

## **FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH - COPPELL**

### **Policies & Procedures for Children and Youth Ministry Volunteers**

**The church staff is grateful for your willingness to serve as a volunteer in our children's and/or youth ministry. We could not minister to the hundreds of young people without your help. Each and every one of you has an important ministry in the life of this congregation. Thank you for taking seriously the vows you have made each time we baptize a young one into the family of Christ. And thank you for taking seriously your own vows of church membership. The nature of our world today creates the need for these policies and procedures to be written.**

#### **Purpose**

**The purpose of this document is to help create a safe environment for the children and youth of First United Methodist Church-Coppell (FUMC-Coppell) by collection of information necessary to evaluate a person's suitability to participate in our children and youth ministries and consistent guidelines for dealing with complaints. It is important for you to verify by signature that you have read and agreed to abide by these guidelines. If you have questions about the nature or creation of this document, please contact the *Commission on Education*. These guidelines are subject to annual revision.**

Commission on Education (COE)

August, 2006

## **Information Gathering Procedures**

FUMC-Coppell will use the following procedures to gather information to assist in the screening of those persons who volunteer to work in children and youth ministries. Volunteers shall be members or regular attendees of FUMC-Coppell for at least 6 months prior to being given a leadership position working directly with children or youth. If this criteria is not met, church staff will contact and rely on the three references provided on the background check form. All information gathered in this screening process will be treated as confidential.

- **Interview** Each new volunteer will be informally interviewed by a lay representative or FUMC Coppell staff member from the appropriate area of ministry (unless the volunteer is well known to the leaders of the area of ministry and has previously worked with children and youth).
- **Criminal Background Check** A criminal background check will be completed for all volunteers before they will be permitted to work with children and youth. No exceptions. All background checks will be renewed annually.

### **Confidentiality**

All information obtained through these procedures shall be kept confidential. Any written material will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be limited to the appropriate lay representative or FUMC Coppell staff member who have “need to know.”

### **Training Procedures**

These policies and procedures will be provided to all volunteers who shall read them and sign the form acknowledging that they have read and understood them. The signed acknowledgment will be returned to the finance office of FUMC-Coppell.

FUMC-Coppell will provide annual training for all volunteers. This training will be provided by the appropriate committee/area of ministry in which you will be working (Commission on Education, Youth Commission, Children’s Music Ministries, Children’s Council, etc.) Volunteers are encouraged to attend training annually.

### **Staffing Procedures for Children & Youth Activities**

- A minimum of 2 adults will be present at church-sponsored activities involving children and youth.
- FUMC Coppell’s child-release policy is that all children 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and younger will be released from any church activity only to a parent or guardian or other adult persons authorized by the parents.
- Attendance should be taken at each event/activity involving children and youth. This is to acknowledge who is present and is for the safety of our children and youth, as well as the adult volunteers.
- A parental permission form, including a signed medical treatment form, will be required before taking children or youth on trips.
- A covenant of conduct form should be completed by each child/youth prior to going on church-sponsored trips.

- All paper documentation (attendance, permission slips, covenants, medical forms) shall be held by a delegated adult sponsor at all times during church trips.
- Only qualified drivers over the age of 21 who provide a copy of current driver's license and insurance to appropriate staff member will be permitted to drive on any church-sponsored event.
- First aid kits are required on all church-sponsored events.
- Minors should use a "buddy system" whenever they go on trips away from church property.
- All counselors or leaders on church-sponsored outings shall be at least 4 years older than the children/youth for whom they are responsible.

### **Behavioral Guidelines for Working with Children or Youth**

The following procedures will be followed:

- Never provide alcoholic beverage, tobacco, drugs or any substance that is prohibited by law to minors under any circumstance.
- Never touch a minor in an inappropriate manner. Touching should be age appropriate and based on the need of the minor and not on the need of the adult. Avoid physical contact when alone with a minor. If a minor initiates physical contact, an appropriate, limited response is proper.
- Never physically discipline a minor. Discipline problems should be handled in coordination with the Church staff and the parents of the minor.
- Never be alone with a minor in a residence, sleeping facility, locker room, rest room, dressing facility, or other closed room or isolated area that is inappropriate to a ministry relationship.
- Never take an overnight trip alone with a minor who is not a member of your immediate family.
- Never administer medication of any kind without written parental permission.
- Never drive a minor to a church event or drive a church vehicle unless you have received prior authorization from parent/guardian and have the appropriate license and/or certification.
- Never permit minors under the age of 13 to cross a road by themselves or without supervision while they are in your custodial care.
- If you recognize inappropriate personal or physical attraction developing between yourself and a minor, maintain clear professional boundaries between yourself and the minor or refer the minor to another adult supervisor.
- If you observe anyone (adult or minor) abusing a minor, take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and to provide a safe environment for the minor. Report the misconduct to the police.

Any volunteer found to have violated any of the above guidelines is subject to automatic disqualification from working or volunteering in any capacity with children or youth.

### **Guidelines for complaints against Children's and/or Youth teachers, leaders and volunteers**

If there are complaints about a Children's or Youth volunteer, teacher or leader, the following procedure will be followed to resolve the complaint:

- There will be two people responsible for investigating the complaint: the COE Chairperson or Youth Commission Chairperson (depending on if it's involving children or youth) and the appropriate staff liaison.
- The investigation will first focus on the true nature of the complaint. Once the complaint is deemed as legitimate, the Chairperson/Staff member shall refer the complaint to appropriate person:
  - Theology--Staff
  - Personality--Staff
  - Content/Curriculum--Curriculum Coordinator
  - Violation of behavioral guidelines--Staff
- The issue will be discussed and resolved with the teacher, leader or volunteer. If the complaint cannot be resolved it will be referred to the appropriate pastor/director.
- COE or Youth Commission will advise the complainant that action has been taken, will describe what is being done and will ask for confidentiality.
- If a second similar complaint is received and verified, the teacher, volunteer or leader will be asked by staff or senior pastor, as appropriate, to move to a different position and not teach or lead. In the case of a volunteer, the person will not be allowed to work with the group to which he/she was assigned. In addition, depending upon the seriousness of the complaint, that person's name may be flagged so that he or she will not be permitted to teach or lead children or youth again.
- Complaints received after the school year is over, during recruitment, will also require investigation if possible. COE/Youth Commission chair and staff will be open to hear concerns about teacher. The concerns will be shared with the teacher before starting the year. Confirmed violation of behavioral guidelines shall be grounds for refusing to allow the volunteer to work with children or youth.
- Teachers, leaders or volunteers about whom unresolved complaints have been received should not be recruited.
- A child or youth shall ALWAYS have the right to move out of the class or group, even if the teacher or leader is found blameless.

### **Disqualifying Offenses**

No volunteer may work with children or youth ministries if the criminal background check reveals that he or she has ever been convicted of any disqualifying offense, been on probation or received deferred adjudication for any disqualifying offense, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any disqualifying offense until a determination of guilt or innocence is made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication.

Disqualifying offenses are:

1. A felony classified as an offense against the person or family or involves an offense against the person or family.

Examples: Offenses against a person include, but are not limited to, murder, assault, sexual assault, and abandoning or endangering a child. Offenses against the family include, but are not limited to bigamy, incest, interference with child custody, enticing a child, and harboring a runaway child.

2. A felony classified as an offense against public order or indecency.

Examples: Offenses against public order or indecency include, but are not limited to prostitution, obscenity, sexual performance by a child, possession or promotion of child pornography, and disorderly conduct.

3. A felony violation of any law intended to control the possession or distribution of any substance included as a controlled substance in the Texas Controlled Substance Act.
4. A misdemeanor classified such as sexual assault, indecency with a child, injury to a child, abandoning or endangering a child, sexual performance by a child, possession of or promoting child pornography, enticing a child, bigamy or incest.
5. No volunteer may provide transportation for any church activity involving children or youth if he or she has ever been convicted of DUI, DWI or any other offense involving illegal substances.
6. If a criminal background check or interview reveals any other conviction, arrest or violation of law, COE or Youth Commission reserves the right to disqualify that potential volunteer from any and/or all activities involving children or youth.
7. Likewise, COE or Youth Commission has the right to disqualify any volunteer against whom there are one or more unresolved complaints, however, the reason for disqualification must be documented and discussed with the volunteer.

### **Appeals**

Any person who applies and is not accepted or is disqualified as a volunteer, for any reason under these guidelines, will have an opportunity to appeal the disqualification to the Commission on Education or Youth Commission.

If non-acceptance or disqualification is based on the criminal background check for volunteers:

The applicant shall be given the name and address of the agency reporting the criminal history of such applicant, so that he or she will have the opportunity to obtain a similar report from such agency. In the event that such report is obtained by the applicant and he or she reasonably believes that an error has been made by the reporting agency or independent agent, then, upon written request, a second criminal background check shall be obtained and the application reconsidered.

If non-acceptance or disqualification is based upon the interview process or an unresolved complaint:

The applicant, upon written request, shall have an opportunity to have a second interview and to have his or her application reconsidered by the entire Commission on Education or Youth Commission within 30 days after the date of the non-acceptance or disqualification.



## Acknowledgment

By my signature below I acknowledge that I have read and agree to be bound by the First United Methodist Church Coppell, Texas Policies and Procedures for children and youth ministry volunteers. I understand that these policies and procedures have been prepared to help me when working with the children and youth at FUMC-Coppell. The information described is for informational purposes and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. FUMC-Coppell may change the content or application of these policies and procedures on an annual basis.

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**Signature**

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**Printed Name**

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**Address**

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**City/Zip**

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**Date**

\*\* In order to serve as a volunteer with children/youth at FUMC-Coppell this signed acknowledgment, along with a completed background check form, must be returned to the finance office of FUMC-Coppell.  
August 2006

\*\*Definition: *Church-sponsored event/activity* is defined as any event listed on the church calendar that originates from the church facility.