteers will remain in an area observable by other unrelated adults or work in pairs. These activities will be supervised by adults of the same gender as the children and youth being supervised.
- Establish procedures for supervising children, youth and adults who may need to use bath houses, showers or restrooms so they are not traversing alone or isolated with a single adult, including at night. Both the child going to the restroom must be supervised and the children remaining in the cabin. Maintain the three-person rule so no child is alone with a single adult or related adults.
- Personal communication and contact with children and youth following a camp or retreat experience should happen only with the knowledge and permission of the parents.

### **Age of Leaders**

- Youth under 18 or not yet graduated from high school cannot serve as camp counselors alone and must work under the direct supervision of adults. These younger persons are considered Counselors in Training or Junior Staff
- It is recommended that leaders be at least 2 years older (ACA HR.8) than those they supervise. When college students and CIT's serve as leaders and the age difference is less than 5 years, there should be additional training related to the inappropriateness of romantic or sexual relationships with any guest, camper or fellow staff person and a reinforcement of Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures. CIT's do not qualify for adult to camper ratios.

### **Training**

- All volunteers and staff are trained in Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures. All volunteers and staff sign that they have read or received training on these procedures and that they agree to follow them, including how to identify and report abuse or suspected abuse.
- Staff are also trained in appropriate touch, horseplay and hugs.

## **Code of Conduct**

- Camp and Retreat Ministry staff are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Leaders are prohibited from dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth.
- Leaders are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- Leaders are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing etc.) on property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.
- Leaders are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities with children or youth.
- Camp and retreat ministry staff are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force.
- Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth or others.
- Camp and retreat ministry employees are prohibited from using harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.
- Camp and retreat ministry employees are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities relating to children's or youth ministry or camp activities.

## **Reporting Procedures**

If you suspect abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, it is your responsibility to report this to the proper people. All persons, volunteer or paid, are mandated reporters and are obligated by law to report suspected abuse

1. Document all signs or instances of abuse
2. Report the suspected abuse to the director
3. Report the suspected abuse to the appropriate state agency

## **REMEMBER:**

These procedures protect the children, youth, vulnerable adults, the staff, the volunteers and the ministry from harm. If you follow procedures and policies with due diligence, you are less likely to be found at fault when an incident does occur.